

Signage Communication: An Assessment of the Awareness and Practices of Nigeria's Motoring Public

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ABSTRACT

It is a daily fact that accidents on our roads claim a lot of lives and leave many maimed and wounded sometimes for life. Traffic signs are mounted on our roads and along certain streets aimed at giving direction and instructions to road users including drivers, commuters and pedestrians in order to avoid accidents. The study is on Signage Communication as it investigated Awareness and practices of Nigeria's motoring public: A study of Road Users in Offa, Kwara State Nigeria. This paper is underpinned by Symbolic Interactionism Theory as it relates to the communication of symbols, leaning on semiotics. It adopted Qualitative Research Methodological Approach with In-Depth Interview (IDI) and Focus Group Discussion (FGD) as means of data collection from the sample of 16 respondents of 4 individuals per each In-Depth Interview (IDI) and Focus group Discussion (FGD) constituents respectively. Data from the In-depth Interviews (IDI) and the Focus Group Discussions (FGD) were transcribed, interpreted and analyzed in relation to the research questions as their selection process was determined by the idea of theoretical saturation, having considered the purpose of the study and access to the respondents at their habitats. The descriptive thematic was applied for the study. It is evident from the findings that there are no functional road signs and visible traffic symbols in Offa metropolis as claimed by the majority of the road users who could identify road bumps as the only prohibitive measure to limit the speed of motorists. Signage Communication can be utilized by the government and her traffic laws agencies and highway regulatory bodies to create awareness for the traffic codes and rules in order to ensure traffic safety. With the increase in road accidents that usually

lead to death of road users, the Government and her traffic management bodies should provide road traffic lights, road signs and markings in all the township roads and the inter-state highways. The government and her relevant agencies should formulate strict road safety policies that will make the provision of traffic lights and road signs compulsory on the highways of all the towns and cities in Nigeria. There is need for stricter enforcement of traffic laws and regulations to ensure compliance and adherence to all traffic rules and codes by the road users, especially the motorists. The Federal Ministry of Education should include road safety modules in school curriculum as many of our young adults now own and drive cars. Cognitive design features should also be taken into consideration while designing traffic road signs and symbols. User-friendly traffic signs which can transmit clear messages and about road conditions ahead to the road users are important.

Keywords: Signage. Motoring. Public. Traffic. Highway.

I. INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

The capacity to respond to the safety of all the road users is an important component of efforts to prevent road traffic accidents and injuries. Road Traffic crashes should not be accepted as inevitable since they can be predictable and prevented from happening if all the stakeholders play their roles. The deaths and suffering on our roads can be avoided if the traffic road signs are available and the road users too are guided to strictly obey them. (WHO, 2009; Akpan, Senam and Elijah 2015).

The Federal and State Governments are constitutionally bounded to provide infrastructures

which include good roads and traffic facilities that will ensure safety. The Government agencies and corporations such as The Traffic unit of the Nigeria Police and the Federal Road Safety Corps and the National Council of Transport are all duty-bound to enforce traffic laws and regulations on the highways.

The road users too should accept road safety rules, regulation and policies by adhering to the traffic rules and obeying road signs. Road signs can be described as signs that are erected by the side or mounted above the road to give information or instructions to road users.

Ebrahim and Nikraz (2012) noted that human error is the major cause of road traffic injuries accounting for 64.95 % of crashes in developing countries. The scholars observed that in appropriate or excessive vehicular speed is a major single cause of road traffic injuries worldwide resulting in over 40 % of fatal collisions. Other causes include rash driving, mobile telephone use, deliberate violation of rules, inability to understand or obey road signs, driving or walking under the influence of drugs or alcohol, and avoidance of safety gears such as seat belts and helmets. Other causes contributing to road traffic injuries include the environment, poor road conditions, and poorly maintained vehicles (Ebrahim and Nikraz, 2012).

The Federal Road Safety Commission, Nigeria however identified eight categories of road users in Nigeria. These are the motorists, the pedestrians, the cyclists, the motorcyclists, the children, the animals, the hawkers and the traders. The motorist refers to the class of road user enclosed in motor vehicles. The pedestrian is a person who is walking on the road, especially in an area also used by motorists. A pedestrian is a person travelling on foot, whether walking or running. In some communities, those travelling using tiny wheels such as roller skates, skateboards, and scooters, as well as wheelchair users are also included as pedestrians. The term usually refers to someone walking on a road or pavement. (Akpan, Senam and Elijah 2015).

