RELIGIOUS IDENTITY IN INTERFAITH MARRIAGES: A SOCIAL IDENTITY PERSPECTIVE

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ABSTRACT
This research was about the role religious identity in interfaith marriages with the context of the social identity theory. Using a cross sectional design and snowballing sampling approach, an modified and adapted version of the Great Britain ISSP 2008 Religiousness questionnaire was used. Pearson moment correlation and independent samples T-test were conducted to test the hypotheses. Results showed religious identity and attitude to interfaith marriages were negatively related. The result also showed that Muslim participants were more influenced by attitude to interfaith marriage than the Christians participants. Apart from that, participants with lower level of education (primary/secondary education) were more influenced in attitude to interfaith marriages than participants with higher level of education (tertiary education). Further explanations to these finds are made and areas of further research suggested.

Keywords: Mixed Marriages, Interfaith marriages, Religion, Social Identity.

Background to the Study
Allegiance to ethnic group and religious affiliation tends to divide the unity of our existence as a country. However, inter-tribal cum interfaith marriages tends to bridge the gap which ethnic group affiliation and adherence to one’s religious principles had created. Various religious groups lay strict restrictions on marrying someone outside their faith especially Muslim marrying Christian and Christian marrying Muslim. However, traveling and education have made people to marry outside their religious affiliation regardless of their religious dogma and teachings.

According to Jaume, Simkin, and Etchezahar (2013), the notion of religious orientation refers to the process that controls and organises the behaviour of religious individuals. Based on this definition, people with an extrinsic religious orientation consider their religious practices to be instrumental in achieving their personal or social objectives (e.g. group acceptance). Conversely, intrinsically oriented individuals consider religion as an ultimate end in itself, which is central to their identity. To this category of believers, religion is a source of motivation for their lives. In other words, individuals who exhibit an extrinsic religiosity are those who participate in religious activities in order to establish or maintain social networks without necessarily internalising religious precepts or teachings. On the other hand, believers with an intrinsic religiosity perceive religion as a driving force to which all others are subordinate in the context of their lives (Batson & Schoenrade, 1991).

Religious Identity is a specific type of identity formation. It is particularly adduced to the sense of group membership to a religion and the importance of the group membership with respect to its linkage to the concept of self. Religious identity is differentiated from religiousness and religiosity. Although, the three may appear to communicate the same concept, religiousness and religiosity refer to the adherence to a religious group membership as well as participation in overt religious activities. Conversely, religious identity refers specifically to religious group membership regardless of religious activity or participation.
Identity formation otherwise known as individuation occurs when an individual begins to acquire specific and enduring personal characteristics, at a point in life and by which the person is recognised or known. By this process, one individual is distinct from another.

The religious landscape of Nigeria has changed markedly over the past four decades, largely due to an increase in ethno-religious conflicts, which have pitched Muslims against Christians in fierce hostilities, particularly in the Northern part of the Country. Today, Nigeria represents one of the best examples of ethno-religious diversity, a pluralistic nation that merits to be researched with avid attention. In the Nigerian context, religious identity is in theory ranked second after ethnicity. However, in the Northern part of the country, religion has become more critical and it serves to activate ethnicity (Rufai, 2011). A vital consideration is that religion has been hoisted far above other identification concepts. According to Rufai (2011) “this explains why the North/South dichotomy is not only a product of ethnic groupings, but also of religious identities”. From the inception of Nigeria as a nation, three religions have been established in the country, Christianity, Islam and the African Traditional Religion. Christianity and Islam became the dominant religions, over the years, along which the country has majorly been segregated. Christianity and Islam have become the most politically active while ATR is relegated to an insignificant third position and the least politically engaged. Rufai (2011) posited that for this reason, Christian and Muslim concerns have animated several debates on religious differentiation and conflicts in Nigeria.

Clearly, the segregation of Nigeria into Christian and Muslim identities is a well-established phenomenon in Nigeria. According to Salawu (2010), the over 400 ethnic groups in Nigeria are distributed between the Christian and Islamic religions, thus creating a virulent North-South dichotomy which has fuelled series of ethno-religious conflicts across the country. Historical accounts put it that the differentiation took its roots way back in 1914, when the British colonialist decided to amalgamate its Northern and Southern protectorates into one single territory known as Nigeria.

In apparent manifestation of in-group identity salience, both religions oppose interfaith union in clear terms. However, the religious disapproval of interfaith marriages has not deterred the practice in the South-west, in general and in Lagos State in particular. Often, interfaith marriages overlook the concepts of religious conversion, religious assimilation, cultural assimilation, religious disaffiliation, and apostasy, yet, they are not immune to religious disillusionment (Dickson & Schaefer 2013). Should disillusionment arise, then, interfaith marriages would be confronted with a religious identity clash, rejection from in-laws and friends, religious intolerance, lack of spiritual compromise, confusion from raising the children in two different faith systems and violation of women’s rights. Therefore, the need arises to investigate why despite constraining circumstances; interfaith marriages are prevalent in the South-west. Does religious identity play a prominent role in interfaith marriage? What accounts for the preponderance of interfaith marriages in the South-west?

