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## Thank God My Car Is Born Again So Also Am I: Naturalistic Observation of Religious Inscriptions on Vehicles in Nigeria

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### ABSTRACT

The study investigated the frequency of religious inscriptions, the use of religious stickers, and religious orientation amongst vehicle owners in Lagos city of Nigeria. A naturalistic observation of 430 cars, 140 commercial buses and 40 trailers was carried out at first, then a sample of 100 participants (68 males and 32 females) selected from a cross section of private car owners and commercial drivers in Lagos metropolis were given questionnaire to complete. The independent variable was religion. The dependent variable was measured with Sticker use and Religious Behaviour Scale (SRBS) ( $X = 39.90$ ;  $S.D = 6.09$ ) and Religious Orientation Questionnaire (ROQ) ( $X = 12.58$ );  $S.D = 4.44$ ).

The results obtained revealed that four hypotheses were significant. With this, it was concluded that though there are more religious stickers than other stickers on cars and other vehicles in Nigeria, religious sticker use does not imply religiosity.

**Keywords:** Naturalistic observation, religious inscriptions, vehicles.

## **Introduction**

The Nigerian society is indeed, a highly religious one as determined by the consciousness of a Supreme Being, which most Nigerians determinedly acknowledge at most public functions, such as in their regular attendance at places of worship and in their everyday speech and interaction. However, the ways in which religious beliefs held by people variously influence their lives. This manifest in how they differently express this in their behaviours. In fact, people are expected to behave in consonance with their religious beliefs. A cursory look at the behaviours of Nigerians may suggest a form of dissonance in this expectation which then calls for an examination.

The philosophy of religion begins with a definition of what its essence consists of. The very fact that these definitions are so many and so different from one another is enough to prove that the word religion cannot stand for any single principle or essence, but is rather a collective name. Religion may be seen as a responsive activity, and not the construction for the implementation of a set of ideas or for the attainment of some goal of society. Religion generates ideas and propositions and creeds, and because man is a thinking being, religion generates images and symbols in him and in attempt to establish these, some express their religious inclination in form of graffiti, stickers, leaflets and the like, which to some connotes emotionality, obsession, mass hysteria, religious riots, etc, and to others, integration, adjustment and well being (Onabolu, 1998).

In response to people's yearnings for self expressions and solutions to some perceived threatening situations, there has been an increased interest in the use of graffiti. Graffiti are words or symbols, written, sprayed or inscribed on a wall or on places of interest to an individual. In recent times walls have been bombarded with writings expressing an individual's feelings

(Balogun, 1994). People's doors, bags, cars and other properties carry these inscriptions with particular emphasis on religious implications. A sticker reading 'Satan keep off! Angels on guard', placed on a door, a car, or any other property, is warning the devil to keep off such a property as angels are guarding it. A cursory look at the use of religious stickers and other inscriptions would show that more people are indulging in this kind of behaviour. Does this act point to the changing trend in the way Nigerians are conceptualizing or practising their religions? Is there a relationship between these kind of self expression and the tenets of these religions so that the higher the number of graffiti or stickers one places on an object, the more religious the person is; or is the number of stickers used a reflection of the debt of belief of such a person either in that religion or what the stickers say. In other words can the stickers number be used as a measure or determinant of the level of religiosity of such an individual?

Many writers (e.g. Amaraegbu, 1995; Onumah, 1995) assert that in the past decade, Nigerians have become increasingly and deeply religious if we go by number of religious institutions that have sprang up, references to God in manner of speech and the observation of religious inclinations of people when it comes to public issues. This suggests that religion influences, to a great extent, the understanding and explanation of the behaviour and probably the personality of Nigerians. Some authorities have begun to speculate that the reason Nigerians are spiritually future-oriented despite the drop in their quality of life (Ake, 1995; Fafowora, 1993; Yakubu, 1995), may be found in their deep religious orientation. It has thus become apparent that religiosity has become a very potent variable in attempting to understand psychology of an average Nigerian (Idehen, 2001)

### **Conceptual Framework and Review of Related Studies**

From the Stone Age to the present time writing or drawing on the walls of caves, carvings, and signs on stones have

been part of human communication or expression of himself. Nwamuo (1977) argued that writings on the wall are expression of an individual's inner feelings or needs that are not satisfied; about his life, himself, his environment and at times about his life experiences. Olowu (1983) mentioned that these writings have been studied over the years not for their overt message but as a guide to the writer's character and personality. Personality of the writer can easily be discernible from the writings on the wall. Graffiti, apart from being humourous can be used to determine the pulse of the society on any given issue, e.g., religion, politics, economics or ethnic relations in a country.