Safety signs, whenever they are erected or mounted beside or above the road help to provide good communication to road users. Their absence or failure to effectively convey warning information can lead to injury or death on our highways. This is because if they are not available on the roads the road users rely on using discretion or taking risks that can be fatal. And where the road signs are available, but are not readily identifiable or being understood by the road users, their communicative value becomes dysfunctional.

Statement of the research problem

There is a general perception that motorists in Offa may not either have satisfactory level of understanding of traffic signs or they perhaps, ignore the road signs whenever they are driving on the township roads. This is thought to be a major cause of road accidents. This research is undertaken to assess the road users' awareness, traffic behavior and observance of road signs in Offa, the second largest town in Kwara State, Nigeria.

Objectives of the study

1. To ascertain the level of awareness about road signs by the road users in Offa
2. To determine whether or not there are road signs in Offa
3. To determine road traffic behaviour of road users in Offa
4. To know level of observance of road signs by motorists and other road users in Offa

Research questions

The study was guided by the following research questions;

1. What is the level of awareness about road signs by the road users in Offa metropolis?
2. What are the road signs and traffic signals on Offa township roads?
3. What is the road traffic behaviour of road users in Offa metropolis?
4. To what extent do the road users observe road traffic signs on Offa township roads?

Scope of the study

The study is limited to road signs in Offa, Kwara State, Nigeria. The road users in Offa metropolis and the traffic officers who enforce traffic laws and rules are the focal groups in the research.

Conceptual review

Signage is a general term for any sort of graphic display intended to convey information to an audience. There are many different types of signage and it has existed for thousands of years. Most modern signage relies on words often in tandem with images, but a great deal of historical signage used only image (McGuigan; 2014) in (Ojiakor, Okika, Emmanuel and Offie; 2015).

Road signs or traffic signs dot the road ways, both minor and major roads of our country. Some signs are informational and directional showing you the way. Or what the conditions of the roads are. These signs provide us with specific instructions on how we should drive through a specific area. Some of these signs are temporary

and provided to alert road users of dangers that may not normally be present (Champion; 2012) in (Ojiakor, Okika, Emmanuel and Offie; 2015).

Road signs are created as safety tools to purposely guide the road users as these signs communicate instructional messages which must be strictly followed for safe driving. Drivers and other road users should be able to identify these signs and understand their meanings and the messages inherent in them. Road traffic officers are therefore designated to enforce adherence and compliance to traffic rules and regulation and obeying instructional guide provided by the road signs are part of the traffic safety rules.

Road signs, signals and markings

A thorough knowledge of traffic signs, signals, road and pavement marking is compulsory for all drivers. Road signs and markings together with signals by authorized traffic officers are to ensure a smooth and safe traffic flow (Nigeria Highway Code; 2021). All the road users are expected to be able to recognize all the road signs immediately they see any one of these signs, signals and markings and they must obey them without hesitation.

The traffic signs tell the road users, especially the drivers about traffic regulations, special hazards and other road conditions, constructions areas and speed limits among others. Road users should not only be familiar with each of the signs, they should recognize the special shapes and colours (Nigeria Highway Code; 2021). Their shapes as captured by the Nigeria Highway Code are;

1. Regulatory signs - these are mostly circular in shape and are of two types. Those with red & yellow circles are prohibitive signs. For example, the "STOP" sign is a prohibitive sign. It means come to a complete stop before entering. Proceed when it is safe to do so. Those with blue circles but not red border are mandatory signs. They give positive instructions and are regulatory signs.

2. Informative signs - they are usually rectangular in shape and provide guidance information.

3. Warning signs - these are usually triangular in shape with red perimeter. The only warning sign with inverted triangle means "YIELD" or "GIVE WAY".

The first National Traffic law was the 1920 Road Traffic Ordinance of Lagos Colony and Southern Protectorate of Nigeria that was applied for the operations of all motor vehicles until the country was demarcated into regions (northern, Western and Eastern). Each of the three regions

was empowered to promulgate its traffic regulations (FRSC; 2008).

The National Road Traffic Act was enacted on January 1, 1949 during the colonial era. The Act was the Act Chapter 548 in the Road Traffic Act of the Laws of the Federation of Nigeria 1990. Later, it was this Act 1949 that gave birth to the Vehicle Inspection Office (VIO) (FRSC; 2008).