In Nigeria, religion exerts a strong impact on believers and this has created a prevalent apprehension between Christians and Muslims. As earlier noted, Muslims in the North have fought ceaselessly against what they perceive as “unrestrained westernisation”. The fear is that if proselytization is freely allowed in the North, it would gravely undermine the Muslim identity and eventually erode the ethnic and cultural values of the North. In the same vein, as observed by Ochonu (2010), Christians have been apprehensive of the Muslims’ dominance of the Nigerian political landscape, fearing that in the event of such, the Muslims would seek to Islamise the country and impose Sharia laws on non-Muslims. Thus, Christians across the country were quick to voice out their opposition soon after some Northern Muslim States adopted the Sharia criminal legal system between 2000 and 2002. The ensuing protests by Christians resulted into devastating clashes between the two divides with appalling consequences.

Therefore, it can be inferred that religion is a key player in the seemingly irreconcilable differences between the Northern and the Southern regions of Nigeria. If this assumption is to hold true, the question that comes to mind is why would most of the religious hostilities that are recorded in the history of the country happen in the North? Although, Christians dominate the South, however, there is a significant proportion of Muslims living in the South, as well. According to Sampson (2012), Islam is preponderant in the north-western and the north-eastern parts of the country, while Christianity is more prominent in the South-East and South-South geographical zones. On the other hand, the South-West has a reasonably balanced number of Muslims and Christians. More than 90% of Yoruba people are estimated to be either Christian or Muslim. In fact, the Yoruba population is said to be evenly divided between Muslims and Christians. The Yoruba tribe is one of the most religiously diversified ethnic groups in Africa. The culture and tradition of the Yoruba people have equally been impacted upon by Christianity and Islam.

Despite the religious diversity among the Yoruba speaking tribes, Muslims and Christians have co-existed peacefully from time immemorial, without any indication of religious animosity between the two.
religious divides. This may be linked with the fact that within the Yoruba tribe, cultural and ethnic identities are equally salient. Thus, mutual interactions, including interfaith marriages are common between Moslems and Christians in Yoruba land. A few notable examples that readily come across include the current governor of Lagos State, Babatunde Fashola, the former governor of Lagos State, Bola Ahmed Tinubu, the late Major-General Tunde Idiagbon (the military Deputy Head of state under Mohammadu Burahi), and Honourable Adeyemi Ikuforiji, the Speaker of the Lagos State House of Assembly. One may want to ask what accounts for the peaceful co-existence between the Muslims and the Christians, in the South-West, despite the strong doctrinal leaning of adherents of the two religions. One would also be tempted to ask why this part of the country has not been affected by religious conflicts, as much as it has been the case in the Northern part of the country.

However, the degree of enforcement is slightly different in the two religions. According to Leeman (2009), in classical Islamic theory, the law is the revealed will of God. It is a set of divinely ordained ordinances that takes pre-eminence over all else including the State. The Islamic law, as encapsulated in Sharia, controls and is not controlled by the Muslim society. Consequently, Muslims all over the world are bound by faith to adhere to all Sharia laws (Leeman 2009). In contrast, in Christianity, devotion to faith is not as rigid as in Islam. This relatively flexible attitude to faith is purportedly predicated on a Biblical verse where God is supposedly pleading with the believers to “choose life instead of death” (Deut. 30:19 New International Version). In addition, most precepts in the Bible are not viewed as direct utterances from God; however they are believed to be divinely inspired. In general, the Bible is alleged to contain the will of God as written and taught by his prophets and apostles but as inspired by God (Leeman 2009). On the subject of the State and society, Christians are instructed by the scriptures to obey constituted authorities, in that they are ordained by God. The existing literature missed looking at religious identity in the light of the diversity of religious beliefs with a focus on interfaith marriage in the South-West. This dissertation will contribute to further understanding religious identity in interfaith marriages in Lagos State. The study will examine the relationship between four measures: religious identity, religiousness, in-group favouritism and attitude to interfaith marriage, the role of educational qualification in interfaith marriage, with a view to understanding the religious forbearance credited to the South-West. Here lies the gap that this study seeks to fill.

Statement of Problem
Islam and Christianity are no doubt very strong religions in Nigeria. Adherents of the religions do not shy away in showing their strong allegiance to the teachings of the creeds. In most part of the country, religious identity prevails above any other identity (Okpanachi 2009). This is particularly so in the Northern part of Nigeria. This strong religious inclination of Nigerians is to be blamed for the religious acrimony that has plagued the country since its creation in 1914. The recent Pew Forum report earlier cited lends credence to the claim on the religious inclination of Nigerians. Nigerians hold a strong belief and consider their religion as a fundamental determinant of their life.

In apparent manifestation of in-group identity salience, both religions oppose interfaith union in clear terms. However, the religious disapproval of interfaith marriages has not deterred the practice in the South-west. Often, interfaith marriages overlook the concepts of religious conversion, religious assimilation, cultural assimilation, religious disaffiliation, and apostasy, yet, they are not immune to religious disillusionment (Dickson & Schaefer 2013). Should disillusionment arise, then, interfaith marriages would be confronted with a religious identity clash, rejection from in-laws and friends, religious intolerance, lack of spiritual compromise, confusion from raising the children in two different faith systems and violation of women’s rights. Therefore, the need arises to investigate why despite constraining circumstances; interfaith marriages are prevalent in the South-west. Does religious identity play a prominent role in interfaith marriage? What accounts for the preponderance of interfaith marriages in the South-west? Thus, this study is intended to investigate the impact of religious identity on interfaith marriages in Lagos State, given the strongly internalised religious identities: Christianity and Islam. In addition, the research intends to investigate the disposition of adherents of the two religions towards interfaith marriages.

