



The influence of popular music on sexual violence in Nigeria

Oluwatosin John Ibitoye

Department of Performing Arts, Kwara State University, Nigeria

Email: oluwatosin.ibitoye@kwasu.edu.ng

Abstract

In recent times, cases of sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV) such as rape, sexual assault and sexual harassment have risen exponentially in Nigeria and these call for urgent attention of stakeholders and sundry. On this backdrop, this study accesses the contribution, influence and impacts of music to this menace with the view of proposing a panacea to this moral decadence and inhumane culture which has crept into our social construct. Our arguments are discussed within the framework of Fredrickson and Robert's Objectification theory (1997); a framework for understanding, researching, and intervening to improve women's lives in a sociocultural context that sexually objectifies the female body and equates a woman's worth with her body's appearance and sexual functions. Through a critical review and analysis of the texts of selected songs from six (6) popular Nigerian musicians, our findings reveal the objectification of the women gender as a tool for sexual gratification, cheap marketing strategy, and proliferation of obscenity and immoral conducts in the society. Having been proven that the society is a product of its music, popular musicians therefore make the female gender vulnerable and susceptible to the rising sexual violence scourge in our society. For this reason, this study accentuates the need for appropriate government regulatory bodies to step up efforts in screening and censoring every music (audio and audiovisual) that goes into the media, with the aim of controlling and monitoring the distribution, exhibition and marketing of music especially that which promotes sexual content and the stereotype of a gender as sex tool.

Keywords: music, gender, sexual violence, sexual objectification

Introduction

In an interval of five months, between January and May 2020, the Nigerian police records all-time high 717 rape cases in Nigeria. It is worthy to note that these are reported and documented cases which exclude cases shrouded in secrecy or not involving the law enforcement agencies. In fact, according to Ogunbode et al. (2014, p. 99), "50-84% of its extreme form is not reported". For this reason, a state of emergency was declared over rape and other forms of gender-based violence in Nigeria by the Nigerian Governors Forum on 12th June, 2020. It is more disturbing to come to terms that, at a period when nations (including Nigeria) across the globe were dealing and struggling with the impacts of the global pandemic - COVID-19, coupled with the rising cases of terrorists attacks, insurgency and banditry which are threats to the security and economy of the country; this same period, cases of rape and all forms of sexual and gender based violence rose exponentially without recourse to humanity. Nigeria's Minister of Women Affairs and Social Development reveals that Nigeria recorded at least 3600 rape cases during the COVID-19 induced lockdown; one would then think if these acts from the perpetrators be a matter of "an idle hand being the devil's workshop" because this crime rose exponentially especially during the lockdown period amid COVID-19 pandemic. Though, sexual violence in itself has been a global epidemic over the years. However, over these years, only few of the perpetrators of these heinous acts have been made to face the full wrath of the law and brought to justice. It is imperative to menace to check before our social fabric and true humanity go to extinct. Several social and cultural factors are contributory to the quantum rise in this social menace in recent times; this study therefore investigates the influence of music on sexual violence in Nigeria.