FRSC (2008) reported that The Federal Government of Nigeria during the administration of President Ibrahim Babangida, an Army General then on February 1988 created the Federal Road Safety Commission (FRSC) through Decree No 45 of 1988 as amended by Decree 35 of 1992 referred to as FRSC Act cap 141 Laws of the Federation of Nigeria (LFN). It was passed by the National Assembly as the Federal Road Safety Commission (Establishment) Act 2007. The Commission has the following functions as spelled out in commission handbook;

1. Making the highway safe for motorists and other road users.
2. Recommending works and devices designed to eliminate or minimize accidents on the highways and advising the Federal and State Governments including the Federal Capital Territory administration and relevant government agencies on the facilities where such works and devices are required.
3. Educating motorists and members of the public on the importance of discipline on the highways.

The responsibilities of the Federal Road Safety Commission as spelled out in the Act are;

1. Preventing or minimizing accidents on the highway.
2. Clearing obstructions on any part of the highways.
3. Designing and producing driver's license to be used by various categories of vehicle operators.
4. Determining from time to time, the requirements to be satisfied by an applicant for a driver's license.
5. Designing and producing vehicle number plates.
6. Standardization of highway traffic codes.
7. Giving prompt attention and care to accident victims.
8. Conducting research into causes of accidents and methods of preventing them.
9. Determining and enforcing speed limits for all categories of roads and vehicles and controlling the use of speed limiting devices.

10. Cooperating with bodies, agencies or groups in road safety activities or in prevention of accidents on the highways.
11. Regulating the use of sirens etc.

Road signs, Non Compliance and alarming data of crashes

Most avoidable road crashes are sometimes occasioned by not only lack of adequate knowledge of road signs, but failure of motorists to adhere strictly to the few existing road signs on our highways. Its ubiquity on our roads is desirable at this point in time when crashes on our roads is alarmingly high, motorists and pedestrians alike need these signs to achieve their ultimate aim of getting to their various destinations safely (Enimola; 2022).

A renewed consciousness on compliance with road signs will to a great extent reduce carnage on our highways. The road signs arm road users with adequate knowledge of the road they are plying. When these road signs are complied with, people will always reach their destination safely. Traffic Management experts have attributed most accidents on Nigerian roads to lack of proper use, abuse and inadequacy of traffic signs, information obtained from the Federal Road Safety Corps (FRSC) indicated that defacing, damaging and removing of road signs across the country is alarming and that there was an urgent need for relevant authorities to enact laws that would checkmate this ugly trend (Enimola; 2022).

Oyesiku, a professor of Transport Systems Planning wrote that lack of road signs in some major locations constitutes hazard to city dwellers, especially at night, as well as traffic jams. In some locations where road signs exist, they are not conspicuously placed for motorists and other road users to see, this has added to traffic challenges in a city like Lagos, especially for visitors (Enimola; 2022).

Enimola (2022) captured the challenges and certain abnormalities on our highways as he sampled opinions of some road users. One of the respondents, Femi Olaitan, a volunteer traffic controller said the situation shows insensitivity, as vehicles have sometimes rammed into one another as a result. He observed that traffic officers, including the police, see this as not favourable to motorists, who unknowingly use roads designated one-way when there are no signs showing so. And even when there are signs, they are usually tucked away in a corner, where they are difficult to see or read.

He however noted that with road signs and functional traffic lights in their right places,

logjams often experienced on major roads would lessen. "Road maintenance goes beyond just digging up of roads and culverts. Government should do something about road signs too. They should be reflective, so that road users can see them during the day and at night. The way our roads are constructed without the right signs shows our state of mind as a people", he added.

Akpan Augustine, an interstate driver who also spoke to Enimola, lamented that absence of road signs has contributed to road mishaps on our highways. According to him, "Signs tell drivers where there are sharp corners, bumps, schools and hospital, so that they could slow down". He again blamed the traffic officers who usually lie in wait for motorists to take the wrong road and then suddenly jump out of their hiding to make an arrest.

According to him, "With bold, reflective and clearly defined road signs, the regular traffic jams often experienced on our roads, especially at the junctions, as well as traffic offences often committed by motorists would be reduced to its barest minimum, as motorists would not need to take the wrong routes or lanes", he submitted.

"The current situation enables people to behave anyhow, as there are no clear signs to tell that a road is one-way, blocked junctions ahead, detour and uneven, among others, Akpan" noted. Ade Oba, an Uber driver in Lagos who also spoke to Enimola noted that, "Lack of signs... remains a challenge to motorists and commuters, especially those not familiar with them. This has made many to be arrested for breaking traffic laws, which ordinarily would have been avoided", he noted.

MrFataiAlagbole, a Taxi driver said, "Road signs prevent confusion as they tell drivers the appropriate speed to drive on a particular road or when they are approaching a merge, they help reduce collisions at intersections, ensure pedestrians' safety as well as help drivers communicate with other drivers in a non-verbal way that keeps all of us safe. They are a must on our roads", he explained.

