

Media Representation Of Child Trafficking In Nigeria: A Study Of The Punch And Nigerian Tribune Newspapers

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Abstract: *This study is focused on media representation of child trafficking in Nigeria: a study of the Punch and Nigerian Tribune Newspapers (January 1st, 2019 – December 31st, 2019). This paper made use of Qualitative research design and content analysis. The Punch and Nigerian Tribune newspapers between January 1st 2019 and December 31st 2019 served as the population of this study. The purposive sampling technique was adopted in selecting The Punch and Nigerian Tribune for this study, systematic random sampling was used to select the issues in news stories, articles, editorials, opinions, features, cartoons, illustrations etcetera. The findings of the study revealed that the role of media narratives in shaping public perception and understanding of child trafficking in Nigeria include framing the problem, shaping public perception of the victims and creating public awareness through story telling on child trafficking. The Punch newspaper had a frequency count of 30 on creating public awareness through story telling on child trafficking, the Nigerian Tribune had a frequency count of 15 on shaping public perception of the victims while Daily Times had a frequency count of 5 on framing the problem of child trafficking in Nigeria. Furthermore, the amount of space allocated to each story sample in the selected newspapers under study were below 10” which was small. The Punch, Nigerian Tribune and Daily Trust newspapers covered issues of child trafficking in Nigeria to a low extent. It was recommended that media outlets should adopt ethical reporting practices, ensuring the protection of victims' identities and avoiding the sensationalization of their experiences*

Keywords: Child Trafficking, Media, Media Coverage, Media Presentation, Newspaper

Introduction

Child trafficking is a critical global concern, especially in developing nations like Nigeria. It involves the recruitment, transport, transfer, harboring, or receipt of children for exploitative purposes, violating basic human rights and endangering the future of millions of children (United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime [UNODC], 2020). In Nigeria, factors such as widespread poverty, unemployment, corruption, and inadequate enforcement of anti-trafficking laws have exacerbated the issue (Ebigbo, 2003; Adepoju, 2005). The country functions as a source, transit, and destination for trafficking, with children often subjected to forced labor, sexual exploitation, begging, and even child soldiering (United States Department of State, 2022). The media plays a crucial role in shaping public discussion and influencing perceptions of social issues like child trafficking. Through information dissemination, narrative framing, and advocacy for policy changes, media outlets contribute to raising awareness and ensuring government accountability. In Nigeria, newspapers such as The Punch and Nigerian Tribune have been key players in investigative journalism and social issue advocacy. However, the effectiveness of these newspapers in accurately representing and framing child trafficking remains a topic of academic interest.

Media representation is often analyzed through the lenses of framing, agenda-setting, and gatekeeping theories. These frameworks suggest that the way media organizations choose and present stories can greatly influence how audiences perceive and prioritize social issues (McCombs & Shaw, 1972; Entman, 1993). For example, sensational headlines, narratives centered on victims, or a focus on perpetrators can evoke distinct emotional responses and shape public understanding. Furthermore, media coverage can either empower victims by promoting their rights or reinforce harmful stereotypes, depending on the framing. Examining how child trafficking is represented in the Nigerian media is essential to understanding its portrayal to the public. Does the media adequately address the root causes of trafficking? Do they highlight the impact of policy failures, economic disparities, and international factors? Or do they focus primarily on individual cases, overlooking broader systemic issues? These questions emphasize the importance of analyzing media coverage systematically. Therefore, this study aims to explore how child trafficking is portrayed in The Punch and Nigerian Tribune, examining the frequency, framing, and depth of coverage to assess their contribution to public understanding and advocacy.

Statement of the Problem

Child trafficking is a severe human rights violation and one of the most widespread forms of modern slavery, impacting millions of children globally. In Nigeria, the issue has reached alarming levels, with reports suggesting that thousands of children are trafficked each year for purposes such as forced labor, sexual exploitation, domestic servitude, and begging. Despite efforts by both the Nigerian government and international organizations to combat this problem, it continues to thrive, driven by systemic poverty, corruption,

weak enforcement of anti-trafficking laws, and a lack of public awareness. The media, as a powerful means of disseminating information, plays a critical role in addressing child trafficking. Through framing narratives, influencing public opinion, and holding authorities accountable, the media can either strengthen the fight against trafficking or contribute to the spread of stereotypes and misinformation (Entman, 1993). However, there are still unanswered questions regarding the effectiveness and thoroughness of media coverage of child trafficking in Nigeria. Studies have shown that how the media frames social issues can affect public perception and policy priorities (McCombs & Shaw, 1972). If child trafficking is underreported, sensationalized, or poorly framed, it may obstruct efforts to tackle its root causes and mobilize public action.