Theoretical Framework

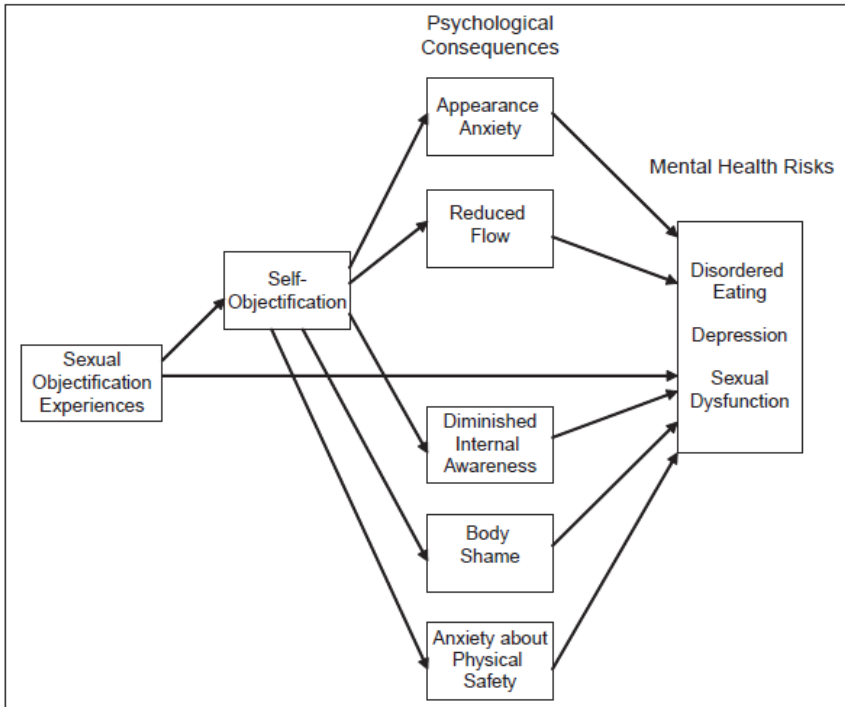
Fredrickson and Robert's Objectification theory (1997) foregrounds this study. Barbara Fredrickson and Tomi-Ann Roberts proposed

this theory as “a synthesis and systematic formalization of the many disparate lines of scholarship on the sexual objectification of women” (Calogero, 2012, p. 574). Objectification theory provides a framework for understanding, researching, and intervening to improve women’s lives in a sociocultural context that sexually objectifies the female body and equates a woman’s worth with her body’s appearance and sexual functions. This theory attempts to explain the extreme and pervasive tendency to equate women with their bodies and why this can have such negative consequences for women’s body image and beyond.

Women are sexually objectified and treated as an object to be valued for its use by others. “Sexual Objectification (SO) occurs when a woman’s body or body parts are singled out and separated from her as a person and she is viewed primarily as a physical object of male sexual desire” (Szymanski et al., 2011, p. 8). This sexual objectification according to Calogero refers to “the fragmentation of a woman into a collection of sexual parts and/or sexual functions, essentially stripping her of a unique personality and subjectivity so that she exists as merely a body” (Calogero, 2012, p. 574). He adds that, these experiences of sexual objectification occur outside of women’s personal control.

Fredrickson and Roberts (1997, p. 173) assert that “women often internalize this outsider view and begin to self-objectify by treating themselves as an object to be looked at and evaluated on the basis of appearance”. Objectification theory then posits a model which explains how self-objectification leads to women’s mental health risks via negative psychological outcomes. The psychological outcomes include: increase in women’s anxiety about physical appearance (i.e. fear about when and how one’s body will be looked at and evaluated); reduction in opportunities for peak motivational states or flow; diminish awareness of internal bodily sensations (e.g., hunger, sexual arousal, stomach contractions); increase in women body shame (i.e., the emotion that results from measuring oneself against a cultural standard and coming up short); and more importantly, increase in women’s anxiety about

their physical safety (e.g., fears about being raped or murdered in worst case scenario), which in turn can lead to disordered eating, depression, and sexual dysfunction.



A model of Objectification theory tenets as proposed by Fredrickson and Roberts (cited in Szymanski et al., 2011, p. 9). This model provides knowledge of how sociocultural factors may influence women’s psychological problems and mental health risks due to objectification. Hence, this theory forms a spine for our study.

Sexual Violence in Nigeria: An interface

Sexual violence is a global phenomenon. It is multifaceted as it includes: rape, sexual assault, sexual molestation, sexual harassment, exploitation, sexual slavery, sex trafficking and other forms of sexual abuse. Sexual violence is an act that involves any unwanted, nonconsensual sexual contact, ranging from kissing or fondling to rape or attempted rape (Gross, 2002, p. 82). The World Health

Organization defines sexual violence as any sexual act, attempt to obtain a sexual act, unwanted sexual comments or advances, or acts to traffic or otherwise directed against a person's sexuality using coercion, by any person regardless of their relationship to the victim, in any setting, including but not limited to home and work.

