



BEARD GANG: THE NARRATIVES FROM STUDENTS' SAMPLE AND ITS IMPLICATIONS

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ABSTRACT

Wearing of beards is a practice that is very common even from the ancient time and processing the features of another person automatically or saying something about him is a reality we are living with now. Despite the negative narratives about beard wearing nowadays, people from different walks of life still wear beards in Nigeria. The aim of this research was to investigate students' perception on beard wearing and how their perception would make them to view individuals with beards. The research which was exploratory in nature surveyed 258 (119 males and 139 females) undergraduate students of University of Lagos as participants. A two item self-developed questionnaire was used to elicit responses from the participants. Data were thematically analyzed and themes that emerged showed that students profiled bearded individuals as mature and good looking (42.2%), responsible (35.3%). Hence, a higher percentage of the participants positively perceived individuals with beards. The study concluded that students have positive perception towards beard-wearing individuals.

Keywords: Beard gang, perception.

INTRODUCTION

Stigmatization expressed towards those who wear beards influenced these bearded men to be in an informal group called beard gang. This is not a registered club but an in-group for those who wear beards (DeeDee, 2018). Remarkably, the gathering of hair around the face of humans as a culture keeps changing from century to century. The 16th and 17th centuries' beliefs about beard were that wearing one was like a prosthesis for men which accentuated how virile and sexually active such men could be (Withey, 2014). The British Victorian period (mid- 19th century) saw men wearing beard as if it was prescribed as medication against a particular illness (Withey, 2014)-especially as it was a period when industrial revolution came with its attendant environmental pollution. Likewise, men wore beards at this time to identify with their heroes who had just returned from Crimean war and were proudly carrying one and the period where physicians, thinkers and other prominent people in the society were seen adorning beards (Meier, 2017). This trend was similar in America as it was the time when the influence of British print materials was felt in America (Hawksley, 2014). In the ancient Egyptian period, beard wearing represented a way of perceiving an individual; its status-either royal or commoner, foreigner or Egyptian and divinity-either god or ordinary human; also the type of beards worn helped to perceive whether a king is alive or dead (Dunn, 2018).

Our visual field has been primed to scan another person from their faces (Little, Jones, & DeBruine, 2011) in order to say things about such person. To automatically process the character of another or use the features of someone to say something about him or her as it was used in Malleus Maleficarium (Hammer of Witches) during Spanish Inquisition in identifying, prosecuting and punishing witches in 1478 (Turvey, 2003) is a reality we are living with every day. Roberts (2009) expounded on facial structures can say a lot about one's character, personality and other stories that faces tell.

Sociocultural identities in Nigeria deeply stem from ethnic and religious factors (Agbibo & Okem, 2011). It is not uncommon for Nigerians in the southern part of the country to profile anybody they see wearing beards and *babaringa* as Muslims from the North. Although wearing beards could be as an adornment, it can also serve ethnic, cultural and religious reasons (Columbia Electronic Encyclopedia, 2012).

Regardless of the reason for wearing beards or being in a member of beard gang, perceptions of people towards beard wearing and how this can influence how those who wear beards are



viewed in relation to crime are negative (Najeeb, 2001, Verkeik, 2015; Fahd, 2017). Still, beard gang is a subject matter of trend in Nigeria among people of different walks of life (Njoku, 2017). This study was set to answer the question how university students (who are highly impressionable) perceive someone who wears beard and how students assess those who wear beards.

This study would among other things provide a cultural knowledge on how Nigerian university students perceive beard wearing and because the study is relatively new, it would serve as reference point for preliminary discourses on the construct which other researchers can make use of.

METHODS

Research Design

The study employed exploratory research design which is a design with pure qualitative outlook. The constructs under consideration i.e. perceptions of university students towards beard wearing and how university students would assess those who wear beards were still not clearly defined. This design is also serving a purpose of creating a deeper insight into constructs under consideration.