Objective of the Study
Generally, the study aimed at finding out the role of religious identity in interfaith marriages in Nigeria; using Lagos state as a case study.

Specifically, the research sought to elicit the following:

1. To examine if there is a relationship between religious identity and attitude to interfaith marriages.
2. To examine if there is a difference in attitude to interfaith marriages between the Muslim and Christian participants.
3. To examine the role of educational qualification in attitude to interfaith marriages.

Significance of the Study
This study will be of great help to religious leaders and believers to understand that religious intolerance is not in the best interest of anyone and that religious tolerance can be achieved in religious diversity. It will reveal to political leaders that using religious rhetoric to achieve their political ambition will only further deepen the religious divide between Christians and Muslims in Nigeria. Above all, the study will help both intending individuals and those who are already in interfaith marriages know how to handle and resolve their religious differences and maintain marital stability.

Overview of existing Literature
As earlier noted, Nigeria is greatly polarized along religious cleavages, which have evolved into distinct groupings which adherents strongly identify with. There is a clear indication of in-group bias and out-group discrimination between adherents of both religions, as echoed in religious and political rhetoric, across the country. This religious polarisation, which created the Muslim group and the Christian group, has become synonymous with the name Nigeria. In painting a vivid description of the country, Archbishop Teissier of Algiers describes the nation as “the greatest Islamo-Christian nation in the world” (Akinade, 2002). As revealed in the recent Pew Forum study, majority of Nigerians prefer to identify themselves with their religious identity more than with any other consideration. Clearly, religious identity is pervasive in every aspect of life including socio-cultural activities like naming ceremonies and wedding events, in Nigeria. It is commonly hoisted above ethnic and cultural considerations in order to establish and maintain secured identity.

Consequently, the incompetence and gross corruption of successive governments after independence resulted in the disillusionment of majority of Nigerians, particularly in Northern Nigeria, who lost faith in the system and sought refuge in ethno-religious groups in order to develop and maintain a secured sense of self. As noted above, individuals seek continuity across time and situation to reduce uncertainty in social affairs. Individuals seek to achieve and maintain positive social identities through various types of social interaction. According to Kelman (1998, cited in Seul 1999), there are three different processes of social influence through which identities are constructed: compliance, identification, and internalization. Compliance occurs when an individual conforms to another's expectations or demands in order to secure favourable regard or treatment (Seul 1999). Interpersonal relationships, particularly in the context of groups, are central to the process of achieving a secured and positively valued sense of self. Individuals seek a secured sense of self by “striving to achieve or to maintain positive social identity” (Tajfel & Turner 1986, cited in Seul 1999). A group is a self-defining collection of individuals, which has an identity of its own that is borne and communicated by the group members (Seul 1999).

The process of out-group discrimination and in-group identification is strongly evident in the two dominant religious groups in Nigeria. The persistent conflicts between the two groups are an indication that there is a sustained culture of mutual suspicion and unhealthy rivalry between Christians and Muslims. The situation is worsened by opportunist political and religious leaders who take advantage of believers’ inexorable search of a religious utopia to legitimise their self-seeking political objectives. Dovidio, Glick and Rudman (2008). According to Social Identity Theory, under the aforementioned conditions, the tension created between the two incompatible identities may trigger greater intergroup conflicts, in parts; because each group projects its beliefs and values as the standard by which all other groups should be judged (Dovidio, Glick & Rudman 2008).

In consonant with the aforementioned, a look at pre-colonial and post-colonial Nigeria provides a clear description how the country became polarised into two distinct groups. The British conquest of 1914 caused more discontent than blessings to the country; the most significant disfavour being the promotion of in-group bias and in-group favouritism along religious lines. The Christian-Muslim peaceful co-existence that once existed plummeted. Foreign religious ideologies became the main source of acrimony between the North and the South, up to the present days. Religion represents the justification for most of the conflicts that have shaken the country for over four decades.

In the Nigerian context, a strong Muslim in-group bias, followed by an out-group hate attitude, is prevalent particularly in the northern region. Conversely, in the southern part of the country, a Christian in-group bias exists alongside an out-group tolerant attitude. This perhaps explains why most of the religious crises so far recorded in Nigeria have been staged in the northern part of the country. The few that were
documented in the south are mainly reprisals on the northern Muslims for the killings of Christians in the northern parts of the country, which is also a clear case of in-group favouritism. Today, religion is a menace to the country. Observers have posited that the broad influence of the two world religions in Nigeria is immeasurable. Its effects reverberate in every sphere of the socio-political, economic, and educational activities of Nigerians. The acrimonious relationship between Christianity and Islam is reflected further in the doctrinal restrictions on intermarriage among believers of the two creeds. Both religions condemn the practice in strong terms, particularly the Islamic religion which considers any adherent that contracts an interreligious union to have committed apostasy, thus should be ostracised from the religious group.

Islam and Christianity have been put almost at par, in terms of adherents in Nigeria, with the marginal difference ascribed to traditional religious believers across the country (Abara, 2012). According to Sampson (2012), the north-western and the north-eastern parts of the country are predominantly Muslims. On the other hand, the south-east and the south-south regions are predominantly inhabited by Christians, while the south-west and north-central regions have a reasonably balanced number of Muslims and Christians. The above description shows a clear dichotomy of the country along Christianity and Islam religions.