In recent times, Nigeria has been experiencing an alarming increase of this menace. The *Nigeria Demographic Health Survey 2013* indicates that "28 percent of women in Nigeria aged 15–49 have experienced some form of physical or sexual violence" (NPC and ICF International). The British Broadcasting Corporation records that, "2,279 cases of rape and indecent assault were reported in Nigeria in year 2017". On 9th July, 2019, Nigerian Legislators began considering death penalty for rape offenders as they deliberated on the motion "Sexual abuse in Nigeria: a growing scourge". Also, in an interval of five months, between January and May 2020, the Nigerian police records 717 rape cases in Nigeria. In Bammeke's words, "no day passes by without a report of a young girl/adult being abused" (Bammeke, 2020). In light of these realities, State Governors in Nigeria declared a state of emergency over rape and other forms of gender-based violence in Nigeria on 12th June, 2020.

Unfortunately, girls/women are the common victims of these acts. In a 2019 survey conducted by NOIPolls, it was discovered that "one in every three girls would have experienced at least one form of sexual assault by the time they reach 25 years". Women are placed as second fiddle, second citizen, inferior persona, weaker vessel, object of oppression and molestation. Women are objectified as sexual symbols meant primarily for pervasive sexual satisfaction. Apparently, this objectification transcends age and class as a girl as young as 3 months can be a victim because her body (parts) has been singled out of her persona and she is viewed primarily as a physical object of male sexual desire regardless of her age.

It is worthy to note that this violation of rights of victims happen irrespective of the gender, but, it is mostly committed against the female gender. APA's 2007 review explains that "women more often than men are depicted in sexualizing and objectified

manners". This could possibly be a reason for the less attention given to the tendencies and realities of sexual violence against the male gender alike. Calogero (2012, p. 574) also corroborates that "women are targeted for sexually objectifying treatment in their day-to-day lives more often than are men".

In the context of rape which is the most common form of sexual violence, a recent study concludes that "90% of victims of rape are female" (Chiazor et al. p. 7765). Chiedu notes that:

Now and then, it is reported that a teacher has raped a student, a religious leader has raped his flock, robbers have raped a victim, a man has raped a sister-in-law or daughter-in-law, a master has raped a housemaid, a security man has raped his master's wife, a boss has raped his staff, a father has raped his daughter, a young man has raped a grandmother, a minor has raped a fellow minor, a traditional ruler has raped a subject, and an 80-year-old man has raped an 8-year-old girl (Chiedu, 2020).

The above assertion proves that this scourge transcends age, class or religion. It is for this reason that Bammeke (2020) affirms that "from cradle to grave, the female gender is an endangered species". However, over the years, perpetrators of sexual violence find it easy to get away with their heinous acts as it is difficult for victims to prove and support their claims with concrete evidence(s). Also, the laws guiding perpetrators of sexual violence in sections 282 and 357 of the Nigeria Penal Code and Criminal Code Act respectively are not being enforced. This is the case with other acts such as Violence Against Persons (Prohibition) Acts 2015, The Prohibition Against Domestic Violence (PADVL) Law of Lagos State, Law No. 15, 2007.

NOIPolls assert that "about 3 in 10 perpetrators of this atrocious crime often don't face the drum or the dictates of the law against the crime even when reported to the police". In other instances, victims get blamed and bear the brunt of being a victim. They are faced with the challenges of answering so many questions

which look unjustifiable to the criminal act committed by the perpetrator. Questions such as: Why is your story inconsistent?; Why is your story not adding up?; Why were you there?; What were you wearing?; Did you call for help at that moment?; Why didn't you raise alarm should there be anyone who could come to your aid?