Setting

Participants in this study were students of the University of Lagos, Akoka, Yaba, Nigeria. University of Lagos is a tertiary institution founded in the south western part of Nigeria. It was established by an act of parliament in 1962 by the Federal Government to provide students with higher education. It has two campuses. The main campus is located at Akoka Yaba while the second campus which is the College of Medicine is located at Idi-Araba Surulere Lagos. The student population of the university as at the year 2017 was about 40000 which comprised of both post-graduates and undergraduates students. It is a 12 faculty school with a hundred and fifty departments. The faculties include the faculty of Science, Basic medical science, Business Administration, Clinical Sciences, Dental Sciences, Education, Engineering, Environmental Science, Law, Pharmacy, Social Sciences and Arts. The university is very cosmopolitan serving an important function of helping to draw students from diverse ethnic backgrounds in Nigeria.

Participants

A survey of 258 undergraduate students of University of Lagos was recruited as participants. Male participants were 46.1% while female participants were 53.9%. Participants' age ranges were: 16-20 (5%), 21-25 (39.2%), and 25-30 (5.8%). The participants cut across different ethnic groups in Nigeria but Yoruba were more represented with 68.2%, Igbos were 15.9%, Edo were 3.9%, Deltas 2.7%, Hausa 1.9% and other ethnic groups had 7.4% respectively. 82.2% were Christians, 16.7% were Muslims while the remaining ones were practicing African traditional religion.

Table 1 below describes the demographic characteristics of the participants:

Demographic Table

Particular	Variable	N	%
Gender	Male	119	46.1
	Female	139	53.9
	Total	258	100
Religion	Traditional (ATR)	03	1.1
	Islam	43	16.7
	Christianity	212	82.2
	Total	258	100
Marital Status	Single	243	94.2
	Married	07	2.7
	Others	08	3.1
	Total	258	100
Age (in years)	16 – 20	142	55
	21 – 25	101	39.2
	25 – 30	15	5.8
	Total	258	100
Ethnic Group	Yoruba	176	68.2
	Igbo	41	15.9
	Edo	10	3.9
	Delta	07	2.7
	Hausa	05	1.9
	Others	19	7.4
	Total	258	100
Faculty	Art	23	8.9
	Science	49	19
	Social Sciences	46	17.8
	Environmental Sciences	06	2.3
	Law	06	2.3
	Clinical Sciences	48	18.6
	Engineering	26	10.1
	Education	06	2.3
	Management Sciences	48	18.6
	Total	258	100

Instruments:

The research instrument was a questionnaire divided into two parts; section A and B. Section A contained the participants’ demographic details such as age, sex, religion and ethnic group. Section B contained a two-item unstructured questionnaire which required the participants to write to their hearts content their views on the questions laid out to them in the questionnaire. The first question was: How you perceive those wearing beards? While the second question was how you would assess those who wear beards? The questions were like a prompt to elicit unhindered responses from the participants as the participants were expected to write freely.

Procedure

The lead researcher had two other research assistants who helped in data collection. After the research assistants were trained on how to ask the question from the potential participants, they set out to different places on the main campus to meet their potential participants. The researcher with the research assistants met the respondents at their various point of activities on the campus premises and were then given the questionnaires to fill after agreeing to partake in the study. The researchers explained to the participants what the study entailed and its purpose. The participants were then reassured of their confidentiality and that the information they provided were only used for research purposes and then the questionnaire would be handed over to them. Some of the participants did not fill the questionnaires while some did not complete their responses. It took an average of 10 minutes for a participant to finish the process of filling the questionnaire. Out of the three hundred (300) questionnaires taken to the field, thirty (30) of them were returned unfilled; forty-two (42) of them were either incompletely or inappropriately filled while there was 248 valid questionnaire for analysis.

DATA ANALYSIS

Thematic analysis was used to analyse the data. Thematic analysis is a kind of qualitative method for identification and organization of like themes in a data. According to Braun & Clarke 2006, thematic analysis is a method for identifying, analyzing, organizing, describing, and reporting themes found within a data set. Braun & Clarke also provided a 6-stage process of thematic analysis which this study adopted. The 6-stages are: familiarization, generating initial codes, searching for themes, reviewing the initial themes, naming and defining the themes and writing up the themes.