In Nigeria, newspapers like The Punch and Nigerian Tribune are among the most influential print media outlets, with the potential to play a significant role in raising awareness about child trafficking and influencing public discourse. However, there is limited research on how these platforms cover the issue. Are they providing consistent and comprehensive coverage of child trafficking? Do they highlight the structural causes, such as poverty and weak governance, or do they focus more on isolated, sensational stories that fail to address the broader context? This gap in knowledge calls for a systematic analysis of how child trafficking is represented in the Nigerian media. Such an analysis is essential for understanding whether media coverage contributes to public awareness and advocacy or reinforces a superficial understanding of the issue. Without a clear understanding of these dynamics, efforts to use the media as a tool for addressing child trafficking may not be as effective. Therefore, this study aims to examine how child trafficking is portrayed in The Punch and Nigerian Tribune. By analyzing the frequency, framing, and depth of coverage, the study will offer valuable insights into how the media can be more effectively utilized to combat child trafficking in Nigeria.

Aim and Objectives of the Study

The primary aim of this study is to examine media representation of child trafficking in Nigeria: a study of the Punch and Nigerian Tribune Newspapers. The secondary objectives are as follows:

- i. To explore the role of media narratives in shaping public perception and understanding of child trafficking in Nigeria.
- ii. Find out the extent The Punch Nigerian Tribune and Daily Trust Newspapers sensitize the society about the ills of child trafficking in Nigeria

Literature Review

Child Trafficking

According to a 2015 assessment by Human Rights Watch, "endemic public sector corruption continued to impair the enjoyment of social and economic rights in Nigeria." Human trafficking can also be facilitated by corruption, as it makes it simpler to transport victims between nations and across borders without being noticed or having to fill out paperwork. Human traffickers prey on families who are economically disempowered and disadvantaged and are attempting to exit a dangerous circumstance. Women and young girls are substantially more exposed to traffickers' tactics due to the feminization of poverty and discriminatory cultural norms (Umeokafor & Ayam, 2020). The political system, which is characterized by institutional weakness and fragility, has fostered the growth of organized crime.

Causes of Child Trafficking in Nigeria

Some of the causes of child trafficking are as follows:

- **Unemployment:** People seek better pastures in another country by any means available when they are unemployed in their own country. Traffickers can readily entice someone who has no knowledge of other countries' economics with the promise of a better life. Some people will try to enter the country (neighboring country) by any means imaginable, including without having genuine documentation to pass through the embassy, due to a lack of sufficient knowledge prior to travel. Nigeria's unemployment rate has reached a position where it is climbing by a percentage point every day. Every year, a considerable number of universities produce jobless graduates.
- **Demand for Female Prostitution:** One of the factors that fosters child trafficking is the large market for buyers of human trafficking for sexual purposes. It goes without saying that child trafficking would not have expanded if there was no greater demand. Child traffickers are able to stay in business because there is a high demand for their services, and demand in any product's supply chain is tied to profit (Garba et al, 2016).
- **Broken Home:** In modern countries like Nigeria, a broken household is a serious and recurrent issue coming from the home environment, allowing child trafficking to thrive. As a result, combating the rise of child trafficking and the vulnerability of children to trafficking in today's culture necessitates a great deal of attention and investigation.

The Role of Media in Child Trafficking in Nigeria

The media serves as a critical tool in addressing social issues, including child trafficking, by raising awareness, shaping public opinion, and advocating for policy reforms. In Nigeria, where child trafficking remains a significant human rights challenge, the role of the media cannot be overstated (National Agency for the Prohibition of Trafficking in Persons (NAPTIP), 2021). The media operates as both an informer and agenda-setter, capable of influencing how society perceives and responds to this pervasive issue.

Raising Awareness and Public Education: The media plays a crucial role in educating the public about the realities and dangers of child trafficking. By disseminating information through newspapers, television, radio, and digital platforms, media outlets can shed light on the tactics used by traffickers, the vulnerability of certain groups, and the impact on victims. This awareness can help individuals and communities recognize warning signs and take preventative measures (NAPTIP, 2021). For instance, investigative reports and feature articles in Nigerian newspapers like *The Punch* and *Nigerian Tribune* have highlighted real-life cases, drawing attention to the plight of trafficked children.

Framing and Shaping Narratives: The media's framing of child trafficking significantly impacts how the issue is understood. Effective framing can highlight systemic causes such as poverty, corruption, unemployment, and weak governance, while also emphasizing the human rights violations involved. Conversely, sensational or shallow reporting can lead to a distorted understanding of the problem, focusing solely on individual cases without addressing the broader socio-economic and structural factors.