Adegbite Alfred in his own view asked rhetorically, "What about the traffic signs or lights?" He pointed out that most often drivers rarely know that they must not cross the 'STOP' lines, that they must always stay behind the 'STOP' line and that it is only when have stepped on the stop line before the amber light that they are allowed to move on. "More positive and right attitude is desirable at this point in time", he said.

In 2018, the Federal Government commissioned the signage production plant of the Federal Road Safety Commission (FRSC) in

Abuja, signifying the federal government's commitment to provide safe roads and prevent road crashes which has always lead to destruction of lives and properties as well as decrease in the nation's Gross Domestic Product, GDP.

The goal was to eradicate the issues of inadequate, misleading and improper placement of road signs which lead to rise in road traffic crashes and violation hence the presence of the plant will help to produce much more road signs sufficient for the highways to aid traffic control and guide the road users.

Emiola (2022) wrote that at the commissioning of the plant, FRSC's Corps Marshal, DrBoboyeOyeyemi, said the corps carried out a research on Nigerian highway signage and signals in 2014 and found that the nation's highway were characterized by improper signs and signals confusing motorists than aiding them, vandalized and defaced signs and signals amongst others, hence the need to produce more signage and signals to aid the road users.

The plant according to (Oyeyemi; 2018) cited in (Enimola; 2022) has the capacity to meet the nation's road needs. The Corps Marshal said the plant has been able to produce 6,000 various road signs which are already installed on some segments of the federal highways and hopes to get them across the entire nation's highways soon. The nation awaits the full impact of the plant, especially in educating motorists on Nigeria's directionless highways (Enimola; 2022).

Empirical review

Adedeji, Abejide and Hassan (2016) published a study that assessed the Effectiveness of Communication Tools in Road Transportation with a focus on the North Eastern region of Nigeria. The researchers raised these three questions in their study; Do these tools (especially, road marking) exist on roads where accidents are frequent? Are these tools effective? What is the understanding of the road users of these tools?

They however reported in their findings that the drivers have a good knowledge of these communication tools but on average of 92%, according to them, the road marks sampled are not available on the roads and have in one way or the other contributed to the fatality rate experienced. They therefore recommended the need for the stakeholders' interventions which include regular funding and schedule for routine maintenance with more focus on road marking.

Hassan, Sani, Anwar, Mamman, Shehu and Abdulrahman (2022) assessed the compliance level of road users to road traffic signs in Kaduna

Metropolis, Nigeria. Their respondents who were surveyed include private and commercial drivers, pedestrians and cart pushers. They reported in their analysis that there is low level of awareness of the traffic signs by road users (43%), According to the researchers, age, education and years of driving experience played prominent roles in drivers' understanding of signs.

Makinde and Opeyemi (2012) investigated the Understanding of Traffic Signs by Drivers in the city of Akure with respect to their personal characteristics such as age, marital status, gender, and educational background. In their analysis, it was stated that there is low understanding of traffic signs by drivers. The average percentage of drivers who correctly understood the warning and prohibitory signs is 58%. It was also reported that age, education and years of driving experience played prominent roles in drivers' understanding of signs while marital status and gender had no effect.

Theoretical Framework

Symbolic Interactionism Theory

Symbolic Interactionism is a theoretical framework to understanding human communication. The theory explains how people attach meaning to words, signs, gestures and symbols. It is also an approach in sociology that describes how societies are created and maintained through the repeated actions of individuals. People in every society understand their social worlds through communication which is the exchange of meaning through language and symbols (Carter and Fuller, 2015, Fernback; 2019).

The people who so wish to communicate devise signs and symbols to serve as instructional guides. The people through an institution assign meanings to the signs and symbols, and such signs and symbols are to be followed because they describe the situation and the environment of the people. The institution establish social expectations for the people's behaviour and attitude towards the signs and symbols which serve to safeguards the people.

According to Herbert Blumer, the theorist who named the theory in 1969, social interaction has four main principles;

1. Individuals act in reference to the subjective meaning objects have for them. For examples, an individual that sees the "objects" of family as being relatively unimportant will make decisions that deemphasize the role of family in their lives.
2. Interactions happen in a social and cultural context where objects, people and situations

must be defined and characterized according to individuals' subjective meanings.

3. For individuals, meanings originate from interactions with other individuals and with the society.
4. These meanings that an individual has are created and recreated through a process of interpretation that happens whenever that individual interact with others.