After the data set was arranged for familiarization, we came up with these set of data for each question:

QUESTION 1: How do you perceive those wearing beards?

Table 1.0 showing the list of coded variables from Q1 (perception)

QUESTION Q1			
S/N	Coded Variables	MALE	FEMALE
I	Rough and Annoying	12	29
II	Sexy	3	8
III	Low Self Esteem	1	0
IV	High Social Class	0	3
V	Maturity	32	20
VI	Good Looking	22	35
VII	Well Mannered	0	2
VIII	Indifferent	17	17
IX	Confidence	0	2
X	Good	24	9
XI	Conformity	0	1
XII	Respect	0	1
XIII	High Self Esteem	1	0
XIV	Maturity and Good Looking	4	1
XV	Maturity and High Social Class	1	0
XVI	Good and Annoying	0	1
XVII	Sexy and Mature	1	0

FOR QUESTION 2: How would you assess those who beards?

Table 2.0 showing the list of coded variables from Q2 (profiling)

SN	Coded Variable	Male	Female
I	Irritating	6	7
II	Responsible	47	44
III	Irresponsible/Criminal	12	23
IV	Unfocused	1	0
V	Friendly	2	4
VI	Indifferent	20	22
VII	Cunny	9	8
VIII	Religious	7	6
IX	Bully	0	1
X	Cool	1	0
XI	Nympho	1	2
XII	Bossy	1	0
XIII	Dependable	3	0
XIV	Patience	1	0
XV	Sophisticated	4	8
XVI	Fashion Conscious	2	1
XVII	Confident	0	0
XVIII	Religious Leader and Responsible	0	1
XIX	Responsible and Friendly	1	0
XX	Religious Leader and Cunny	0	1
XXI	Influential	1	0

Categorization of variables in Q1 (Perception)