Creating Platforms for Victims' Voices: The media can serve as a platform for victims and survivors to share their experiences, thereby humanizing the issue and fostering empathy among the public. These stories not only bring attention to the gravity of the problem but also empower victims by providing them with a voice. However, ethical considerations are crucial in ensuring that media coverage does not further stigmatize or exploit survivors.

Agenda Setting Theory

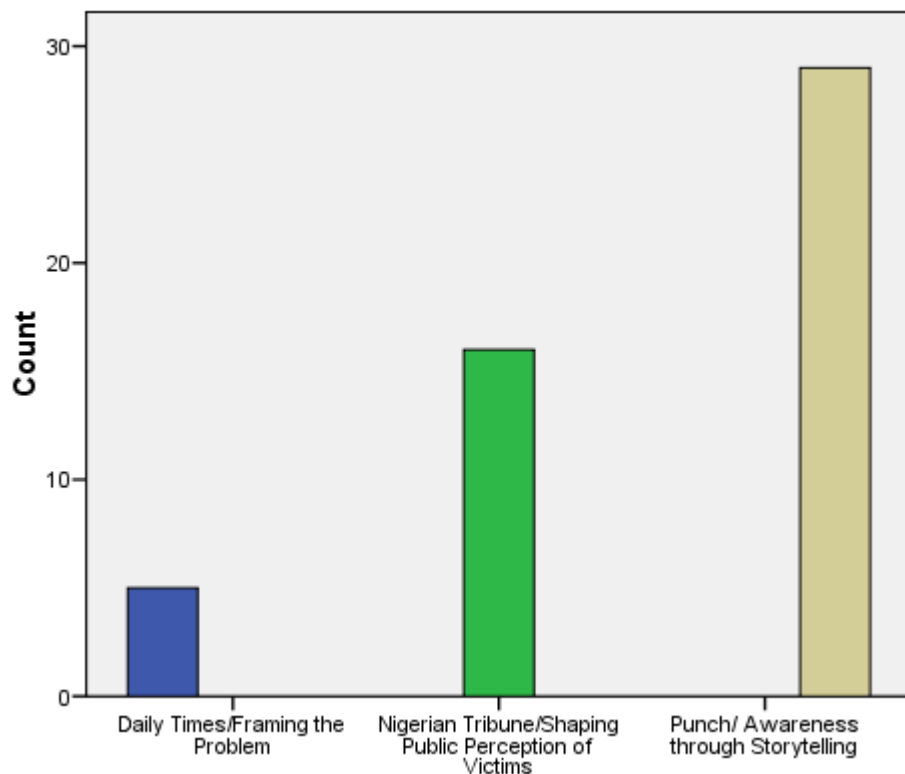
Agenda Setting Theory was propounded by Maxwell McCombs and Donald Shaw in 1972/1973. The theory provides a useful framework for analyzing how the media influences public awareness and policy responses to child trafficking. Nigerian media outlets, like *The Punch* and *Nigerian Tribune*, play a crucial role in bringing the issue of child trafficking to the forefront. If child trafficking is frequently reported and framed as a national crisis, the public is likely to view it as a high-priority issue, demanding immediate attention and action. Through agenda-setting, the media can influence how child trafficking is perceived—whether as an isolated criminal act or as a systemic issue tied to poverty, corruption, and governance failures. The framing of child trafficking stories—focusing on victims, perpetrators, or systemic causes—shapes public understanding and mobilizes advocacy. For instance, investigative journalism highlighting the failure of law enforcement or the plight of trafficked children can galvanize public support for reforms.

Research Methodology

The design adopted for the study was Qualitative research design using content analysis. The *Punch* and *Nigerian Tribune* newspapers between January 1st 2019 and December 31st 2019 served as the population of this study. The two newspapers were chosen because of their National coverage. The purposive sampling technique was adopted in selecting *The Punch* and *Nigerian Tribune* for this study, systematic random sampling was used to select the issues in news stories, articles, editorials, opinions, features, cartoons, illustrations etcetera. The instrument used in collecting the data was code sheet. The code sheet is used in systematic data collection for content analytical research. The data generated was presented in frequency distribution tables with raw figures and simple percentage analysis. The researcher used descriptive techniques, which was based on qualitative and quantitative analysis.

