

Human Trafficking Reportage by Select Online News Media in Nigeria



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Abstract

This study examines the coverage of human trafficking in Nigerian online news. Content analysis was conducted on four online news sources, selected based on national reach, consistency in publishing, and popularity amongst Nigerian online readers. The study analysed 553 publications, accounting for 10% of the population of 5,532 e-copy editions published from January 2019 through December 2022. The study found that the media's portrayal of human trafficking victims can perpetuate harmful stereotypes and contribute to victim blaming. The four Nigerian online news sources studied, published many stories on human trafficking within the study period. Reports on human trafficking were accorded low prominence in the newspapers studied, with a majority of the stories being reduced to mere links on the websites of the news sources and the majority of reports on human trafficking by the four Nigerian online news sources studied occurred as straight news, while feature articles accounted for the second highest format of reportage. The study recommends that news sources can collaborate with anti-trafficking organisations to provide accurate and up-to-date information on human trafficking and to raise awareness about the issue and that news sources should provide more in-depth analysis and personal stories to engage readers and create empathy towards victims of trafficking.

Keywords: *Human trafficking, Nigeria, Online news media, Reportage, Exploitation*

Introduction

Human trafficking is a global issue that involves the exploitation of individuals for labour or sexual purposes through the use of force, fraud, or coercion (UNOD, n.d. and Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, n.d.). The impact of human trafficking on victims is devastating, with many experiencing physical and psychological abuse, torture, and trauma ((UNOD, n.d.). Victims may also suffer long-term health

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consequences, such as chronic pain, sexually transmitted infections, and mental health disorders (United States Department of State, 2021). The media plays a crucial role in shaping public perception of human trafficking victims, as the images and stories presented in the media can create expectations of what trafficking is and how it affects victims (Cho & Lee, 2017). However, the media's portrayal of human trafficking victims can also perpetuate harmful stereotypes and contribute to victim blaming (Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, n.d.).

Responsive journalism is needed in reporting on human trafficking issues. Responsive journalism involves reporting on human trafficking in a way that is accurate, fair, and respectful of victims' rights and dignity (Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, n.d.). This includes avoiding sensationalism, respecting victims' privacy and confidentiality, and providing context and accurate information about human trafficking. Journalists should also be aware of the potential impact of their reporting on victims and take steps to minimise harm. Research on human trafficking and the media has focused on the role of media framing in shaping public perception of human trafficking victims (Cho & Lee, 2017).

The media play a crucial role in shedding light on societal problems such as human trafficking, and this study aims to analyse the reportage of select online news media in Nigeria on human trafficking, with a focus on the extent of coverage, the types of trafficking covered, and the effectiveness of the media in sensitising the public against human trafficking. The study will examine the content of select online news media in Nigeria, including *Premium Times*, *Thisday Online*, *Sun News Online*, and *Vanguard* newspapers, to determine the extent of coverage of human trafficking. It will also analyse the types of trafficking covered, including child trafficking and sex trafficking. Additionally, the study will investigate the effectiveness of the media in sensitising the public against human trafficking. The findings of this study will provide insights into the role of the media in addressing human trafficking in Nigeria and contribute to the development of effective strategies for combating human trafficking in the country.

The research questions guiding the study are:

1. What is the frequency of reports on human trafficking in Nigerian online news sources?
2. What is the prominence accorded reports on human trafficking in Nigerian online news sources?
3. In what formats are human trafficking reported in Nigerian online news sources?
4. How do Nigerian online news sources portray human trafficking?

Literature Review

Understanding Human Trafficking in Nigeria

Human trafficking is a grave issue that plagues many countries worldwide, including Nigeria. This essay will explore the situation of human trafficking in Nigeria, shedding light on its prevalence, causes, and consequences. Nigeria has been identified as a source, transit, and destination country for human trafficking (Adeyeye & Egbulefu, 2022). The country serves as a source for trafficked individuals, particularly women and children, who are often lured with promises of better opportunities, such as education or

employment, only to be exploited in various forms, including forced labour, sexual exploitation, and domestic servitude (Oliver, 2017). Several factors contribute to the prevalence of human trafficking in Nigeria. Poverty, lack of education, and unemployment are underlying causes that make individuals vulnerable to trafficking (Agboola, 2019). Additionally, political instability, armed conflict, and weak law enforcement further exacerbate the problem, creating an environment conducive to human trafficking (Adeyeye & Egbulefu, 2022). The consequences of human trafficking in Nigeria are devastating.