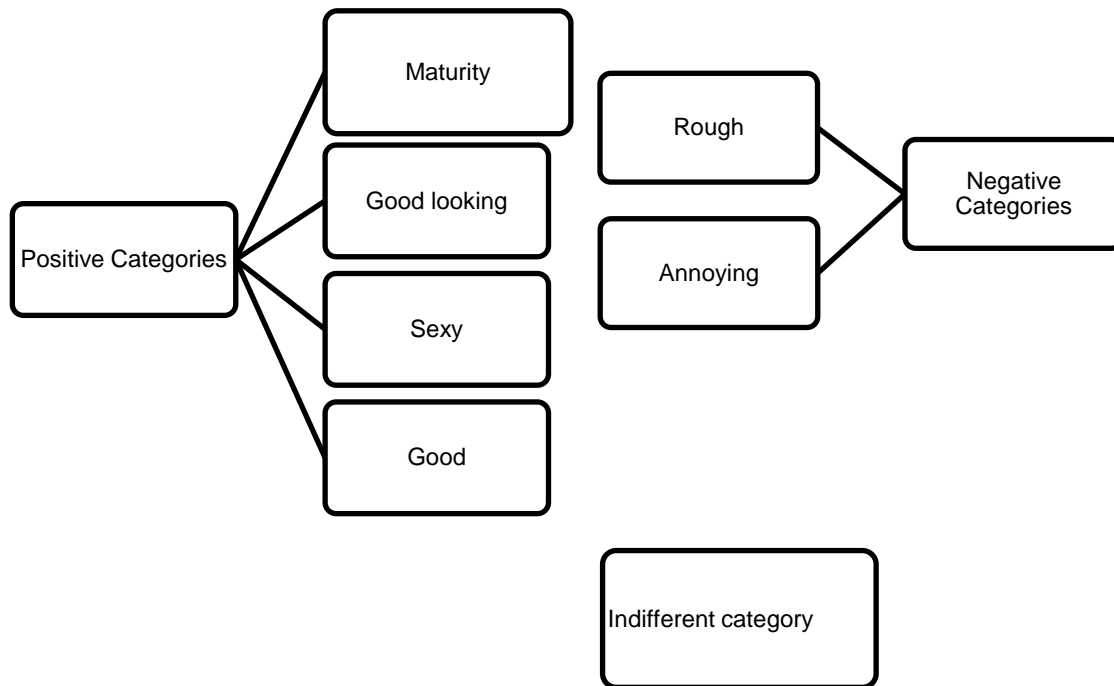


Table 1.0 Showing generated themes for positive category in Q1

Positive Category(Q1)				
S/N	Themes	Coded Variables	Frequency	
			Male	Female
1	People with beards are smart	Maturity	32	20
2	Beards improve looks	Good Looking	22	35
		Sexy	3	8
		Good	24	9
	Total		81	72

Table 2.0 Showing generated themes for negative category in Q1

Negative Category(Q1)				
S/N	Themes	Coded Variables	Frequency	
			Male	Female
1	Gives off a displeasing ambience	Rough	4	12
		Annoying	8	17
	Total		12	29

Table 3.0 Total number of Participant category in Q1

Category	Males	Females	Total
Positive	81	72	153
Negative	12	29	41
Indifferent	17	17	34
Total	110	118	228

Table 6.0 Percentage number of People in each category of Q1

Positive	67.1%
Negative	17.9%
Indifferent	14.9%

Table 6 shows that a higher percentage number of participants study will positively perceive beards wearing with 67.1% of the total number of participants having a positive perception was

17.9% having a negative perception and 14.9% being indifferent towards the way they perceive it.

Table 7.0 shows the different distribution of age class and their perception in the different categories

	Ages Q1		
	16-19yrs	20-23yrs	24yrs and above
Positive	63	68	22
Negative	14	24	3
Indifferent	16	14	4
Total	93	106	29

Table 8.0 showing the percentage distribution of each age class and their perception in each category

Categories	Ages Q1		
	16-19yrs	20-23yrs	24yrs and above
Positive	67.7%	64.1%	75.8%
Negative	15.0%	22.6%	10.3%
Indifferent	17.2%	13.2%	13.7%

Table 9.0 Frequency Distribution of Variables for Q1 Religious Background

Category	Religious Background Q1		
	Christian	Muslim	African Traditional Religion
Positive Category	131	20	2
Negative category	33	8	
Indifferent	28	6	
Total	192	34	2

Table 10.0 showing the percentage distribution of each religion and their perception in the different category

Category	Religious Background(Q1) Perception		
	Christian	Muslim	African Traditional Religion
Positive Category	68.2%	58.8%	100%
Negative category	17.1%	23.5%	
Indifferent	14.5%	25%	

Table 8 shows positive thoughts of students across religious groups as depicted in the way they perceived beard wearing across. 68.2% of the Christian population in the study positively perceived beard wearing, 17.1% showed a negative perceived beard wearing and 14.5% were indifferent. Percentage number of Muslims who positively perceived beard wearing was 58%,

23.5% of them negatively perceived beard wearing while 25% of them were indifferent towards the way they perceived beards.

Table 11.0 Frequency Distribution of Variables for Q1 Ethnic Background

Category	Ethnic Background(Q1) Perception			
	Yoruba	Igbo	Hausa	Others
Positive Category	101	31	1	19
Negative category	29	6	2	3
Indifferent	21	6	1	5
Total	151	43	4	27

Table 12.0: Showing the percentage distribution of each ethnic groups and their perception in the different category

Category	Ethnic Background(Q1) Perception			
	Yoruba	Igbo	Hausa	Others
Positive Category	66.8%	72.0%	25%	70.3%
Negative category	19.2%	13.9%	50%	11.1%
Indifferent	13.0%	13.9%	25%	18.5%

All ethnic groups showed a higher percentage of its population tilting towards having a higher perception on beard wearing with the exception of Hausas which showed a higher percentage of its population perceiving beards in a negative light. From the table, the Yoruba population had 66.8% of its population perceiving beards positively, 19.2% perceived beard wearing negatively and 13.0% were indifferent towards the way they perceived it. The Igbos had 72% of its population having positive perception of beard wearing, 13.9% of them showed a negative perception to beard wearing and 13.9% showing indifference towards perception on beard wearing. The Hausas had 25% of their population positively perceiving beard wearing, 50% had a negative perception and 25% showed indifference towards the way they perceived beards.