Yamin (2008) posits that the preservation of the religious identity often leads to conflicts. There is a mutual conscious determination not to be overrun by the other, between Christianity and Islam in Nigeria. This explains the persistent friction between adherents of the two religions and the religious hostilities that have pervaded the country. Consequently, the adoption of the Sharia criminal legal system by some Northern Muslim-majority states between 2000 and 2002 was deemed highly controversial to the Christian identity. In the same vein, the Christians’ nationwide protest against the adoption of the Sharia legal system was considered, in Muslim quarters, as undermining and a threat to the Muslim identity. Dowd (2014) posits that a number of studies have found a positive association between religious diversity and social conflict. Dowd adds further that “the more divided a society is by religion; the more likely it is that religion can be used to fuel social conflict”. Thus, Nigeria’s religious diversity increases religious intolerance and the likelihood of social conflicts along religious lines. Religious differences overlap and reinforce ethnic differences in many parts of the country.

The study conducted by Dowd, revealed that although Nigeria’s religious divide may have prompted destabilising religious competition and inspired religious intolerance across the country, communal religious exchange among both Christians and Muslims tends to have a more positive effect on religious tolerance in the country’s more religiously diverse settings than in more religiously homogeneous ones (Dowd, 2014).

From the above description of a religiously diverse society, Nigeria falls into the first and third perspective. The difference in creed about Jesus, the equal split between Christianity and Islam as well as the existence of different denominations within these world religions qualify Nigeria as a religiously diverse country. Regrettably, these differences have been exploited to fuel social hostilities across the country. According to Dowd’s study, this is not unconnected with the conjecture that in religiously diverse societies where democratic institutions are new and fragile, there is intense religious contestation as religious communities compete for adherents and/or social influence.

Although, religious differences have been identified as a potential instigator of social hostilities in religiously divided countries, like Nigeria, studies have revealed that religious segregation, rather than religious diversity fosters violent conflicts and that promoting segregation among religious communities is ultimately counterproductive (Dowd 2014). Therefore, an in-depth look into Nigeria to elicit information at the individual level would help to elucidate how religious diversity affects social conflict. One would discover how and why activity in a religious community might affect the likelihood that an individual engages in violent activities, that is, what the causal dynamics might be; what triggers conflict and why? This leads to considering the roles of religious leaders and how variation in religious diversity is likely to affect the way religious leaders decide to achieve their goals (Dowd 2014).

Christianity and Islam are transnational religions with expansionist tendency. The Christian religion instructs Christians to proselytise to the whole world (Gospel Matthew 28: 19), while the Quran instructs the believers to “… fight them until there is no more fitnah (disbelief) and all believe in Allah alone throughout the world” (Qu’ran 8:39). The vast majority of Christian churches and Islamic communities desire to grow and shape the world around them according to their understanding of God’s will (Dowd 2014).

According to Davis (1986), religion claims to provide answers to questions of ultimate meaning, questions about the nature and destiny of human beings. However, unlike comprehensive ideologies (such as Marxism), it seeks its answers in a transcendent realm, appealing to some form of superhuman power. Religions hold that human life and human society are founded upon trans-empirical truths (Davis 1986).
Therefore, Christianity and Islam seek to influence the culture, the norms and the values that guide behaviour and determine the boundaries between acceptable and unacceptable conduct. According to Dowd (2014), religious leaders have two primary objectives; to grow their religious communities as large as they can and to influence the norms and values of the wider society. They often seek to achieve these objectives through proselytization and the establishment of more worship centres which often result in clashes of interests between Christians and Muslims.

Perhaps, the above description fits well with the setting in the South-west where religious tolerance is particularly a hallmark. In contrast, in the Muslim north of Nigeria, localities are religiously homogeneous and highly segregated; therefore, the Islamic religious leaders tend to be less openly supportive of religious tolerance. This is in consonant with Dowd’s standpoint that leaders of a long-dominant religious majority are more likely to seek their goals (i.e., growth and influence) by securing advantages for their own religious groups at the expense of others and, in so doing, encourage social conflict. Conversely, in highly diverse settings, the preferred course of action for religious leaders is to promote religious tolerance and embrace neutrality in religious affairs, in that, to do. This is the case in the South-west. According to Fafunwa (1974), “Christianity and Islam changed the face of religion in Yoruba land”. The vast majority of Yoruba (90%) are either Christian or Muslim (most of them practicing orthodox Islam, known as Sunni). Both religions have impacted and are still impacting the culture and tradition of Yoruba. The South-West and until recently the North-Central are regions where identity transcends religious affiliation and is mainly shaped by regional culture and values, and where inter-marriages are common place (Hoffmann, 2014). Muhammad Sa’ad Abubakar, the Sultan of Sokoto (cited in Okunola 2009) lends credence to the religious tolerance that is characteristic of the two religions, in this statement:

“In pointing out that conflict between Muslims and Christians was, until recently, a rare occurrence, it is worth in Nigeria; further families especially in the southwest and the north central zones, harbour members of different religious affiliations who had co-existed and continue to co-exist in peace and harmony” [n.p.]