There are psychological theories that have tried to explain the reasons for this unique behaviour of human beings. One is that of catharsis or "release". According to this theory, writing, such as on the wall could be a way of releasing built-up tension. Freud (1955), observed that the Id consist of everything psychological. This Id cannot tolerate increase of energy that are experienced as uncomfortable states of tension, hence the search for avenue of expression in order to restore balance in the individual. In addition, Nwamuo (1986) observed that social pressures and inhibitions make the desire to self-definition, self determination, self expression and self actualization for individuals, especially adolescents all a necessity for seeking out avenue where this can be manifested especially where his ego or prestige is guaranteed.

A number of theories have been advanced which try to show the influence of psychological processes on this social phenomenon called religion. The area covered by the psychological study of religion concerns itself with the individual, his behaviour in respect of the religious group, to which he belongs, and his behaviour in the relationship he has formed with what he thinks of as divine, or treats as divine, and how he expresses it. Freud (1927) emphasized religion as a source of comfort, solace, or assurance in the face of external stresses and frustrations. The basis of religion is due to that situation where man is faced with the needs of life and these needs are crying for satisfaction. His

means are inadequate for meeting his many sided needs, and because he feels that his needs must be satisfied, he created for himself, by a process of mental mechanism, certain being or entities, who will be able to satisfy these needs. This is usually expressed in many behavioural forms, and we would like to posit that one of such behaviour could be through the use of slogan and inscriptions, his belief in these entities, to satisfy his needs such as in graffiti and its many forms.

The five types of human motivational needs (physiological, safety, belongingness, self esteem, and self actualization needs) espoused by Maslow, are universally found in all people. The higher spirituals needs are at the top of this hierarchy (Maslow, 1971). According to Maslow, the religious or spiritual values are not the exclusive property of any one religion or group. Self-actualizers show themselves to be religious in their character, attitudes, and behaviour. He states that humans have an absolute need for something bigger and higher than themselves. This need drives them to believe in a Supreme Being and express this need for others to see this belief in the supreme. One of such means of expression is through the use of inscriptions.

Several psychoanalytic writers mention the function of religion in relieving guilt feelings (e.g. Pfister, 1948). Guilt feelings have often been interpreted as the direction of aggression towards the self, and there is evidence that it is connected with internal conflicts between the self and ego ideal or the conscience (Flugel, 1945). Guilt feelings are strongest in those whose parents used strict discipline and are stronger in females than in males (Wright, 1971). Ostow and Sharfstein (1954) suggest that churches and other religious groups use guilt as a means of controlling people. For example because you carry a sticker on car that says "Redeemed member" which declares you to be a member of Redeemed Christian Church of God, you are expected

to behave according to the tenets being preached by that church. This serve as a control function on any possibility of misbehaviour from such a member. In other words, anyone who has membership stickers of such groups is checked so that they do not embarrass such groups in the society.

The occurrence of a major crisis in an individual's life has also been traditionally described as an occasion for religious reawakening and an impetus for religious commitment. One possibility to the link between religion and fear of death is that those who are most anxious about death become religious in order to reduce their anxiety. Commercial drivers bombard their vehicles with stickers that speak of God's protection from death on the highways. They also resort to charms of different sorts, which make them either disappear or stay alive in the face of death. Religious teaching also reduces the fear of death.

Hartmann (1958) saw the main function of religion in the individual as the integrative function, through which the inner mental processes are synthesized with social adaptation. Another view was offered by Draper (1969), who emphasized the sublimation of aggressive and libidinal drives through religion: A number of these writers emphasized the positive role of religion in the integration and personal adjustment in the individual.

As earlier suggested, one of the cardinal objectives of this study, would be an attempt to infer the depth of religiosity of Nigerians, by a naturalistic observation by the inscriptions, writings and stickers on their cars. Secondly, this study intend to highlight the relationship existing between religious inscriptions on vehicles and corresponding observable behaviour in these vehicle owners, that is, Do those who put up stickers act out what these stickers say? Lastly, and above all this study tries to find out if those who use religious inscriptions are more religious than those who do not use, and what implications this would have on the Nigerian society.

## Hypotheses

The following hypotheses were tested in accordance with the aims objectives of the research.