Table 13.0 Demographic presentation of Variables for Q1 in different Faculties

Category	Faculty (Q1) Perception								
	Eng.	ClinicalSci.	Arts	Mgt.Sci	Law	S.Sci	Sciences	Edu.	Env.Sci
Positive	17	30	13	31	5	23	26	5	3
Negative	2	5	4	8		8	9	1	
Indifferent	5	9	3	3		8	6		
Total	24	44	20	42	5	39	41	6	3

Table 14.0 showing the percentage distribution of each faculty and their perception on individuals with beard.

Category	Faculty (Q1) Perception								
	Eng.	Clinical Sci.	Arts	Mgt.Sci	Law	S.Sci	Sciences	Edu.	Env.Sci
Positive	70.8%	68.1%	65%	73.8%	100%	58.9%	63.4%	83.3%	100%
Negative	8.3%	11.3%	20%	19.0%		20.5%	21.9%	16.6%	
Indifferent	20.8%	20.5%	15%	15%		20.5%	14.6%		

This table shows the percentage distribution of each faculty and their perception on beards. The faculty of Engineering (Eng.) showed 70.8% of the participants having a positive perception, 8.3% showing a negative perception and 20.8% being indifferent. Faculty of arts had 65% of its participants perceiving beards positively, 11.3% negatively and 15% indifferent. Faculty of management sciences showed 68.1% of its participants positively perceiving beards, 19.0% having a negative perception and 15% being indifferent. Faculty of law had 100% of its participants positively perceiving beards. The faculty of social sciences shows 58.9% of its participants having a positive perception, 20.5% showing a negative perception and 20.5% being indifferent. Faculty of Clinical Sciences had 68.1% of its participants perceiving beards positively, 11.1% negatively and 20.5% negatively. Faculty of Education showed 83.3% of its participants having a positive perception on beards and 16.6% having a negative perception. In the faculty of Environmental sciences 100% of the participants positively perceived beards.