In the South-west Christianity and Islam have been proven to work hard to ensure religious tolerance. Interestingly, Muslim religious leaders in the region have “encouraged a separation of church or mosque and state and a religious pluralism.” Given the religious reality in the South-west, Dowd concludes that although religious diversity is associated with interreligious conflict, on a national level; however, religious observance has a positive association with social tolerance in religiously diverse settings in a sub-national level. Therefore, it may be illogical to conclude that religious diversity leads to social conflict (Dowd 2014).

In summary, it is evident that religion plays a critical and influential role in every aspect of life in Nigeria. Religion has proven to be a compelling force in the political dispensations from colonialism to the present days. According to Falola, 1990; Kukah, 1994; International IDEA, 2000; Kenny, 2006; Suberu, 2009 (cited in Danjibo, 2009.), a historical account of the Nigerian state is inconclusive without reference to religion. Various efforts at fostering interreligious dialogues to proffer solutions for a sustainable peaceful religious co-existence between Christians and Muslims have been documented. However, limited literature has been written about interfaith marriages. Of the existing literature, a very few have delved on the issue of religious identity in interfaith marriages.

**Theoretical basis of research**

According to Oppong (2013), there is limited social psychological literature explaining religious identity formation in Nigeria. However, few studies on the subject, generally, have demonstrated that religion is correlated with identity formation (Arweck, & Nesbitt, 2010). Religious identity is a peculiar form of identity which stems from an individual’s awareness of belonging to a religious group. It is reinforced when the consciousness of religious group membership is strongly linked with one’s perception of self-concept. Arweck, & Nesbitt, (2010) argue that religious identity is different from religiosity or religiousness. They assert that although the three terms share a common link, religiousness and religiosity refer to both the value of religious group membership as well as participation in religious events, like attending church services (Arweck, and Nesbitt 2010). On the other hand, religious identity refers specifically to religious group membership regardless of religious activity or participation. However, the three terms are interrelated, since religious commitment and purposefulness are linked to identity formation.

Consequently, members of a given religious group share common ideologies and they view the world from an identical religious perspective. They align every opportunity to socialize with individuals from out-groups and set basic principles to live out, according to their religious context. Thus, these principles are fundamental in shaping an individual’s identity (King, & Boyatzis, 2004). Over the past two
decades, studies on identity have overlooked the role of religion in forging identities for individuals and groups (Peek 2005). Researches on identity formation have mainly focused on various dimensions of identity such as gender, race, ethnicity, nationality, sexuality, age, physical and mental ability and class but have largely discounted the role of religion (Peek 2005).

**Social Identity Theory (SIT)**

Social Identity Theory was propounded by Tajfel and Turner in 1979. Both sought to study the dynamics of intergroup interactions, that is, the processes of relationships within groups and between groups (Akba 2010). According to Akba, the main thrust of the concept of SIT centres on “that part of an individual’s self-concept which comes from his knowledge of his membership of a social group (or groups) together with the value and emotional significance attached to that membership” (Tajfel, 1978). In other words, the social identity process posits that members of a group fuse their group membership with their self-concepts and create a global perception of themselves and others from the view of their membership in specific groups (Tajfel & Turner, 1979).

In relation to the topic of this thesis, the question of how Muslims and Christians perceive their in-group and out-group can be explored through SIT. Specifically, under the framework of SIT, religious in-group bias and out-group discriminatory perception can be explored. Considering the main assumptions of SIT, it is plausible to claim that, relative to the apparent animosity between the two religions, as evidenced by the religious hostilities that have shaken the country; in-group bias and out-group prejudice are a well-established phenomenon, in the religious landscape of Nigeria. Given the strong dogmatic religious restrictions on interfaith marriages, in Christianity and Islam, it is apparent that only religious tolerance would account for the widespread interfaith marriages in the South-west regions of Nigeria.

**Research Questions**

The research will attempt to answer the following question:

1. Will there be a relationship between religious identity and attitude to interfaith marriage?
2. Is there a difference in attitudes to interfaith marriages between the Muslim and Christian participants?
3. Will the level of education attained play a role in influencing attitude to interfaith marriages?

**Research Hypotheses**

The following hypotheses will be tested in the research:

1. There is a significant relationship between religious identity and attitude to interfaith marriages.
2. The Muslim participants will be more influenced by their attitude to interfaith marriage than the Christians participants.
3. Participants with lower levels of education will be significantly influenced by the attitude to interfaith marriages than participants with higher level of education.

**METHOD**

**Research Setting**

The survey research was conducted using via personal interviews with individuals aged 20 – 62 years, who have been residents in Lagos for not less than 6 months. Both male and female individuals were contacted personally. Data collection was carried out in Ikorotun, Idimu, Egbeda, Agege, Abule Egba and Otta areas of Lagos state.

**Participants**

Participants of this study comprised 200 individuals (99 males and 101 females) who were residing in Ikorotun, Idimu, Egbeda, Agege, Abule Egba and Otta of areas Lagos state, at the time of this study. The sample was drawn from the population of Christian/Muslim communities in the study locations. The participants had either retained their faith or adopted the faith of their spouses. The range of the participants’ age was from 20 to 62 years with a mean age of 35.68 years (SD = 8.361). The vast majority (94%) fell between the ages of 25 - 54 years. In terms of religious affiliation, over half of the participants (59%) indicated to be Christians, while less than half (41%) were Muslims. On education, about half of the sample (48%) attained secondary education, while the remaining half got either a polytechnic education (27%) or a university education (24%). For occupation, slightly over one third of the respondents were either self-employed (35%) or traders (34%). Others were civil servants (20%) or corporate executive (10%).
Resign Design
The design used for this study was a cross-sectional design. The study involved obtaining information about religious identity in interfaith marriages in Lagos state. The study variables in this study were: Independent Variable: Religious identity and Dependent Variable: Interfaith marriage.