Hence, over time, many victims struggle with the trauma and the social stigma as they seem not to be believed neither is justice in sight for them. This circumstance in many cases can lead to several mental disorders such as depression, Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), sleep difficulties, panic disorder and at the extreme, suicide; if the victim do not get murdered in the process.

Sex and Nudity as sociocultural phenomena

Sex and nudity is fast becoming a norm in the society and indeed, a threat to our sociocultural fabric. It is a common belief that, "Sex sells". Hence, one of the easiest routes to get attention in the society today is sex. Value is no longer placed on the human body, especially the female body. In the entertainment industry which music is a major component of; explicit and sexual contents are added to productions as a means of attraction. This is believed to be a fast route to build a rapid and popular social status, high commercial viability, social and popular attraction. Knowing fully well that the human nature is sexually vulnerable and susceptible to sexual contents, several producers and marketers ply this controversial route to generate a high and staggering Return on Investment (ROI).

As sexism and sexualization of the female gender is the order of the day, nudity is the new normal. It is a new norm to dress seductively and sexually enticing. The female gender suffers this sexualization cum objectification and tool for sex as a medium of selling. Szymanski et al. (2011, p. 10) lament that, evidence for the SO (Sexual Objectification) of women can be found practically everywhere, from the media, to women's interpersonal experiences, to specific environments and subcultures. APA's 2007 review on

the sexualization of girls captured the depictions of women in the media including commercials, prime-time television programs, movies, music lyrics and videos, magazines, advertising, sports media, video games, and Internet sites. Their study revealed that “women more often than men are depicted in sexualizing and objectified manners (e.g., wearing revealing and provocative clothing, portrayed in ways that emphasize their body parts and sexual readiness, serving as decorative objects)” (APA). The media has done so much harm in portraying and depicting women’s bodies and body parts as the target of a non-reciprocated male gaze.

Influence of music on Sexual Violence

Over time, music as a social phenomenon has been observed to be a contributing factor in the rise of this moral decadence. Music and its influence on the rise of sexual violence globally have become a cause of concern as researchers and scholars such as Railton and Watson (2005); Szymanski et al. (2011); Chatterji; Frazier; Brathwaite; Glantz; Dunu and Ugbo (2015); and Eze (2020) have decried and berated the increase in the sexualized representation of women in popular music. A society is a reflection of its music as music is the reflection of the society; as the society influence production of music, music produced influence the society. Over the years, sexual undertones have been a predominant feature and characteristics of musical contents being rolled out to the society for immediate consumption. Several popular musicians have stereotyped, labeled and objectified the female gender as sex tool and sex image through their music; a tool meant only for sexual satisfaction which is to be gotten by all means.

This is evident in the texts of their songs, visual contents in music videos. This verbal and visual abuse is capable of leading to physical form of abuse which is prevalent in our society today. It is a common phenomenon to see the youths lost in the euphoria of such songs as they move and dance in ecstasy to the music. Some of these dances are erotic in nature; these dances such as twerk dance, lap dance amongst others laced with sexual innuendos send sexual signals and ignite intense sexual arousals or sexual images in the

minds of the audience (listeners/viewers) who are the consumers. Railton & Watson (2005) clarify that:

If a song is played over and over and everybody likes it, then it becomes normal and acceptable and by extension whatever is being represented in that song becomes acceptable in turn with time. For example, if an artiste uses a derogatory term to refer to a woman in his song, chances are that other people will start using the same term to refer to women. It could also work in another way; if women are wearing a revealing outfit in a music video then young girls will think that they should be wearing the same kind of clothing (cited in Dunu and Ugbo, 2015, p. 37).