Instead of addressing how institutions objectively define and affect individuals, Symbolic Interactionism focuses on these individuals' subjective viewpoints and how they make sense of the world from their own perspective. The objective structure of a society is less important in the symbolic interactionist view than how subjective, repeated and meaningful interactions between individuals create society. Therefore, the society is believed to be socially constructed through human interpretation (Carter and Fuller; 2015, Nickerson; 2021).

Symbolic Interactionism Theory is a perspective that sees society as the product of shared symbols, such as language. The social world is therefore constructed by the meanings that individuals attach to events and social interactions, and these symbols are transmitted across the generations through language (Nickerson; 2021).

The theory can be seen as a prism which x-rays Signage Communication as a social vehicle that creates awareness with the road signs and instructs the road users on the utilization of these signs and symbols for safety driving. Best practices of the Nigeria's motoring public is hinged on their adherence to traffic rules and regulations.

The Symbolic Interactionism Theory is relevant to this study because it provides an insight to the understanding of behavioural pattern and attitudinal change of the road users to instructional traffic guides in the road signs and symbols. Adherence and compliance to traffic rules and regulation by following instructional guides provided by the road signs are part of the traffic safety rules.

According to Nickerson (2021) Symbolic Interactionism Theory assumes that people respond to elements of their environments (road signs and symbols in form of language) according to the subjective meanings they attach to those elements, such as meanings being created and modified through social interaction involving symbolic communication with other people.

II. METHODOLOGY

Qualitative methodological approach which entailed the use of In-depth Interview (IDI) and Focus Group Discussion (FGD) was adopted for the four categories of road users. Samples were drawn from motorists, commuters/pedestrians, hawkers/ traders and the road safety officers. Each group of the respondents was made up of four individuals, therefore a total number of 16 respondents were interviewed. Data from the In-depth Interviews (IDI) and the Focus Group Discussions (FGD) were transcribed, interpreted and analyzed in relation to the research questions.

All the respondents provided the researchers with insightful knowledge and adequate information based on the research objectives and their selection process was determined by the idea of theoretical saturation, having considered the purpose of the study, convenience of the researchers and access to the respondents at their habitat- motor parks and garages. The descriptive thematic was applied for the study.

Data presentation, analysis and discussion of findings

Research question 1: what is the level of awareness about road signs by the road users in Offa metropolis?

The first respondent, Alhaji Yusuf Abdumajeeb observed that it's unfortunate that there are no road signs in Offa township any longer, "except while going to Ilorin along Eleyooka village and AjaseIpo, you can see speed limit warning, left and right curve and bump ahead", he explained.

Another respondent, Comrade AddulateefSurajudeen noted that he's aware of road signs that give information when a driver is approaching bad portions of a road, bridge, construction area of the road, narrow ways or corner, bend which are very dangerous. He also mentioned traffic lights that help to control traffic when traffic control officers are not available.

AlhajiFataiJimoh also identified some of the road signs; "road signs have meaning as they point out or inform the drivers about direction and warning ahead. For examples, speed limit signs, animals crossing signs, pedestrians crossing signs or zebra crossing marks, and so on".

Mr Adebayo Yusuf, another respondent was of the opinion that it is possible for some drivers within the town not to be familiar with road signs since there are no road signs on Offa township roads.

MrTaiwoElegbede said, "There are usually road signs and marks which inform the drivers about schools locations, pupils and people crossing the roads and there are also symbols that

caution drivers to either 'slow down' or 'stop' while driving. According to him, "There are road signs for every junction such as T-junction, bend, narrow bridge and others. These signs are very useful to all the road users, not only the drivers".

The data from the Focus Group Discussion conducted among the pedestrians however indicated that many people don't know the meaning of road signs even if they see them. The first respondent said, "I am not aware of any road signs". The second respondent said, "I have never seen any road signs except the bump erected by the community people". The third respondent said, "I am only familiar with 'STOP', 'ZEBRA CROSSING', 'CHILDREN CROSSING' and 'SPEED LIMIT' and few others that I do see in other towns". The fourth respondent said, "I know there are road signs but I don't know their meaning".

It can be established from the above data that many of the road users are only familiar with the bumps and the use of flags to stop vehicular movement and the traffic officers at work who control traffic within the town. Some of the respondents are not familiar with other road signs and they don't seem to know the purpose of the road signs except the drivers who have been to other towns or states. This can be corroborated by the responses from a group of commuters who participated in the Focus Group Discussion (FGD). The excerpt;

Respondent 1: "I only know of road bump and I always see traffic officers controlling traffic with their hands (gestures)".