Sampling Technique
The study employed a purposive sampling technique in choosing the participants, via the snowball procedure, with no form of randomization involved. Qualified participants were initially identified and interviewed, after which, they were asked to suggest other participants that matched our target respondents for this research.

Instruments
The researchers adapted, modified and developed the questionnaire, drawing most of the questions from the Great Britain ISSP 2008 – Religion III Questionnaire which was designed by the International Social Survey Programme (ISSP). The questionnaire was divided into five main sections. The first section was on participants’ demographic information which mainly had questions on age, gender, and religion; level of education, marital status and occupation.

The second section contained questions on religiousness to elicit how ardent respondents were to religion. Religiousness scale containing fourteen items was formulated to measure participants’ religious attitudes otherwise defined in this study as Religiousness. The scale was adapted from the Great Britain ISSP 2008 – Religion III Questionnaire and modified to suit the Nigerian religious context. Some of the items in this scale were “Religion is important in a person’s life”, “Religion is a bridge between man and God” “Both religions believe in the same God”. Participants answered the fourteen items using the Likert type scale of 1 = strongly disagree and 5 = strongly agree. At analysis stage, the scale was subjected to an internal consistency reliability test, using Cronbach’s Alpha which gave an alpha coefficient of 0.73. The last four items on the scale were eliminated to yield an alpha coefficient of 0.85.

The third section had questions on Religious Identity to gauge respondents’ religious attachment. A religious identity scale was used to measure participants’ level of acceptance of a person from a different religion to – be their friend, their boss, their community leader, marry their relative. In addition, participants’ willingness to attend a religious service in another religion was sought using this scale. The scale was also adapted from Great Britain ISSP 2008 – Religion III Questionnaire and modified for the purpose of this study. Respondents were asked to indicate their likelihood of accepting “a person from a different religion to be their friend”, “a person from a different religion to be their boss” and “a person from a different religion to marry a relative of theirs”. Participants answered the 6 items using a scale of 1 = definitely not accept and 5 = definitely accept. During analysis, the scale was subjected to an internal consistency reliability test, using Cronbach’s Alpha which yielded an alpha coefficient of 0.73.

The fourth section covered questions on religious in-group favouritism, as it affects respondents. A scale of eight items was used to measure in-group favouritism among participants. The scale was culled from the Great Britain ISSP 2008 – Religion III Questionnaire and modified for the purpose of this study. Respondents were asked to indicate how strongly they agree or disagree with the items using a Likert scale of 1= strongly disagree and 5= strongly agree. Some of the items were “My religious group shapes my personal values and moral standards”, “I always abide by the principles of my religious group” and “I always give consideration to members of my religious group before any other religious group”. At analysis stage the scale also subjected to an internal consistency test, using the Cronbach’s alpha which gave an alpha coefficient of 0.72.

The last section covered Attitude to Interfaith Marriage. This scale was developed to gauge respondents’ approach to interfaith marriages. The scale was comprised of sixteen items and each measured participants’ attitude to interfaith marriage. Some of the items in the scale were “single faith marriages are better than interfaith marriages”; “religious differences are difficult to manage in interfaith marriages” and “there is more inner peace and happiness in single faith marriages”. The sixteen questions were answered using a Likert type scale of five-point from 1 = Strongly Disagree to 5 = Strongly Agree. This scale was formulated by the researcher and tested for suitability in the Nigerian context prior to usage. Its internal consistency reliability was determined using the Cronbach’s Alpha test which indicated an alpha of 0.72.
**Procedure**

For this study, the researchers recruited two assistants who were responsible for placing and retrieving the questionnaires from respondents. They were First trained by the researchers in the comprehension of the questionnaire and the art of respondent approach technique. The researchers ensured that the research assistants understood and followed the technical as well as ethical research procedures. The training period lasted two days prior to commencement of fieldwork.

A set of written instructions was given to and reviewed by the research assistants. It was important to ensure that the research assistants were satisfied with the completed questionnaire before retrieval. Where a questionnaire was not properly completed due to incomprehension of the questions, the research assistants would clarify the items so that the respondent would be able to give his or her answer before retrieving the questionnaire. Given the relative ease of comprehension of the items in the instrument, respondents were able to complete and return the questionnaires. Thus, all the questionnaires were returned for analysis. No form of inducement were given to participants.

**RESULTS**

Data collected are presented, analysed and interpreted in this section. The descriptive statistics of respondents on religious attitude, religious identity, in-group-favouritism and attitude to interfaith marriages are tabulated below.