Victims often endure physical and psychological abuse, loss of freedom, and violation of their basic human rights (Adeyeye & Egbulefu, 2022). They suffer from trauma, health issues, and social stigmatisation, making it difficult for them to reintegrate into society even after they are rescued or escape from their traffickers. Efforts to combat human trafficking in Nigeria have been made at national and international levels. The Nigerian government has enacted legislation and established agencies, such as the National Agency for the Prohibition of Trafficking in Persons (NAPTIP), to address the issue (Agboola, 2019). However, challenges remain in terms of enforcement, coordination, and awareness. To effectively tackle human trafficking in Nigeria, a multi-faceted approach is required. This includes strengthening law enforcement, improving socioeconomic conditions, providing education and vocational training, raising awareness, and enhancing international cooperation (Oliver, 2017).

Additionally, it is crucial to support and empower survivors of trafficking through comprehensive rehabilitation and reintegration programs. Human trafficking is a significant problem in Nigeria, with women and children most vulnerable. Poverty, lack of education, and weak law enforcement contribute to the prevalence of trafficking. The consequences for victims are severe, and efforts to combat trafficking require a comprehensive and coordinated approach. By addressing the root causes, strengthening legislation, and supporting survivors, Nigeria can make progress in eradicating human trafficking and protecting the rights of its citizens.

Overview of existing research on the framing of human trafficking victims in local news

Human trafficking is a global issue that involves the exploitation of individuals for labour or sexual purposes through the use of force, fraud, or coercion. The media plays a crucial role in shaping public perception of human trafficking victims, as the images and stories presented in the media can create expectations of what trafficking is and how it affects victims. Existing research on the framing of human trafficking victims in local news has focused on the role of media framing in shaping public perception of human trafficking victims. Koo (2014) examined the portrayal of victims and offenders of human trafficking in three major newspapers from 2005-2012. The study found that newspapers often portrayed victims as helpless and vulnerable, while offenders were portrayed as powerful and dangerous. Another study analysed recent U.S. newspaper articles on human trafficking and found that the media often framed human trafficking as a problem that primarily affects women and children and that the media often used sensational language and images to depict human trafficking (Cho & Lee, 2016).

Research on media framing suggests that these images of human trafficking in the media will create expectations of what trafficking is and how it affects victims (Cho & Lee, 2017). News portrayals perpetuate stereotypes that can lead to victim blaming and a

lack of empathy for victims (Hossain, 2018). Therefore, journalists need to report on human trafficking accurately and informally and respect victims' rights and dignity (Koo, (2014).

Existing research on the framing of human trafficking victims in local news highlights the importance of ethical journalism in reporting on human trafficking victims. Journalists should be aware of the potential impact of their reporting on victims and take steps to minimise harm. By reporting on human trafficking in a way that is accurate, informative, and respectful of victims' rights and dignity, journalists can help to shape public perception of human trafficking and its impact on victims.

Impact of media framing on public perception of human trafficking victims

The impact of media framing on public perception of human trafficking victims has been a subject of research and analysis. Several scholarly works have explored this topic, shedding light on how the media's portrayal of human trafficking victims can shape public opinion and influence societal attitudes. Cho & Lee's (2016) study conducted a content analysis of recent U.S. newspaper articles to examine the framing of human trafficking. The research found that media framing can create expectations of what trafficking is and how it affects victims. The study highlighted those newspapers often portrayed victims as helpless and vulnerable, while offenders were depicted as powerful and dangerous. This framing can influence public perception by reinforcing stereotypes and perpetuating victim-blaming attitudes. Another scholarly work focused on the role of media framing in shaping public perception of human trafficking. The research emphasised that media framing can create specific images and narratives that shape how the public understands and responds to human trafficking. It highlighted the importance of understanding these frames to effectively address the issue and promote accurate public understanding (Cho & Lee, 2017).