This is the extent of influence that musicians and their music possess over its audience in the society. Women in a special way have become objects of 'inspiration' for these popular Nigerian artistes' lyrics. Everything about them (women) form part of the musical lyrics- waist, butts, and boobs-as most artistes bluntly refer to. And it is common sights to see and hear the women (particularly the young women) recite and dance to these tunes in socio- cultural settings (Dunu and Ugbo, 2015, p. 35). Adedeji (2020) laments that "Nigerian music is riddled with not one, not two but thousands of songs that are sexist - objectifying and degrading women. The lyrics and videos of these songs, support or justify misogyny and sexism, yet a lot of them have such catchy tunes, we sometimes cannot resist them".

The African contact with the western cultures contributed to the growth of this menace. Eze (2020, p. 167) argues that "the proliferation of hip hop culture in Nigeria as a result of adoption, adaptation and popularization of American hip hop music is responsible for the rise in sexist representation and objectification of women as sex symbols in the lyrics, videos and live performances of some these popular musicians". Though, this

act became more popular and a norm since the advent of the new pop culture influenced by the Western culture, there has however been indigenous music artists who promoted this immoral act of objectifying women as sex symbol. A dadakuada artist in Ilorin, Kwara State once sang:

Die die die *Gently Gently Gently*
Ojuu re nti mi o o o *I am shy because of you*
Gege bi oju oko ti n' alabiamo *Just like the nursing Mother*
is shy of the penis
Obo to sosu merindinlogun otoo roko *A vagina that stays*
for sixteen months is ripe enough to receive penis
Bi eeyan ba f'oko tee *If one presses it with penis*
Gbogbo re ni o dun yungba yungba *Everything will be*
very very sweet
Bolakini, Tomiala gbagba yungba Tomiala Important
Tomiala, enjoyable Tomiala
(cited in Adeola, 2013, p. 252)

The western American culture which was copied and has penetrated our socio-cultural context is a culture where the sexualization of women is cultivated and culturally condoned (Szymanski et al., 2011, p. 10). In the quest to build a rapid social status and commercial viability for their music, popular musicians go to the extreme to achieve their aim with the sex theme being a top feature. Surprisingly, in a self-immolating manner, popular female musicians are not exempted from this act of objectifying themselves and parading their bodies for sex appeal. Tiwa Savage, a female Nigerian pop star in her own words during an interview with BBC said:

I might just have to go butt naked in my next video because I don't know what else I'm going to have to do to top that one!... We're going through this pandemic, so the idea was I want to let them know that I'm still a boss, that I'm still beautiful, that

I'm still African...People have been really really creative with it which is amazing. The album is a whole mix of the emotions an African woman goes through: love, aspiration, being bossy, being sexy, (and) being vulnerable (Wahab, 2020).

Through her words, one could conclude that she is being defensive of her position as a way of expressing the emotional moments which women go through. It is an aberration to think that advertently releasing a nude video is a means of expressing varying emotional moments of women; we cannot rule out the aftermath and social effect of such obscenity and sexual parade.

Ironically, popular musicians are models to several young people and as such, they wield some level of influence on these minds that form their fan base. As songs and music videos objectifying women are released, the already objectified women parade themselves as sexual symbols. Fredrickson and Roberts (1997, p. 173) explain that “women often internalize the outsider view and begin to self-objectify by treating themselves as an object to be looked at and evaluated on the basis of appearance (sexual appeal)”. This self-objectification makes women want to look sexy and sexually appealing. Some would go to any length or extent to ensure they are sexually attractive. This perspective on self can lead to habitual body monitoring, which in turn can increase women’s opportunities for shame and anxiety, and diminish awareness of internal bodily states.