**Table 1**

Mean and Standard Deviation of All the Variables

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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Religiousness</td>
<td>99</td>
<td>58.55</td>
<td>6.09</td>
<td>101</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Religious identity</td>
<td>90</td>
<td>24.89</td>
<td>3.44</td>
<td>101</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Religious in-group-favouritism</td>
<td>90</td>
<td>25.48</td>
<td>5.26</td>
<td>101</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attitude to interfaith marriage</td>
<td>90</td>
<td>47.94</td>
<td>7.81</td>
<td>101</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1 above reveals the mean and standard deviation of the participants on various variables of the study. By comparing male and female respectively; 90 male and 101 female participated in the study, male participants had a lower mean score in religiousness (M=58.55, SD =6.09) than the female participants who recorded mean score (M= 59.40, SD =5.81). On religious identity, male participants recorded also a lower mean score (M =24.89, SD =3.44) than female participants who recorded a score of (M=25.72, SD=3.42). Also on in-group-favouritism, male participants still had a lower mean score of (M =25.48, SD=5.26) than the female participants who had a mean score of (M=26.03,SD =4.92). However, on attitude to interfaith marriages, Male participants had a higher mean score (M=47.94, SD= 7.81) while the female participants had a lower mean score (M=46.71, SD=6.75).

Testing of Hypotheses

**Hypothesis 1:** There is a significant relationship between religious identity and attitude to interfaith marriages.

**Table 2**

Correlation of Measures

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variables</th>
<th>( \bar{x} )</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Religiousness</td>
<td>44.39</td>
<td>5.03</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Religious identity</td>
<td>25.31</td>
<td>3.45</td>
<td>.451**</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Attitude to interfaith marriage</td>
<td>47.32</td>
<td>7.31</td>
<td>-.142*</td>
<td>-.149*</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Religious in-group-Favouritism</td>
<td>25.76</td>
<td>5.09</td>
<td>.003</td>
<td>-.098*</td>
<td>.272*</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Significant at .05, **Significant at .001

Table 2 above shows the summary of Pearson Correlation analysis of the variables measured in this study. Results above show that religious identity has a weak negative correlation with attitude to interfaith marriage (r = -.149*, at p<0.05). In-group-favouritism correlated extremely weakly with religiousness (r=003), and has a negative correlation with religious identity (r=-.098 at p<0.05). Also, attitude to interfaith
marriage correlated negatively with religiousness (r=-.142* at p<0.05), and has a positive correction with in-group-favouritism (r= .272* at p<0.05).

In order to determine the contribution of the predictor variable on the variance observed in attitude to interfaith marriages, regression analysis was computed. The result is presented in Table 3.

Table 3
Relative Contribution of the Independent Variable to the Prediction of interfaith marriage

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variables</th>
<th>B</th>
<th>Beta</th>
<th>T</th>
<th>Sig</th>
<th>R</th>
<th>R²</th>
<th>Fcal</th>
<th>Pv</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Religious identity</td>
<td>-.317</td>
<td>-.149</td>
<td>-2.127</td>
<td>0.02</td>
<td>-1.149</td>
<td>.022</td>
<td>4.524</td>
<td>0.05</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Dependent variable: interfaith marriage

The results in Table 3 show that religious identity independently contributed about 14.9% to the observed variance in attitude to interfaith marriage (Beta = -.149, t =2.127, at *p<0.05). This implies that religious identity and attitude to interfaith marriages are negatively correlated. This result indicates support for hypothesis 1.

Hypothesis 2: The Muslim participants will be more influence by their attitude to interfaith marriages than the Christians participants.

Table 4
Independent t-test Comparison of attitude to interfaith marriages by religious affiliation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Interfaith marriages</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>µ</th>
<th>σ</th>
<th>Tcal</th>
<th>df</th>
<th>Sig</th>
<th>Pv</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Christian</td>
<td>118</td>
<td>46.33</td>
<td>7.03</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Muslim</td>
<td>82</td>
<td>48.75</td>
<td>7.50</td>
<td>-2.334</td>
<td>198</td>
<td>0.05*</td>
<td>Sig</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Result is significant at *p<0.05

Table 4 above reveals that there is significant difference between Christian and Muslim participants on attitude to interfaith marriages. From the above table, the independent t-test comparison yielded t-value of (t= -2.334 at *p<0.05) level of significance revealed that the hypothesis under reference is accepted. Thus, Muslim participants are more influenced by attitude to interfaith marriages than the Christian participants.

Hypothesis 3: Participants with lower level of education will be more influenced in attitude to interfaith marriages than participants with higher level of education.

Table 5
Independent T-Test Comparison of Attitude to Interfaith Marriages by Level of Educational Qualification

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Interfaith marriages</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>µ</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>Tcal</th>
<th>df</th>
<th>Sig.</th>
<th>Pv</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Educational qualification</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lower</td>
<td>95</td>
<td>48.42</td>
<td>6.84</td>
<td>2.033</td>
<td>198</td>
<td>0.05*</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Higher</td>
<td>105</td>
<td>46.33</td>
<td>7.60</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Result is significant at *p<0.05

Table 5 above reveals that there is significant difference between participants with lower educational qualification (primary/secondary education) and participants with higher level of educational qualification (tertiary education), on attitude to interfaith marriages. From the above table the independent t-test comparison of mean scores of attitude to interfaith marriages shows a significant t-value (t = 2.033, *p< 0.05). Hence, the hypothesis which states that participants with lower level of education (primary/secondary education) will be more influenced in interfaith marriages than participants with higher level of education is accepted.