Additionally, a study examined the portrayal of human trafficking victims and offenders in major newspapers from 2005 to 2012. The research revealed that victims were often portrayed as innocent and deserving of sympathy, while offenders were depicted as criminals. This framing can influence public perception by shaping attitudes towards victims and offenders (Koo, (2014). Research has explored the impact of media framing on public knowledge about human trafficking. It has been found that media coverage can significantly affect the public's understanding of the issue. Misleading or sensationalised portrayals can lead to misconceptions and limited awareness of the complexities of human trafficking (Hossain, 2018).

These studies highlight the significant impact of media framing on public perception of human trafficking victims. The media's portrayal of victims can shape societal attitudes, reinforce stereotypes, and influence public understanding of the issue. Ethical journalism and responsible reporting are crucial in ensuring accurate and respectful portrayals of human trafficking victims, which can contribute to a more informed and empathetic public response.

Concept of ethics-of-care journalism and its potential role in improving media coverage of human trafficking victims

Ethics-of-care journalism is a concept that emphasises the importance of empathy, compassion, and respect for the dignity of individuals in journalism. This approach to

journalism can be particularly relevant in improving media coverage of human trafficking victims. Recent scholarly works have explored the potential role of ethics-of-care journalism in addressing the challenges of reporting on human trafficking victims. Koo, (2014) study examined how gendered mediation affects local news framing of trafficking victims and called for ethics-of-care journalism. The research highlighted the importance of empathy and compassion in reporting on human trafficking victims and emphasised the need for journalists to prioritise the well-being and dignity of victims. Cho & Lee (2023) analysed the portrayal of victims and offenders of human trafficking in major newspapers from 2005 to 2012. The research found that newspapers often portrayed victims as helpless and vulnerable, while offenders were depicted as powerful and dangerous. The study suggested that an ethics-of-care approach to journalism could help to address these issues by prioritising the dignity and well-being of victims.

Guidelines for media and trafficking in human beings emphasise the importance of ethical journalism in reporting on human trafficking victims. The guidelines highlight the need for journalists to avoid sensationalism, respect victims' privacy and confidentiality, and provide accurate information about human trafficking (Ethical Journalism Network, n.d.). By adopting an ethics-of-care approach to journalism, journalists can help to promote accurate and respectful portrayals of human trafficking victims, which can contribute to a more informed and empathetic public response. Ethics-of-care journalism can be crucial in improving media coverage of human trafficking victims. By prioritising empathy, compassion, and respect for the dignity of individuals, journalists can help to promote accurate and respectful portrayals of human trafficking victims. This approach to journalism can contribute to a more informed and empathetic public response, which can ultimately help to address the challenges of human trafficking.

Theoretical Framework

The study is anchored on Framing and Care ethics theories.

Framing theory suggests that the media's portrayal of human trafficking can shape public perception and understanding of the issue. Recent studies have analysed media coverage of human trafficking to identify framing patterns and how they affect public perception. For example, one study analysed recent U.S. newspaper articles on human trafficking and found that the media often framed human trafficking as a problem that primarily affects women and children and that the media often used sensational language and images to depict human trafficking. Cho & Lee, (2016) study examined the portrayal of victims and offenders of human trafficking in three major newspapers from 2005-2012 and found that newspapers often portrayed victims as helpless and vulnerable, while offenders were depicted as powerful and dangerous (Koo, (2014).

Care ethics theory emphasises the importance of empathy, compassion, and respect for the dignity of individuals in journalism. An ethics-of-care approach to journalism can be particularly relevant in improving media coverage of human trafficking victims. Recent research has highlighted the potential role of ethics-of-care journalism in improving media coverage of human trafficking victims. For example, one study called for ethics-of-care journalism in reporting on human trafficking victims and emphasised the need for journalists to prioritise the well-being and dignity of victims (Cho & Lee, 2023).