Respondent 2: "I am not aware of any road signs or symbols...but I do see staff and students using small flags to caution drivers to stop to allow students to cross in front Offa Grammar School".

Respondent 3: "The one I know is the bump to stop cars... it is very common in all the roads in Offa".

Respondent 4: I don't know these road signs, I have not seen them ...but at Captain Cook (An Eatery) in Owode level crossing (Densely populated area of the town)...the security man will use small red flag to stop some vehicles if a customer is driving out of the place".

Respondent 5: I know that policemen used to stop cars for the people to cross the road at Owode and sometimes at UBA/General junction... "

Respondent 6 cuts in "...Some drivers too will stop when they see elderly people and students"

In-depth interview (IDI) with the FRSC officers indicate that many of the drivers are aware of the traffic signs and symbols especially the commercial drivers and the private drivers who travel

frequently to other states of the federation. The excerpts of the IDI as transcribed are as follows;

Officer 1: "The drivers are aware of the traffic signs, the problem is the mentality that why do I need to follow certain rules while driving, and coupled with the ignorance that the rules are for their safety".

Officer 2: "Many of the drivers are just stubborn and they are always in a hurry to beat traffic...I don't believe drivers would not know traffic rules or road signs. There are just few...maybe those ones who never see the road signs".

Officer 3: "There are those who never went to driving schools and there are others who are not familiar with the traffic rules and road signs, perhaps because they hardly see them frequently. But majorly many Nigerian drivers ignore road signs except if there is no way to drive due to obstructions or damaged roads. Some drivers won't even stop when we signal to them to stop for inspection or counselling especially when they are on high speed".

Research question 2: What are the road signs or traffic symbols that are available in Offa Township?

In an In-depth Interview with Alhaji Yusuf Abdumajeeb, he said, "There are no road signs to guide the traffic or instruct the drivers within Offa town except while driving outside the town to other towns or states".

Comrade Abdulateef Surajudeed corroborated this view that there are no road signs or traffic lights either on the township roads or at the exit of Offa town as at the moment the interview was being conducted.

Alhaji Fatai Imoh explained that these road signs and some traffic lights used to exist in Offa many years ago especially when the railways and trains were in operation in Nigeria as there are terminal and station in Offa. "But you can hardly see any road signs or traffic lights again in Offa except few old road signs that could have been damaged or which are already pointing to wrong direction", he submitted.

In another In-Depth Interview with Mr Adebayo Yusuf, he responded that the road signs are available as he lamented that many drivers may not be familiar with these signs except some drivers who drive or travel to other towns or states where there are these road signs.

Mr Elegbede Taiwo noted that it has been long that the town used to have road signs and marks. "I don't think the road signs are there anymore because I have not been seeing any road sign whenever I drive", he added.

Focus Group Discussion conducted among the commuters indicated that there are no road signs in Offa. Except those old ones mounted at railways crossing and they are to caution drivers at the approach of a train on the railways. Excerpts; Respondent 1: “No road signs...but there are traffic officers and Road Safety people”.

Respondent 2: “There are no road pole signs and no traffic lights too”.

Respondent 3: “I only see “NO PARKING” stands in front of banks and some schools in Offa”.

Respondent 4: “No traffic light or road signs in the town... There are only bumps on most roads and there are no signs or symbols to tell the visitors that bumps are ahead of them, and this is also hazardous to drivers”.

Respondent 5: “Yes I have seen some road signs along Olofa way, Taiwo road and Ijagbo road to Ilorin...if you are walking you will see them, and they are old and not easy to see from the vehicle”.

Respondent 6: we don't have any road sign or light...we only have bumps...they are very common”.

The data from the Focus Group Discussion among the pedestrians show that there are no road signs in Offa. The first respondent said, “I have not sighted any road signs or traffic light”. Another participant noted that “one of the causes of road accident is that there is no traffic light or road signs, drivers are just driving the way they like”. Another participant, observed that, “I only see traffic warden or police controlling traffic at Owode area of the town and along Ijagbo/Ilorin road”. Another respondent said, “only the Road Safety Officers are seen doing their jobs, they monitor vehicles and control traffic in the township”.

The excerpts of the IDI with the FRSC officers confirmed that many of the road signs are either damaged, obsolete or non-available on the major roads. They however claimed that there are no traffic lights in Offa.

Officer 1: “Many of the traffic signs are old and obsolete and they are not even enough. The road bumps are not even located at the right places and at times, they badly constructed. They are erected by the community”.

Officer 2: “There are no road signs or symbols in Offa as far I am concerned. I have not seen anyone since I resumed duty in Offa. There are only bumps, which I believe are illegal. Our men and officers have been doing well in term of traffic control and enforcing traffic rules, but there is need for the provision of traffic lights and road signs in the township”.