- 1) There are significantly more religious inscriptions than other inscriptions on vehicles.
- 2) There are significant variations in the distribution of religious inscriptions and other inscriptions.
- 3) There is a significant relationship between religious behaviour of vehicle owners and their religious orientation.
- 4) The use of stickers on vehicles significantly does not imply religiosity.
- 5) Males differ significantly from females in their religious behaviour.

## Method

**Design:** The design of the study was ex-post facto. This was because participants were not subjected to direct manipulation by the researchers, but the independent variables had already had their influence prior to the commencement of the study.

**Sample:** The general population of interest in this study was vehicle drivers and owners. The study was carried out to cover males and females, professionals, civil servants, businessmen and women and commercial drivers. It also included Christians, Moslems and those from other religions as well.

There was first an observation of vehicles where they were parked or along the road to determine the nature of the stickers on them. Then a sample of 100 drivers was randomly selected on whom a set of questionnaire was administered. They were



randomly selected from the vehicle users in the city of Lagos, Nigeria. The number of males and females who participated in this study was 69 and 31 respectively. The sample had 4 categories of occupation. They are professional civil servants (10), business men/women (9), and commercial drivers (26). Religious distribution shows that 29 participants were Muslims, 65 Christians and 6 were of other religious beliefs. The driving experience of these subjects ranged from 2 years to 25 years.

**Instruments and description:** A naturalistic observation was carried out to observe the frequency of occurrence of sticker use on vehicles. Also, a self-report questionnaire was used for the research. The questionnaire consists of three (3) sections:

**Section A:** This focused on obtaining data about the sociological and demographic variables of the participants such variables include sex, occupation, religion and driving experience.

**Section B:** This was made up of sticker use and religious behaviour scale (SRBS). This aimed at assessing the religious behaviour of participants and the relationship this had to with sticker use. Reliability co-efficient of the scale was Cronbach's alpha of 0.52.

**Section C:** This section concerned itself with determining/measuring level of religious orientation of participants. The scale was adopted from Allport and Ross' (1967) Religious Orientation Questionnaire. The reliability co-efficient of the scale was Cronbach's alpha of 0.45.

**Procedure:** The study was carried out in two parts. The first part was the observation of stickers on vehicles. The researchers went out to major car parks and estates in Lagos to observe vehicles with and without stickers. The frequency of use, type of sticker i.e. religious, advertisement or organizations, and type of religious stickers were noted. This included stickers on encouragement,

declaration, promises and warfare. A total of 430 cars, 140 commercial vehicles and 40 long vehicles, were observed. Their frequencies were recorded and simple percentages were found.

The second part involving the questionnaires use was of two parts. The first part was primarily to obtain information about the reliability of the scales, on 36 participants randomly selected from student car users in a pilot study. Thereafter, a sample of 100 respondents was purposely selected in the city as earlier mentioned.

In section A: participants were asked to respond to the variables as they concerned them. In section B: participants were expected to respond in a 5-scale Likert type format, 5 being most or all of the time, 4 – a good part of the time 3 – some of the time, 2 – a little of the time and 1 – rarely or more of the time. Some of the items on the scale were scored in the reversed order. These items were 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, and 10. For these 5 would mean rarely or more of the time, 4 a little of the time, and so on. The scoring took the same pattern.

The religious orientation scale in section C tested religious orientation of participants. It is made up of 2 subsections (a) and (b). For items 1 – 5 (a) it was extrinsic orientation and (b) it was intrinsic orientation. For items 6 – 12 (a) was intrinsic religious orientation and (b) was extrinsic religious orientation. For extrinsic religious scale, participants were scored 2 points while for intrinsic orientation they had 0 point.

Participants were students from different departments in University of Ibadan who used cars. Some of them had stickers on their cars and others did not. Participation was voluntary.

The second part of this was like the first, but was administered to the sample of interest, i.e. private car owners and commercial drivers. A total of 100 questionnaires were given out

and all were retrieved. Some of the questionnaire were responded to immediately and retrieved; some participants took theirs home due to lack of time. For others, especially the commercial drivers, the researcher filled in their responses. The period for administration and retrieval of the questionnaires was 10 days.

## Results

Hypothesis one which stated that there are significantly more religious inscriptions than other inscriptions on vehicles was tested using frequency and percentage distribution. The result is presented in Table 2.