DISCUSSION
This study was conducted on religious identity in interfaith marriages in Lagos State. Three hypotheses were tested and these hypotheses are the basis of the discussion in this chapter. The main thrust of the study was to know if there is a significant relationship between religious identity and attitude to interfaith marriages. The result revealed a weak negative association between religious identity and attitude to interfaith marriage.
This means that as religious identity increases, there is no indication of a discernible attitude toward interfaith marriage. In other words, a person’s religious identity does not indicate whether he is favourably or unfavourably disposed towards interfaith marriage. While more analysis is necessary, there is evidence to suggest that the association between greater religious diversity and tolerance, which encompasses interfaith marriage, largely holds. This finding is in consonant with an assertion made by Dowd (2014), that “there is a more positive association between religious group engagement and respect for basic freedoms in religiously diverse states (states where neither Christians nor Muslims represent more than 60 percent of the population) than in more religiously homogeneous states”.

As Dowd (2014) posits, religious observance has a positive association with social tolerance in religiously diverse settings within the South-West in Nigeria. Awoniyi (2013) argues that religious tolerance does not mean doctrinal compromise; and that religious openness is often the plea of the powerless, which is even difficult to explain by those in position of power. However, in the South-West, which includes Lagos State, religious leaders seek to promote the growth and influence of their religious community by promoting tolerance and state neutrality in religious affairs (Dowd 2014). The finding is also in support of Allport’s extrinsic religiousness theory which considers religion as serving other more ultimate ends rather than central religious beliefs per se. Thus, individuals described by extrinsic religiousness use their religion to fulfil more basic needs such as social relations or personal comfort.

The second hypothesis sought to elicit if Muslim participants will be more influenced by their attitude to interfaith marriages than the Christians participants. The finding revealed that Muslim participants were more influenced by their attitude to interfaith marriages than the Christian participants. The finding is also in line with religious identity theory which is a peculiar form of identity which stems from an individual’s awareness of belonging to a religious group. It is reinforced when the consciousness of religious group membership is strongly linked with one’s perception of self-concept. Arweck, & Nesbitt, (2010) argue that religious identity is different from religiosity or religiousness. They assert that although the three terms share a common link, religiousness and religiosity refer to both the value of religious group membership as well as participation in religious events, like attending church services (Arweck, and Nesbitt 2010). On the other hand, religious identity refers specifically to religious group membership regardless of religious activity or participation. Furthermore, the finding aligns with classical Islamic theory, which holds that the law is the revealed will of God. Such Muslim law strictly frown at marrying an infidel or unbeliever. There is a strict warning about Muslim women not being permitted to marry non-Muslims under any circumstances (Leeman 2009). Although, restrictions on interfaith marriage are equally found the Christian doctrines, however, Christians in South-West are found to be more tolerant than the Muslims as revealed by the study.

The third hypothesis revealed that participants with lower level of education (primary/secondary education) were less predisposed towards interfaith marriages than participants with higher level of education (tertiary education). Most people with less educational qualification are bias with regards to interfaith marriages to due to ignorance that makes them to stand firm to their believe without doubting or critical reasoning. This is not surprising as notable politically figures, mostly in Lagos State, are known to contracted interfaith marriages.

**Implication of the Study**

Findings from this study have demonstrated the association of religious identity and educational qualification to interfaith marriages in Lagos State. Religious adherents in Lagos State appear to be liberal in terms of their allegiance to religious creeds or their level of religious identification vis-a-vis interfaith marriages. However, their educational status emerges as a factor that plays a central role in interfaith marriages as demonstrated by the study.

The implication of this study is that Christian and Islamic religious leaders would do well in encouraging interfaith marriages in their religious communities, as part of their strategies to promote and entrench religious tolerance. Such act will further encourage peaceful co-existence of Muslim and Christian. Also, a higher level of education appears to play a role in the believers’ attitude, particularly Muslims, towards interfaith marriage. Therefore, formal education should be encouraged, since education will promote liberalism towards religious matters, including interfaith marriages.

**Recommendations**

The study investigated religious identity in interfaith marriages in Lagos state. The following recommendations can be proffered:
1. The Lagos State Government, and by extension the Federal Government, should intensively promote and enforce basic education, with a view to reducing the rate of illiteracy, since illiteracy breeds ignorance which fuels stereotype, prejudice and discrimination.
2. Religious leaders of the two world religions in Nigeria should consistently preach against religious fanaticism in the form of discrimination, prejudice and stereotype against ethnicity and religious affiliation.
3. The Lagos State model of religious tolerance as exemplified by religious leaders in Lagos State should be emulated and replicated throughout Nigeria, so as to trigger the process of peaceful co-existence between Christians and Muslims, across the Nation.

Suggestions for Further Studies
While this paper does provide some basis to suggest that the relationship between religious identity and interfaith marriage is quite insignificant in Lagos State, it is admittedly very limited. Further research is needed to understand how religious identity affects religious-based attitude to interfaith marriage. First, future research should include more locations in the State. Besides including more locations that vary in terms of their religious diversity, it would do well to include several settings that share similar levels of religious diversity. In this way, future research can more accurately distinguish the relationship between religious identity and interfaith marriage that is unique to any one location. Second, more research is needed to discern the relationship between the changing religious demography and preaching on tolerance. Finally, further research should consider many other variables that may affect interfaith marriage and incorporate them in their study. It is also important to have a large enough sample size so as to enhance the generalizability of the study.

Reference