Framing theory Care ethics theories are relevant to the study of ethics-of-care Journalism and its role in framing human trafficking victims in local news. By analysing media coverage of human trafficking and adopting an ethics-of-care approach to journalism, journalists can help to promote accurate and respectful portrayals of human trafficking victims, which can contribute to a more informed and empathetic public response.

Methodology

This study examined Nigerian Online news sources' coverage of human trafficking using content analysis. It systematically, objectively, and quantitatively examined Online news sources' coverage of human trafficking. Four online news sources were chosen based on national reach, coverage of Nigerian human trafficking reports, consistency in publishing, and popularity amongst Nigerian online readers. Vanguard Online, Sun News Online, Premium Times, and THISDAY Online were selected. The four online news sources published 5,532 e-copy issues throughout the research.

The study runs from January 2019 through December 2022. The four online news outlets issued 5,532 e-copy editions from January 1, 2019, to December 31, 2022. Five hundred fifty-three concerns were studied from 10% of this population. From the four online news outlets' e-copy editions were selected apiece. By dividing 5532 by the sample size and using the calendar for the years analysed, a skip interval of 10 issues was chosen, and the number of copies analysed was 553. The selection procedure started in various months each year to add randomness.

It is commonly recognised that research goals determine content category selection. Stampel and Westley (1998) state: "The decision to build your categories instead of adopting an existing set should be based mostly on the conclusion that no current system will enable you to satisfy the objectives of your study" (cited in Ogbuoshi 2008 p. 49). Study content categories are: Forced labour, sex, child, organ, marriage, and online-facilitated trafficking

Coding parameters included: Frequency and prominence: High, Medium, and Low prominence are assigned to editorial items on human trafficking featured on the front, back, and editorial pages, supplements, special sections, pullouts, and inside pages. Three viewpoints on human trafficking were considered. - Positive - editorial issues that gave covert or clear support for Human Trafficking in Nigeria; negative - Editorial matters that criticised Human Trafficking in Nigeria; and Neutral - Items that were equivocal or merely relayed the source's views without taking a side. The study also examined the journalistic genre used to publish issues on human trafficking. They are news, features, editorials, opinions, interviews, advertorials, and letters to the editor. NAPTIP, FG, Local Residents/Victims, Foreign Countries, and others were the major reported sources of human trafficking reports in the four online news sources.

Based on balanced press coverage of human trafficking activities, the articles were analysed. For instance, did a piece about human trafficking include the opinions of as many actors as possible? Report language/ tone was examined. This was categorised as objective, urgent, and empathetic. In analysing the data collected and collated, SPSS version 27 was used to analyse data collected before they were presented in frequency tables.

Results

Table 1: Frequency of reports on human trafficking victims

Newspaper	Frequency	Percentage (%)
<i>THISDAY Online</i>	159	27.60
<i>Premium Times</i>	146	25.35
<i>Vanguard Online</i>	171	29.69
<i>Sunnews Online News Online</i>	100	17.36
Total	576	100

Table 1 shows the frequency and percentage of reports on human trafficking victims in four newspapers. The table indicates that Vanguard Online had the highest frequency of reports with 171 (29.69%), followed by THISDAY Online with 159 (27.60%), Premium Times with 146 (25.35%), and Sunnews Online News Online with 100 (17.36%). The total number of reports across all four newspapers was 576.

Table 2: Portrayal of Human trafficking victims

Newspaper	Portrayal Variables				Total	
	Neutral		Negative		N	(%)
	N	(%)	N	(%)		
<i>THISDAY Online</i>	12 (23.53)		123 (28.81)		159 (27.60)	
<i>Premium Times</i>	12 (23.53)		115 (26.93)		146 (25.35)	
<i>Vanguard Online</i>	13 (25.49)		133 (31.15)		171 (29.69)	
<i>Sunnews Online News Online</i>	14 (27.45)		56 (13.11)		100 (17.36)	
	51 (8.85)		427 (74.13)		576 (100)	

The table above shows that the percentage of articles with a neutral portrayal of human trafficking victims ranges from 23.53% to 27.45%, the percentage of articles with a negative portrayal of human trafficking victims ranges from 13.11% to 31.15%, while the total number of articles analysed for all newspapers is 576.