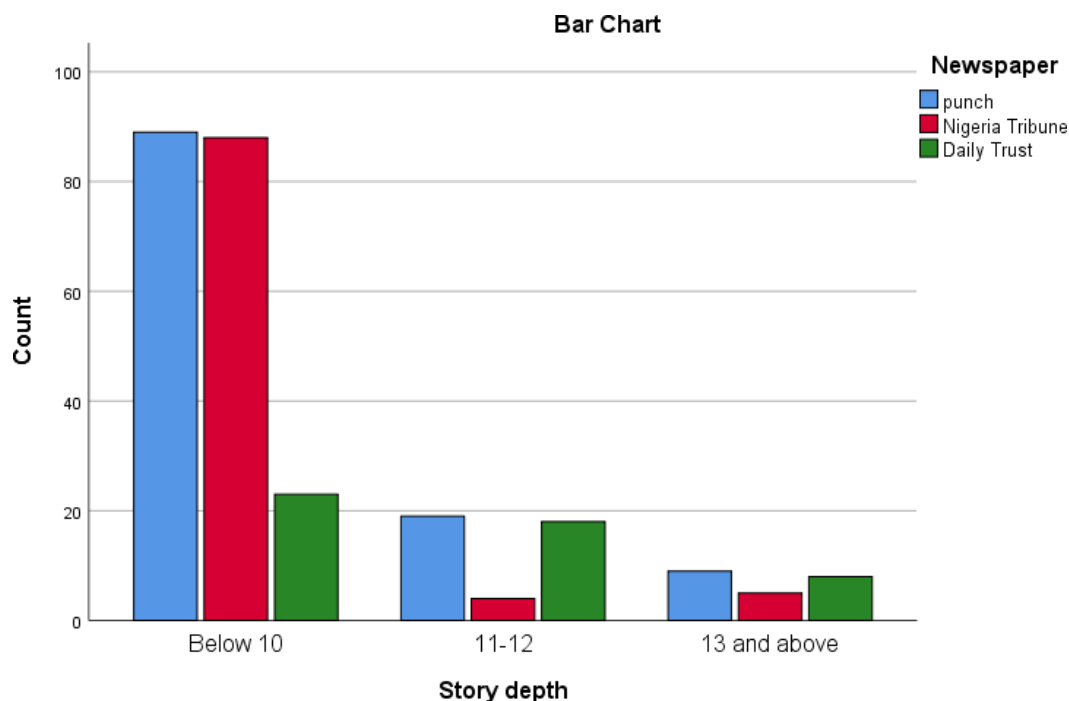
Data Analysis

Research Question One: What is the role of media narratives in shaping public perception and understanding of child trafficking in Nigeria?



From research question one, it was recorded that the role of media narratives in shaping public perception and understanding of child trafficking in Nigeria include framing the problem, shaping public perception of the victims and creating public awareness through story telling on child trafficking. The Punch newspaper had a frequency count of 30 on creating public awareness through story telling on child trafficking, the Nigerian Tribune had a frequency count of 15 on shaping public perception of the victims while Daily Times had a frequency count of 5 on framing the problem of child trafficking in Nigeria.

Research Question Two: To what extent do The *Punch*, *Nigerian Tribune* and *Daily Trust* newspapers cover issues of child trafficking in Nigeria?



To analyse the depth of stories on child trafficking in Nigeria in the selected newspapers for this study. 200 stories were published below 10", 41 were published between 11-12 and 22 stories published were 13 and above in the selected newspapers. In *Punch*, 89 stories were below 10", 19 stories were between 11-12" and 9 stories were 13 and above. In *Nigerian Tribune*, 88 stories were below 10", 4 stories were between 11-12" and 5 stories were 13 and above, while *Daily Trust*, 23 stories were below 10", 18 stories were between 11-12" and 8 stories were 13 and above. This implies that the amount of space allocated to each story sample in the selected newspapers under study were below 10" which was small. Therefore, the *Punch*, *Nigerian Tribune* and *Daily Trust* newspapers covered issues of child trafficking in Nigeria to a low extent.

Conclusion

The findings of the study revealed that the role of media narratives in shaping public perception and understanding of child trafficking in Nigeria include framing the problem, shaping public perception of the victims and creating public awareness through story telling on child trafficking. The *Punch* newspaper had a frequency count of 30 on creating public awareness through story telling on child trafficking, the *Nigerian Tribune* had a frequency count of 15 on shaping public perception of the victims while *Daily Times* had a frequency count of 5 on framing the problem of child trafficking in Nigeria

Furthermore, the amount of space allocated to each story sample in the selected newspapers under study were below 10" which was small. Therefore, the *Punch*, *Nigerian Tribune* and *Daily Trust* newspapers covered issues of child trafficking in Nigeria to a low extent.

Recommendations

- The media should undertake more investigative reporting in order to unearth all the hidden issues that could assist in apprehending and punishing those behind this child trafficking.
- Media outlets should adopt ethical reporting practices, ensuring the protection of victims' identities and avoiding the sensationalization of their experiences.
- The media should consistently highlight the root causes of child trafficking, such as socioeconomic disparities, corruption, inadequate law enforcement, and the lack of educational opportunities.

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