Research question 3: What is the road traffic behaviour of road users in Offa?

Alhaji Yusuf Abdumajeeb posited that road signs and traffic symbols are necessary to guide the road users but unfortunately there are no road signs to guide the drivers. “We only have traffic control officers stationed at few junctions or at Owode intersection and we drivers always follow their instructions.

Comrade Abdulateef Surajudeen in his own response said, “We always obey all traffic rules and regulations since these rules and regulations are very useful for us and they help to prevent accident”.

Another respondent, Alhaji Fatai Jimoh noted that “Since these signs always provide us with traffic information which caution or give direction, they are to be strictly obeyed as they help to prevent accident”. “I personally look out for the road signs whenever I am driving because they tell us about the road conditions”, he affirmed.

Mr Adebayo Yusuf, another driver responded that “We follow road signs wherever we see them while driving”, and Mr Taiwo Elegbede also noted that “It is compulsory to obey traffic rules and follow road signs as they help us to know where to drive slowly and or stop while driving”. He explained that it is a rule for every driver to check the brake and clutch oil, wipers, extra tyre, jack, fire extinguishers and other vehicle accessories before driving on the roads.

The data from the Focus Group Discussion however show that the traffic behaviour of the drivers are not encouraging. One of the participant said, “Some drivers are driving recklessly...get drunk before driving, some are not patient with the passengers...some just drive without any training due to the influence of friends they join driving job...!” . Another respondent observed that “Motorcyclists don't obey the traffic officers...many drivers don't go to driving schools”. Another respondent said, “They don't want to allow people to cross the roads

The Focus Group Discussion conducted among the commuters supported the assertion that drivers don't drive with caution as they drive at high speed. Especially the motorcyclists. Excerpts: Respondent 1: “The problem is the ‘Okada’ riders (motorcyclists) they over-speed and they don't stop for the police”.

Respondent 2: “The Ojoku road is where the drivers going to the Polytechnic always drive recklessly. Maybe because the road is good in some area...”

Respondent 3: “Lack of patience by the drivers and Okada people (Motorcyclists) has been causing

accidents in the town. They overtake even while on high speed. The road safety officers are not always on that road to the Poly”.

Respondent 4: “Accidents always occur at General junction and Poly road (Main Campus)...almost every week because the drivers of ‘Korope’ (Mini buses) and ‘Okada’ (motorcycles) don’t wait for each other.

Respondent 5: “Maybe if there are road signs and traffic lights, the drivers will be guided”. For instance, there are no signs to indicate bumps on the roads while driving”.

Respondent 6: “Some drivers drive vehicles that are not good... this can cause accident too. When they are driving at high speed, they don’t listen even if we try to caution them”.

The IDI with the road traffic officers however confirmed that road users, especially drivers hardly obey traffic rules and most of them also disobey the instructions from the road traffic officers. Excerpts; Officer 1: “Their attitude to traffic rules and safety code is bad. Most drivers, especially the commercial drivers will only struggle to fasten their seat belt when they sight us. The motorcyclists are so terrible, they can hit you if you are not careful”.

Officer 2: “The traffic behaviour of some drivers are not encouraging while few others are decent and polite. I can say that if the roads are good and there are traffic lights and enough road signs and symbols, with our efforts, drivers will change and comply with traffic rules”.

Officer 3: “Most drivers are rude and they intentionally ignore rules, for example, ‘why will a driver refuse to fasten the seat belt? I believe Nigerian attitude to traffic safety is poor generally, not only in Offa. More traffic officers should be recruited to enforce traffic laws and even make arrest and punish any traffic laws offender”.

Officer 4: “All road users should obey traffic rules for their own safety. Trauma and grief associated with road traffic death as a result of accidents can be avoided if we all follow traffic instructions and obey rules. Generally, over 70% of road users have poor attitude to traffic rules and people are always in hurry, even passengers too...every Nigerian seems to have bad road traffic behaviour”.

Research question 4: To what extent do the road users observe road signs on Offa township roads?

Alhaji Yusuf Abdumajeeb, the chairman of National Union of Road Transport Workers (NURTW) Offa branch said, “We always educate our members on the purpose of obeying traffic rules and regulations.

Comrade Abdulateef Surajudeen observed that “Whenever I am driving or traveling to maybe Jos or Kaduna, I watch out for road signs and traffic lights”. According to him, “The traffic rules and symbols help to prevent accident on our roads”.