Table 3: Prominence of reports on human trafficking

Newspaper	Prominence Variables						Total	
	High		Medium		Low		N	(%)
	N	(%)	N	(%)	N	(%)		
<i>THISDAY Online</i>	34 (20.48)		8 (44.44)		117 (29.85)		159 (27.60)	
<i>Premium Times</i>	69 (41.57)		6 (33.33)		71 (18.11)		146 (25.35)	
<i>Vanguard Online</i>	40 (24.10)		2 (11.11)		129 (32.91)		171 (29.69)	
<i>Sunnews Online News Online</i>	23 (13.86)		2 (11.11)		75 (19.13)		100 (17.36)	
	166 (28.82)		18 (3.13)		392 (68.05)		576 (100)	

The table above shows that the percentage of articles with high prominence ranges from 13.86% to 41.57%, the percentage of articles with medium prominence ranges from 2.78% to 44.44%, the percentage of articles with low prominence ranges from 18.11% to 68.05% while the total number of articles analysed for all newspapers is 576.

Table 4: Formats of reports on human trafficking

Newspaper	Format Variables						Total N (%)
	Straight news N (%)	Feature Article N (%)	Editorial N (%)	Opinion N (%)	Interview N (%)		
<i>THISDAY Online</i>	119 (28.81)	14 (27.45)	3 (18.75)	7 (41.18)	6 (15.38)	159 (27.60)	
<i>Premium Times</i>	109 (26.39)	16 (31.37)	3 (18.75)	2 (11.76)	10 (25.64)	146 (25.35)	
<i>Vanguard Online</i>	113 (27.36)	17 (33.33)	5 (31.25)	4 (23.53)	12 (30.77)	171 (29.69)	
<i>Sunnews Online</i>	72 (17.43)	4 (7.84)	5 (31.25)	4 (23.53)	11 (28.21)	100 (17.36)	
<i>News Online</i>							
	413 (71.70)	51 (8.85)	16 (2.78)	17 (2.95)	39 (6.77)	576 (100)	

Table 4 shows the formats of reports on human trafficking in four online newspapers: THISDAY Online, Premium Times, Vanguard Online, and Sunnews Online. The table presents the number and percentage of reports in each format variable, including straight news, feature articles, editorials, opinions, and interviews. The total number of reports is also provided. Most reports on human trafficking in these newspapers are presented as straight news, accounting for 71.70% of all reports. Feature articles are the second most common format, with 8.85% of all reports, followed by interviews (6.77%), editorials (2.78%), and opinions (2.95%).

Table 5: Language of reports on human trafficking

Newspaper	Language Variables			Total N (%)
	Objective tone N (%)	Urgent tone N (%)	Empathetic tone N (%)	
<i>THISDAY Online</i>	3 (15.79)	15 (28.85)	71 (28.40)	89 (27.73)
<i>Premium Times</i>	3 (15.79)	11 (21.15)	47 (18.80)	61 (19.00)
<i>Vanguard Online</i>	5 (26.32)	17 (32.69)	81 (32.40)	103 (32.09)
<i>Sunnews Online News</i>	8 (42.11)	9 (17.31)	51 (20.40)	68 (21.18)
<i>Online</i>				
	19 (5.92)	52 (16.20)	250 (77.88)	321 (100)

Table 5 shows the language of reports on human trafficking in four online newspapers: THISDAY Online, Premium Times, Vanguard Online, and Sunnews Online News Online. The table presents the number and percentage of reports in each language variable, including objective, urgent, and empathetic tones. The total number of reports is also provided. The majority of reports on human trafficking in these newspapers are presented in an empathetic tone, accounting for 77.88% of all reports. Reports with an urgent tone are the second most common, with 16.20% of all reports, followed by reports with an objective tone (5.92%).