Damino Damoche a popular Nigerian musician popularly known with his erotic lyrical contents sang in *Obo to che* which literally means “a ripe vagina”:

<i>Obo to che obo to re</i>	A vagina that’s ripe
<i>...Mo ma nlabo labo</i>	I lick women’s vagina
<i>Mo man rebo kebo</i>	I have sex indiscriminately

Adeyemi Lawal another sexual lyricist popularly known as

Skailey Mental sang in *Dadubule*, "Lay her down":

<i>Meji loyan, okan loko</i>	The breasts are two and the penis is one
<i>Okan loko</i>	The penis is one
<i>Meji lepon, okan loko</i>	The testes are two and the penis is one
<i>Okan loko</i>	The penis is one
<i>Oya da dubule</i>	Make her lie down now
<i>Sidioker oya da dubule</i>	Raise her buttocks and make her lie down
<i>Jeki nbi sobo</i>	Let me ejaculate right inside her vagina
<i>Ke'bo, run'bo, ja'bo</i>	Have a carnal knowledge of her now

From the foregoing, it can be deduced that such lyrical content is capable of igniting an intense sexual arousal on the listeners and influence their choice of getting the urge satisfied which could come from force leading to violence. Azeez Fashola popularly known as Naira Marley sang in *Dido lobo* "A vagina is meant for coitus":

<i>Dido lobo (a do pa)....</i>	A vagina is meant for intense coitus
<i>Oni n fisi, kowole</i>	She asked me to penetrate, it proved abortive
<i>Mofi to si, o yo wole</i>	I applied saliva as lubricant then it penetrated easily
<i>O tin dun mo ko fe lole</i>	Now she enjoys it and refuses to leave for her house
<i>Ko mo eko, ko mo ona lle</i>	She claims she doesn't know her way around
<i>E ba n womo to ni idi</i>	Get me a girl with big buttocks
<i>Toju e fine to tun lophon</i>	With a pretty and sexy face
<i>Sho lo gbon, wa to gbon</i>	You will soon learn in the hard way.

In his *O po toyi* which literally means "It is quite massive", Naira Marley sings:

Aso le fi bo, (aso le fi bo) You covered "it" with cloths
O po toyi, (O po toyi) "It" is quite massive
Aso le fi bo (aso le fi bo) You covered "it" with cloths
Awon omo soak away "Soak away" offsprings
Won ni ki n suck am well They asked me to suck it well enough
If I go the club, mo ma take away If I go to the club, I will take
some away
O fe ka mi o, mo ya look away... She almost got my gimmicks
before I looked away
O n wo mi o, o da n pe o fe do mi o She is staring at me as though
she wants us to have coitus.

It is worthy of note that, the influence Naira Marley wields on the youth cannot be underrated as he has a large controversial audience base popularly known as "*Marlians*". These controversial fans exude so many questionable traits and characters. The contemporary society has set a social "standard" such that a typical "*Marlian*" can be easily recognised should "they" fall short of these standards. Chinedu Okoli, popularly called Flavour objectified the female body as a tool for sexual gratification in his song *Sexy Rosey*:

Ah ah ah sexier Rosey
My chérie coco
Baby I see something beautiful for your back oh...
Your waist is 34
Your hips 44
You're 24
Ooh I love my baby
Jealousy, jealousy
I don't see, I don't tear
Baby I see something beautiful for your back!
Kpo kri kpo kpo kpo kpo kpo kpo kpo kpo

From the foregoing, it is clear that sexual objectification which is capable of inciting different forms of sexual violence

is the goal of these musicians and the influence is evident in the society today. From the titles of these songs, they are suggestive of sexual objectification with lyrics laced with sexual innuendos and accompanied with weird and erotic dance movements.

Songs used in this study were received by sizeable number of youths at the time of their release with boisterous singing and dancing across the country. Often times, the youths pick their favorite sexual lines in the songs and turn it into slangs or commonly used phrases of expression in the society, influencing the mental thoughts to do the abominable. These are also usually accompanied with erotic dance movements capable of influencing the thought of sexual violent acts against the female body. These musicians also use their music to body shame (i.e., the emotion that results from measuring oneself against a cultural standard and coming up short) the female folk.