*Table 1: Distribution of Inscriptions by Vehicles and their Percentages of Expressions Depicted*

Vehicles	Religious	Adverts	Others	No Graffiti	Total (%)
Private Cars	426	114	34	104	678 (64.5)
Commercial Buses	166	100	04	26	296 (27.7)
Truck or Trailers	56	20	06	02	94 (8.8))
Total (%)	648 (60.7)	234 (21.9)	44 (4.1)	132 (13.3)	1068 (100)

From the percentage distribution of the different inscriptions on vehicles in Table 1, religious inscriptions (60.7%) were significantly more than other inscriptions. Hypothesis one is significant.

Hypothesis two which stated that there are variations in the distribution of religious inscriptions was tested using frequency and percentage distribution. The result is presented in Table 2.

**Table 2: Distribution of Religious Stickers by Vehicles and their Percentages of Expressions Depicted**

Vehicles	Encouragement	Warfare	Declaration	Promises	Total (%)
Private Cars	66	46	236	78	426 (64.9)
Commercial Buses	60	24	70	12	166 (25.3)
Truck or Trailers	10	11	35	8	64 (9.8)
Total (%)	136 (20.7)	81 (21.3)	341 (52.0)	98 (15.0)	656 (100)

A total of 430 cars were observed, 140 commercial vehicles and 40 trucks and trailers. The distribution of religious stickers also varied across vehicles. From table 2, there are more stickers on declaration (52.7%) than there are of encouragement (20.7%), warfare (12.3%) or promises (15.0%).

Hypothesis 3 which stated that there is a significant relationship between religious behaviour of vehicle owners and their religious orientation was tested using Pearson r correlational analysis. The result is presented in Table 3.

**Table 3: Correlation Matrix Showing the Relationship between Religious Behaviours and Religious Orientation**

Variables	Religious Behaviours	Religious Orientation
Religious Behaviours	—	
Religious Orientation	.362**	—

\*\* Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level.

The Pearson product moment correlation as reported on Table 3 indicates that there is a significant relationship between religious behaviours and religious orientation ( $r = .362$ ,  $df = 98$ ,  $P < .05$ ).

**Table 4: Summary of One-Way ANOVA on the inscriptions and religiosity among vehicle owners**

Source	Sum of squares	DF	Mean square	F	P
Between Groups	5.234	2	2.617	.129	<.05
Between Groups	1970.326	97	20.313		
Total	1975.560	99			

Hypothesis 4: The use of religious inscriptions does not imply religiosity. This implies there is no significant relationship between use of religious inscription and religiosity as deduced from Table 4. ( $F(2, 97) = 0.129$ ;  $P < .05$ ).

**Table 5: Summary of t-test showing group comparisons between male and female on behaviour and religiosity**

Dependent Variables	Sex	N	X	S.D	S. Error	Df	t	P
Behaviour	Male	68	39.71	6.18	.75	98	-.462	>.05
	Female	32	40.31	6.00	1.06			
ROQ	Male	68	12.26	4.01	.49	98	-.462	>.05
	Female	32	13.25	5.25	.93			

Hypothesis 5: The group statistics Table indicates that there were 68 males with a mean score of 39.7 (S.D. 6.18) on the religious behaviors scale while 32 females had a mean score of 40.3 (SD 6.00) on the scale. From the independent sample test as to whether these sets of means are significantly different, the t-values are not significant. This result indicates that males ( $x = 39.7$ ) do not differ significantly from females ( $X = 40.3$ ) in their religious behaviour ( $t(98) = -.462$ ;  $p > .05$ ).

## Discussion

The first hypothesis indicated that there were more religious inscriptions than others on vehicles. Of the 430 cars that were observed, a total of 678 inscriptions were recorded, 62.8% of these were religious inscriptions. Of the 140 commercial buses observed and 296 inscriptions recorded, 56.1% were religious inscriptions. For the trucks or trailers, 40 were observed and 94 inscriptions recorded. 59.6% of these inscriptions were religious ones. From these observations emerged a proposal that Nigerians express their person or what they are going through by "voicing" it out through stickers and in this case, stickers that have religious connotations. It can be inferred that Nigerians present a "picture" of religious persons that believe in the power of a supreme being. Should this be the case, they are also expected to behave on the road, as a religious person, in manners that would relate their persons or beliefs with the teachings of these religions, one of which is to be peaceful with their neighbours at all times. Observations of the authors, which informed this study was that drivers of the cars with more religious inscriptions tend towards aggressive behaviour against other road users, flout traffic rules, and very abusive. This is not expected of a religious person if we were to go by the tenets of these religions especially that of Christianity and Islam. An interesting find was that private car owners used more religious inscriptions than other vehicles, which was expected and interpreted by the authors to be an interpretations of behaviour expected from "uneducated, ruffians and the like" commercial drivers..