Table 6: Sources of reports on human trafficking

Newspaper	NAPTIP	FG	Local residents/victims	Foreign countries	State Govts.	Others	All of the above	Total
	N (%)	N (%)	N (%)	N (%)	N (%)	N (%)	N (%)	N (%)
<i>THISDAY Online Premium Times</i>	39(31.97)	72(30.90)	30 (15.87)	5 (21.74)	28 (26.67)	44(26.83)	1(25.00)	219(26.07)
<i>Vanguard Online</i>	34(24.87)	72(30.90)	53 (28.04)	4 (17.39)	30 (28.57)	43(26.22)	2(50.00)	238(28.33)
<i>Sunnews Online News Online</i>	30(24.59)	56(24.03)	77 (40.74)	10(43.48)	35 (33.33)	42(25.61)	1(25.00)	251(29.88)
	19 (15.57)	33 (14.16)	29 (15.34)	4 (17.39)	12 (11.43)	35 (21.34)	0(0.00)	132(15.71)
	122(14.52)	233(27.74)	189(22.50)	23 (2.74)	105(12.50)	164(19.52)	4(0.48)	840(100)

Table 7 shows the sources of reports on human trafficking. The table indicates that the highest number of reports on human trafficking came from residents/victims, with 189 reports (22.5% of the total). The second-highest number of reports came from FG, with 233 reports (27.74%). The third-highest reports came from newspapers, with THISDAY Online having the highest reports (39 reports, or 31.97%). The lowest number of reports came from others, with only four reports (0.48% of the total).

Table 7: Balance of Stories

Newspaper	Balanced	Unbalanced	Total
	N (%)	N (%)	N (%)
<i>THISDAY Online</i>	107 (27.30)	52 (28.26)	159 (26.93)
<i>Premium Times</i>	100 (25.51)	46 (25.00)	146 (25.35)
<i>Vanguard Online</i>	120 (30.61)	51 (27.72)	171 (29.69)
<i>Sunnews Online News Online</i>	65 (16.58)	35 (19.02)	100 (17.36)
	392 (68.06)	184 (31.94)	576 (100)

According to Table 8 above, THISDAY Online had 107 balanced stories (27.30% of the total) and 52 unbalanced stories (28.26% of the total), resulting in a total of 159 stories (26.93% of the total). Premium Times had 100 balanced stories (25.51% of the total) and 46 unbalanced stories (25.00% of the total), resulting in a total of 146 stories (25.35% of the total). Vanguard Online had 120 balanced stories (30.61% of the total) and 51 unbalanced stories (27.72% of the total), resulting in a total of 171 stories (29.69% of the total). Sun News Online had 65 balanced stories (16.58% of the total) and 35 unbalanced stories (19.02% of the total), resulting in a total of 100 stories (17.36% of the total).

Overall, the table indicates that most stories in these online newspapers are balanced, with 392 balanced stories (68.06% of the total) compared to 184 unbalanced stories (31.94%). This suggests that these newspapers strive to provide a fair and objective representation of news stories. However, it is important to note that the table does not provide information on the criteria used to determine whether a story is balanced or unbalanced, and further research would be needed to understand the methodology behind these categorisations.

Table 8: Content categories

Newspaper	Forced labour trafficking	Sex trafficking	Child trafficking	Organ trafficking	Forced marriage trafficking	Online facilitated trafficking	Total
	N (%)	N (%)	N (%)	N (%)	N (%)	N (%)	N (%)
<i>THISDAY Online Premium Times Vanguard Online Sunnews Online News Online</i>	39 (25.16)	20 (36.36)	9(21.95)	2(28.57)	0 (0.00)	1(6.67)	71(26.59)
	38 (24.52)	10 (18.18)	10(24.39)	2(28.57)	2(66.67)	2(33.33)	64(23.97)
	45 (29.03)	14 (25.45)	14(34.15)	2(28.57)	1(33.33)	3(50.00)	79(29.59)
	33 (21.29)	11 (20.00)	8(19.51)	1(14.29)	0 (0.00)	0(0.00)	53(19.85)
	155 (58.02)	55 (20.60)	41(15.36)	7(2.62)	3 (1.12)	6(2.25)	267(100)