However, it is worthy of note that, some artistes also use their music to chastise misogyny, sexism and the rising menace of sexual violence. Folarin Falana popularly called Falz in his song, *Child of the world* berates sexual violence and he exposed the psychologically effects of such violence like rape which is capable of diminishing the moral consciousness of the victim and igniting her self-objectification as a sexual object having lost her pride; hence, she has nothing to be ashamed of or be morally conscious of:

Uncle Peter *Agbaya*

Alai ni'tiju (The one without integrity)

One late night he came back in the sitting room

Uncle please stop...Shhh be silent

Uncle didn't stop till he broke the hymen

Am I a fool?

Shey I don go astray?

Am I a victim of my circumstance?

Omoluwa bi ti bo so wa ye (A dignified person has gone lewd)

And now I'm feeling like I don loss my way

I be Child of the world,

I don become a child of the world,
She don dey look for that thing she dey resist before
She never had a Daddy figure so she need the luck
Uncle Peter don create beast, he can't tame the stuff
She like make e rough
She can't have enough

The poignant and narrative song captures the unfortunate story of a young graduate who became the victim of rape perpetrated by her own Uncle. Suffering from Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), the psychological effects of this incident ignites promiscuity in her and causes her to go wild and astray. Studies have shown that in many scenarios, perpetrators of sexual violence are known by the victims; ranging from family members to close friends, intimate partners/spouse, teachers, pastors and rarely strangers. Similarly, Anidugbe Daniel, known as Kiss Daniel used his *Yeba* to decry those who take advantage of women by physically touching, molesting and harassing them outside their own consent because they are seen as inferior and powerless:

Omo meta in one body (Three ladies in one body)
Oyin momo... (Sweet as honey)
When you stand, am under you oh, oh nananana
Uncle stop touching, sorry madam sorry

In a dialogue form, the assaulter in this song singles out and separates the victim's body from her as a person and she is viewed primarily as a physical object of male sexual desire causing this lady to react and caution him.

Towards a Panacea: Recommendations

Going forward in the quest to tame the rising scourge, censorship is a fundamental option. Censoring all audio and audio-visual productions in terms of their contents before going on air or media spaces by the regulatory bodies is germane. The National Film

and Video Censors Board (NFVCB) and National Broadcasting Corporation (NBC) as regulatory agencies of the Federal Government of Nigeria are saddled with the responsibilities of putting to check and taming the incessant sexual innuendos, explicit, sexual contents and sexual objectification of women common amongst popular musicians. Having been empowered by the law as statutory bodies, these agencies are encouraged to intensify efforts in controlling and monitoring the distribution, exhibition and marketing of music and music videos alike. These will discontinue the sexualization of women as cheap route to stardom amongst musicians whilst increasing the drive towards creativity and quality contents amongst musicians. Inadequate censoring, regulation, check and balance creates porosity in the creative industry; leading to production and distribution of music contents laced with vulgarity, obscenity, indecency and injurious contents to our moral and social fabric which contribute the rising scourge of sexual violence in Nigeria.

Music should rather than be a contributing factor to the increase of the sexual violence menace; chastise and approach the scourge didactically. Regardless of the common belief that “sex sells”, great and quality musical contents devoid of nudity and sexualization still get attention of their target market while musicians who are bereft of ideas plying the “sex route” do not last in the music business as they go out of vogue after a while. Creative exploration in the industry is infinite; hence, musicians should endeavor to channel their creativity and energy into moral, socially conscious, relevant, yet entertaining contents. Lastly, cases of sexual violence as an emergency should be treated as such by stakeholders and agencies saddled with the responsibilities of public orientation, enlightenment and implementation of the laws guiding against this act.

Conclusion

This study discussed contributory influence of popular music to the exponential increase in sexual and gender-based violence in Nigeria.

Our study examined the common practice of popular musicians inadvertently placing the women at harm's way, endangering the female gender through the objectification and sexualization of the female body in their music, thereby, making them vulnerable and susceptible to the rising sexual violence scourge in our society. Our recommendations proffered a panacea towards a morally conscious and creative music industry in a violent free society.

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