Alhaji Fatai Jimoh however also responded that he always obey traffic rules and regulations and he pointed out that the road signs are very useful while driving on roads that a driver is not familiar with especially in other states of the federation.

Mr Adebayo Yusuf, in his own response said, “We the drivers, and the union executives meet to educate ourselves. We organize workshops and seminars for members, at least twice in a month”. According to him, the purpose is to discuss vehicles’ maintenance and observing traffic rules and regulations on the roads.

Mr Taiwo Elegbede in another In-Depth Interview explained that “Many drivers, especially the private cars owners or drivers do not usually follow traffic signs or lights”. He however advised that the government should erect road signs and mount traffic lights on Offa township roads where they are necessary.

In the Focus Group Discussion, many of the participants observed that since there are no traffic rules and traffic lights, there are no prohibitive or warning signs to caution the drivers on the township roads.

Excerpts:

Respondent 1: “Drivers don’t obey traffic rules”.

Respondent 2: “They are in hurry...their speed is too much”.

Respondent 3: “Since there are no traffic lights to stop them, especially in the late hours when they are rushing home, the police and road safety men will not be there to warn them”.

Respondent 4: “Okada riders (Motorcyclists) are the most dangerous people, many of them will not stop when they get to the bumps...they will look for any small space...they are causing accident with the manner they speed”.

Respondent 5: “Many private drivers don’t know how to drive. They Motorcyclists and Tricyclists overtake at the wrong side too. We need traffic lights and more traffic officers in all our roads to prevent accidents”.

Respondent 6: “Some drivers are aware of the traffic rules and road signs but they just refuse to obey”.

The traffic officers that were interviewed expressed concern on the non-compliance of the road users, especially drivers. Excerpts;

Officer 1: “although, there are no traffic lights or symbols to follow but the drivers always ignore warning and caution from traffic officers on duty. Our men usually make arrest at times, on market days at Owode, we used to impound vehicles and motorcycles”.

Officer 2: “Most drivers do not obey traffic laws and rules...only few drivers obey traffic rules...meanwhile there are no traffic lights to guide them. Our officers are always on duty to control traffic and by the time we have traffic lights and more signs, things will improve”.

Officer 3: “There are no road signs to obey. The drivers can only obey us, so when we ask them to stop, they should stop, if we ask them to slow down for the people to cross, they should obey. Drivers who don’t obey traffic officers on duty will not follow any road signs or traffic lights”.

Officer 4: “But...(he laughs) there are no traffic lights or road signs...except if we talking of drivers obeying traffic rules such as stopping for the Road Safety officers to inspect their driver’s license and check their vehicles if they are road worthy...the spare tyre and other things. And they don’t usually have those items, fire extinguisher etc. I can say, most commercial drivers and some private drivers disobey simple traffic rules and laws”.

It can be said that there are no traffic lights or road signs in Offa metropolis to either control traffic or safe guide the road users.

III. SUMMARY. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

It is evident from the findings that there are no functional road signs and visible traffic symbols in Offa metropolis as claimed by the majority of the road users who could identify road bumps as the only prohibitive measure to limit the speed of motorists. It can be established that the provision of traffic lights, road signs and markings will ensure safe motoring public in Offa town and the road users would be able to identify them and they can subsequently be familiar with the road signs and traffic symbols.

Signage Communication can be utilized by the government and her traffic laws agencies and highway regulatory bodies to create awareness for the traffic codes and rules in order to ensure traffic safety. With the increase in road accidents that usually lead to death of road users and the likely traffic congestion in some areas in Offa as such congestion is synonymous with other urban towns in the country, the following are proposed;

1. The Government and her traffic management bodies should provide road traffic lights, road

signs and markings in all the cities and urban towns in the country.

2. The government and her relevant agencies should formulate strict road safety policies that will make the provision of traffic lights and road signs compulsory on the highways of all the towns and cities in Nigeria.
3. There is need for stricter enforcement of traffic laws and regulations to ensure compliance and adherence to all traffic rules and codes by the road users, especially the motorists.
4. The Federal Ministry of Education should include road safety modules in school curriculum as many of our young adults now own and drive cars.
5. Nigeria’s motoring public deserve good roads. Government should construct good roads and make the existing road ‘vehicle worthy’ by fixing the bad portions. Bad roads have been contributing to regular damage of vehicles and the spare parts are not affordable by poor Nigerians who always manage to drive their cars even when they are not road worthy.
6. Cognitive design features should also be taken into consideration while designing traffic road signs and symbols. User-friendly traffic signs which can transmit clear messages and about road conditions ahead to the road users are important.

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