Table 9 shows the number and percentage of articles related to each category for each newspaper, as well as the total number and percentage of articles related to all categories for all newspapers. Forced labour trafficking is the most common content category, with 155 articles (58.02% of the total), followed by sex trafficking with 55 articles (20.60% of the total), and child trafficking with 41 articles (15.36% of the total). Organ trafficking, forced marriage trafficking, and online facilitated trafficking have fewer articles, with 7, 3, and 6 articles, respectively.

The table provides insight into the content categories covered by the four online newspapers. However, it is important to note that the table only covers a specific period and may not represent the newspapers' overall coverage of trafficking-related issues. Moreover, the table does not provide information on the quality or depth of the articles or the newspapers' editorial stance on the issue of trafficking. Therefore, further analysis is needed to understand the newspapers' coverage of trafficking-related issues fully.

Discussion of Result

Research Question One: What is the frequency of reports on human trafficking in Nigerian online news sources?

The answer is found in Table 1, which shows that the four online news sources studied published 576 stories on human trafficking within the study period. This number is significant given that other issues in the polity also received press coverage. The frequency of reports on human trafficking helped draw global awareness to human trafficking and increased its salience among the public, thus confirming the agenda-setting theory. The agenda-setting theory asserts that "what the media find important, or salient, is what the public finds important" (Papadouka, Evangelopoulos, & Ignatow, 2016). The study's findings are consistent with other research showing that online news platforms and social media increasingly influence the public agenda on social issues such as human trafficking. However, a study by Martinelli (2012) differs from this when it found that the media failed to inform the public about sex trafficking, which is a form of human trafficking. However, the addition of the internet has disrupted the agenda-setting theory slightly by blunting salience cues.

Research Question Two: What is the prominence accorded reports on human trafficking in Nigerian online news sources?

Results presented in Table 2 reveal that reports on human trafficking were accorded low prominence in the newspapers studied, with most of the stories being tucked inside the e-copies of the newspapers studied "Low prominence". This figure represents over two-thirds of all editorial matters published on human trafficking. This suggests that the online news sources did not accord the necessary importance such issues deserve. While human trafficking is a significant issue, it is often hidden in plain sight (Tirman, 2013). Forced labour accounts for two-thirds of human trafficking cases. However, it should be noted that these figures are not definitive and may be distorted, given the prominence and visibility of some forms of exploitation over others. For instance, sex workers who are victims of human trafficking may be easier to identify than trafficked labourers on farms or in factories. There is a significant reliance on qualitative methodologies in human trafficking research across all disciplines (Goździak & Bump, 2008).

Research Question Three: In what formats are human trafficking reported in Nigerian online news sources?

Table 4 provides the answer to this research question. The table provides insights into the formats used in the coverage of human trafficking. According to the table, 71.70% of the reports on human trafficking occurred as straight news, while feature articles accounted for 8.85%, and interviews represented 6.77% of the formats used. The preponderance of the straight news format suggests that the newspapers did not engage in much situation analysis, which would have aided the public in understanding the roots of human trafficking in Nigeria. However, it is possible to find similar studies and research that shed light on the prevalence of straight news format in the coverage of human trafficking. One study found that traditional news media, such as newspapers, magazines, and broadcast news operations, provide significant factual information online (Goździak & Bump, 2008). This suggests that the format used in traditional news media, such as straight news, may also be prevalent in online news sources. Additionally, the reliance on qualitative methodologies in human trafficking research across all disciplines may contribute to the prevalence of straight news format in the coverage of human trafficking (Goździak & Bump, 2008). Qualitative research often focuses on providing descriptive and narrative accounts, aligning with straight news reporting characteristics.

Research Question Four: How do Nigerian online news sources portray human trafficking?