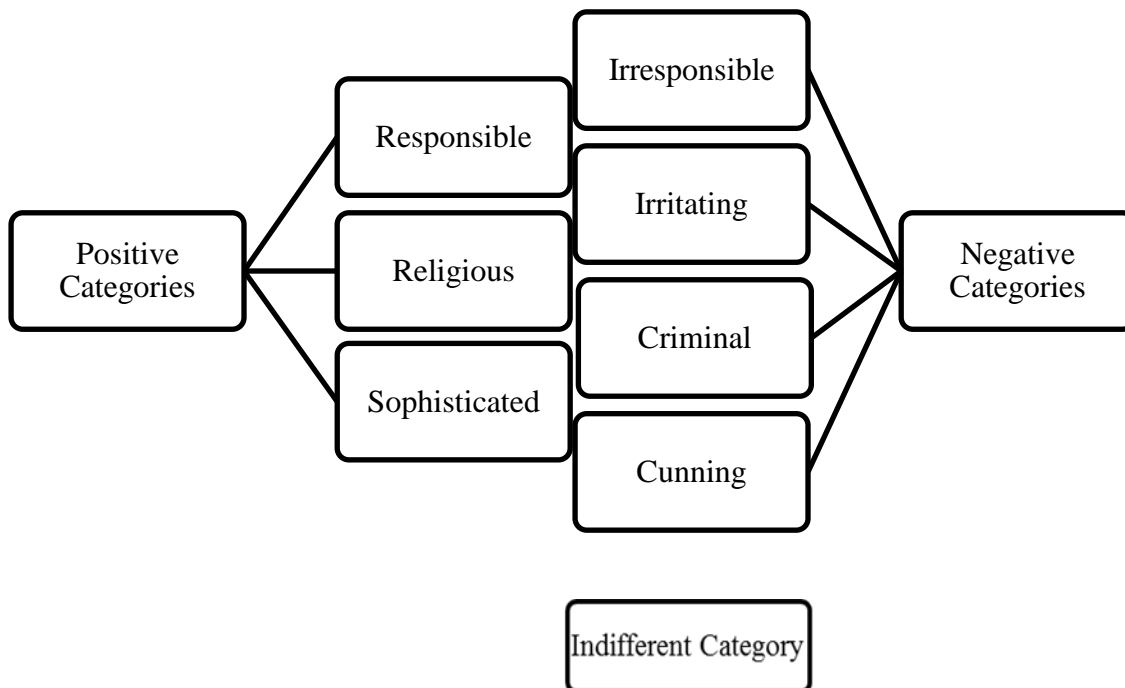




Table 15.0 Showing generated themes for positive category in Q2

Positive Category(Q2)				
S/N	Themes	Coded Variables	Frequency	
			Male	Female
1	Sophisticated	Sophisticated	4	8
2	Having a sense of duty	Responsible	47	44
		Religious	7	6
	Total		58	58

Table 16.0 Showing generated themes for negative category in Q2

Negative Category(Q2)				
S/N	Themes	Coded Variables	Frequency	
			Male	Female
1	Irritating	Irritating	6	7
2	Have a foxy appearance	Irresponsible	6	19
		Criminal	6	4
		Cunning	9	8
	Total		27	38

Table 17.0 Total number of Participants in category Q2

Category	Males	Females	Total
Positive	58	58	116
Negative	27	38	65
Indifferent	20	22	42
Total	105	118	223

Table 18.0 Percentage number of People in each category of Q2

Positive	52.0%
Negative	29.1%
Indifferent	18.8%

Table 16 shows that a higher percentage number of participants study will positively profile bearded individual with 52.0% of the participants positively profiling individuals with beards, 29.1% negatively profiling bearded individuals and 14.9% being indifferent to the way they would profile bearded individuals.

Table 19 Frequency distribution of age class and how they would profile people with beards

Categories	Ages Q2		
	16-19yrs	20-23yrs	24yrs and above
Positive	47	56	13
Negative	26	36	3
Indifferent	21	16	5
Total	94	108	21

Table 4 Percentage distribution of age classes how they will profile people with beard

Categories	Ages Q2		
	16-19yrs	20-23yrs	24yrs and above
Positive	50%	51.8%	61.9%
Negative	27.65	33.3	14.2
Indifferent	22.3%	14.8	23.8%

Table 17.0 Demographic presentation of Variables for Q2 Religious Background

Category	Religious Background(Q2) Profiling		
	Christian	Muslim	African Traditional Religion
Positive Category	89	25	1
Negative category	55	8	
Indifferent	39	6	
Total	183	39	1

Table 18 showing the percentage distribution of each religion and the way they profile in the different category.

Category	Religious Background(Q2) Profiling		
	Christian	Muslim	Traditional
Positive Category	48.6%	64.1%	100%

Negative category	30.0%	20.5%	
Indifferent	21.3%	15.3%	

From the table we could see that Christians have a higher percentage of participants' positively profiling people on beards with 48.6% positively profiling people, 30.0% negatively profiling individuals with beards and 21.3% being indifferent. 64.1% of Muslims had 64.1% of its population positively profiling individuals on beards, 20.5% would negatively profile bearded individuals and 15.3% of the participants were indifferent.

Table 19 Frequency Distribution of Variables for Q2 Ethnic Background

Category	Ethnic Background(Q2) Profiling			
	Yoruba	Igbo	Hausa	Others
Positive Category	80	23	1	18
Negative category	41	9	3	7
Indifferent	29	5		6
Total	150	37	4	31

Table 20: Showing the percentage distribution of each ethnic groups and the way they profile people on beards in different categories

Category	Ethnic Background(Q2) Profiling			
	Yoruba	Igbo	Hausa	Others
Positive Category	53.3%	62.1%	25%	58.0%
Negative category	27.3%	24.3%	75%	22.5%
Indifferent	19.3%	13.5%		19.3%