In hypothesis two, which stated that there would be variations in the distribution of religious inscriptions, it was observed that the distribution varied from encouragement, to warfare, to declaration and to promises. There were more declaration stickers (52%) than all the others. On the cars, 236 (55.4%) of the 426 inscriptions were declarations. 42.2% of

stickers on commercial buses were declarations and 54.7% on trucks and trailers. There were still more of these on private cars than other cars. Private car owners, and indeed vehicles with more religious inscriptions use these as a shield in the face of fear of accidents, armed robber and social mobility, supported by survey done by Lawuyi (1979) and in order to demonstrate their faith in the potency of the supreme being to protect from all these fears which are life threatening.

The third hypotheses stated that there is a significant relationship between religious behavior of vehicle owners and their religious orientation. The hypothesis was found to be significant by the Pearson product moment of correlation. The values are as follows:  $r = .362$ ,  $df = 98$ ,  $P < .05$ . This is supported by the work of Allport and Ross (1967). The observation was contrary to the expectations and what informed the study in the first place, of the authors. Aggressiveness, verbal attacks and breaking of traffic rules by almost every driver on Nigerian roads, irrespective of their level of religious orientation was expected to moderate the driving behaviour and personality of the drivers especially those that were "bold" enough to declare their faith, through the stickers. The expectations of the authors, which was what informed the title of the paper, were to challenge the inscriptions on the vehicles. The proposal was that the higher the number of religious inscriptions, the more "unreligious" the behaviour of the drivers would be. However, the findings of this study through the third hypothesis proved us wrong. The reason for this may be because the vehicle owners' value life and would do anything to maintain that life.

Hypothesis four states that the use of religious inscriptions does not imply religiosity. The one way ANOVA indicated that the hypothesis was accepted; no relationship existed between sticker use and religiosity level. This means that not all those who use stickers have a belief in and worship of a particular being.

There is a difference between behaviour and believe, you may believe in something or a cause but your behaviour may not be in tandem with your believe, hence the earlier expressed expectations of the authors. One we did not find any difference between the major religions of Christians and Islam as expressed in the stickers; and two, the drivers did not expressed deep affiliation to what the stickers were saying, especially the commercial drivers, who believed that "more experienced drivers know how to avoid calamities on the road". This is contradicts significantly the observation of Nwamuo (1977) that the inscriptions are meant to express the inner feelings of individuals.

In hypothesis five, which stated that males differ from females in the religious behavior, that is, the type of and number of sticker use, the t-test for independent samples showed that the result was not significant. This implies that males are not different from females in their religious behaviour and or sticker use. This result was different from Nwamuo (1986) and Wales et al, (1976) findings which indicate that females wrote more in terms of graffiti.

### **Conclusion**

The study showed that there were more religious inscriptions, than adverts and others on vehicles. This is as a result of socioeconomic factors, and psychological factors, which include fear of death, either by accidents or attack from armed robbers, obsession, frustrations and conformity. The need for belongingness, one of the hierarchical needs stated by Maslow, is also satisfied in the use of religious stickers. People want to identify with certain religious organizations, whether they are born again or not. The satisfaction is gotten when people, on seeing the stickers on their vehicles, make remarks like "so you go there".



This study further emphasized the fact that people paste stickers on their cars for reasons other than the expected. It is usually expected that people who use stickers do so as an extension of their belief in the supreme. This has not been so. Fraudulent people, ritual killers, cultists still use these stickers, even though they do not subscribe to the tenets of the religions they profess. The implication of this therefore, on Nigeria is that though, many people use religious stickers, it is not a guarantee that they would behave in religiously acceptable ways. Presently, the state of moral decadence in Nigeria is on the increase. If sticker usage implied religiosity, we should experience a decline in armed robbery cases on the roads, fraudulent activities should be reduced, and other moral vices should be checked. This however, is the reverse. Violence is on the increase and accidents, due to carelessness and disobedience of traffic rules is also on the increase. Thus, sticker use has little or no effect on religious level and driving behaviours of Nigerians.

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