From the table above all ethnic groups will profile all individuals positively with the exception of the Hausas who would profile bearded individuals negatively. The percentage number of people in the Yoruba ethnic group that would profile individuals positively was 53.3%, 27.3% would profile them negatively while 19.3% of the Yoruba participants were indifferent. Results from the Igbo participants of the sample population showed that 62.1% of them will positively profile individuals with beards, 24.3% will negatively profile individuals on beards and 13.5% are indifferent. Results from the Hausa ethnic group showed a quite different pattern from the results of all other ethnic groups in the study. Here, Hausas were shown to have a higher

percentage of its participants negatively profiling individuals with beards. The Hausas had 25% of its participants positively profiling individuals on beards and 75% profiling people with beards negatively.

Table 21 showing the frequency distribution of various faculties and how they will profile individuals with beards.

Category	Faculty (Q2) profiling								
	Eng.	Clinical Sci.	Arts	Mgt.Sci	Law	S.Sci	Sciences	Edu.	Env.Sci
Positive	12	19	10	30	2	18	18	4	3
Negative	4	17	4	10	2	10	17		1
Indifferent	4	12	7	8		6	4	1	
Total	20	48	21	48	4	34	39	5	4

Table 22 showing the percentage distribution of various faculties and how they will profile individuals with beards in the different category

Category	Faculty (Q2) profiling								
	Eng.	Clinical Sci.	Arts	Mgt.Sci	Law	S.Sci	Sciences	Edu.	Env.Sci
Positive	60%	39.5%	47.6%	62.5%	50%	52.9%	46.1%	80%	75%
Negative	20%	35.4%	19.0%	20.8%	50%	29.4%	43.5%		25%
Indifferent	20%	25%	25%	16.6%		17.6%	10.2%	20%	

DISCUSSION

There had been studies on beard wearing but many of these studies have investigated how women perceive beard wearing in relation to attractiveness (Dixson & Brooks, 2013; Dixson, Tam & Awasthy, 2012; Dixson & Vassey, 2012). This particular study investigated the perceptions of undergraduate students (both male and female) towards beard wearing and also how they (students) would assess those who wear beards. Results show some polar realities. Some of the students perceived beard-wearing men as mature & good looking. Being good-looking was supported by the study of Barber (2001) which showed that men wore beards to emphasize their physical attractiveness and increase their social status especially to improve marriage prospects. Likewise, Neaves & Shield (2008) found that males carrying heavy beards were more socially mature than others. Dixson & Vasey (2012) found a dissimilar result. They reported that women did not consider beard men faces as more attractive than clean-shaven men.



Also, our study found out that participants rated bearded individuals as responsible. According to the participants, bearded individuals are mostly in their adulthoods suggesting they are mature and the responsibilities of adulthood such as making important decisions regarding important duties and also being trustworthy should be a characteristic of the features. In another words, beards come with age of maturity which was similar with the assertion of (Ebling, 1987); this maturity could be physical (Neave & Shield, 2008). But the study of Stirrat & Perret (2010) revealed that bearded men are less trustworthy than clean-shaven men. Another alternative to this is from the study of Bakmazian (2014) who discovered that bearded individuals were more trustworthy.

IMPLICATIONS

The implication of this study is that it laid bare the various perceptions of students towards those who wear beards.

CONCLUSION:

It can be concluded that students' narratives for how they perceive and profile beard-wearing men had positive and negative responses. Some of the responses included that bearded individuals were mature, good-looking, sexy, rough and annoying while others were well profile individuals with beards as sophisticated people, responsible, being religious, irresponsible and indifferent.

LIMITATIONS

There are a number of limitations to this study that may have influenced the results. Firstly, the exploratory nature of the study has its own demerit. Apart from showing helping to dig deeper on the construct, it did not show direction for the variables under consideration. Other studies could check the relationship between beard-wearing and perception about criminal tendencies of those who wear beards. Secondly, the population sample was from the university of Lagos void any form of major cultural influence or social unrest therefore notable to represent accurately the different environmental and cultural factors that may influence an individual's view on beards. Thirdly, the whole population sample was literate not giving cognizance to the uneducated individuals

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