According to the data in Table 2, 74.13% of stories were neutral, 17.01% portrayed human trafficking negatively, and only 8.85% depicted it as positive. This suggests that the online news sources offered a balanced view of the issues involved in the conflict (Virkus, 2014). To further support this finding, a study on British newspapers' representation of transnational human trafficking from 2000 to 2016 found that references to trafficking as an "epidemic," "widespread," or "rampant" were used, indicating a negative portrayal (Gregoriou, Ras, 2018). Another study examined the media framing of human trafficking and aimed to highlight positive or negative developments (Muraszkiewicz, Georgiou, & Constantinou, 2015). While there is limited specific research on the portrayal of human trafficking in newspapers, there is a growing

literature contesting the validity of negative Western media representation of Africa as a myth and empirically non-existent (Serwornoo, 2021). Additionally, some studies analyse how the media portrays victims of sex trafficking and whether it reflects an accurate understanding of legislation (Curtis, 2012).

Findings

The findings of the study are as follows:

- The four Nigerian online news sources studied published many stories on human trafficking within the study period. This may have provided Nigerians with enough information on the issues. The fact that these online news sources published a significant number of stories on human trafficking suggests that there is awareness and attention given to the issue in Nigeria, as the availability of information on human trafficking can help educate the public, raise awareness, and potentially lead to increased efforts to combat this crime.
- Reports on human trafficking were accorded low prominence in the newspapers studied, with most of the stories being reduced to mere links on the websites of the news sources. The low prominence given to reports on human trafficking in the newspapers studied indicates that this issue may not be receiving the attention it deserves. By reducing the stories to mere links on their websites, the news sources may downplay the significance of human trafficking. This could hinder efforts to raise awareness and mobilise action against this crime.
- Sex trafficking was the most frequently covered form of human trafficking in the four Nigerian online news sources studied, while child trafficking was the second most reported form of human trafficking. The focus on sex trafficking and child trafficking in the news coverage suggests that these forms of human trafficking are prevalent in Nigeria. It highlights the need for targeted interventions and efforts to address these specific forms of trafficking. It also indicates that there may be a greater public interest in stories related to sex trafficking and child trafficking, which can help generate more awareness and support for anti-trafficking initiatives.
- Most reports on human trafficking by the four Nigerian online news sources studied were straight news, while feature articles accounted for the second highest format of reportage. The predominance of straight news reports on human trafficking indicates a focus on providing factual information and updates on trafficking cases. This can help inform the public about ongoing efforts to combat human trafficking. The presence of feature articles suggests a willingness to delve deeper into the issue, potentially providing more in-depth analysis and personal stories that can engage readers and create empathy towards victims of trafficking.

Conclusion

The online news sources in Nigeria provide significant coverage of human trafficking, which can help educate the public and raise awareness to combat this crime. However, the sources accorded low prominence to reports on human trafficking, and most stories were reduced to mere links on the websites of the news sources. This indicates that human trafficking may not receive the attention it deserves, which could hinder efforts to raise awareness and mobilise action against this crime. The focus on sex trafficking and child trafficking in the news coverage suggests that these forms of human trafficking are prevalent in Nigeria, highlighting the need for targeted interventions and efforts to

address these specific forms of trafficking. The predominance of straight news reports on human trafficking indicates a focus on providing factual information and updates on trafficking cases, while the presence of feature articles suggests a willingness to delve deeper into the issue. Overall, there is still a need for more attention to this issue in newspapers.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of the study, the following recommendations can be made:

1. Increase the prominence of reports on human trafficking: The study found that reports on human trafficking were accorded low prominence in the online news sources studied, with a majority of the stories being reduced to mere links on the websites of the news sources. Nigerian online news sources should give more prominence to reports on human trafficking to raise awareness and mobilise action against this crime.
2. Provide more in-depth analysis and personal stories: Most reports on human trafficking by the four Nigerian online news sources studied were straight news, while feature articles accounted for the second highest format of reportage. News sources should provide more in-depth analysis and personal stories to engage readers and create empathy towards victims of trafficking.
3. Collaborate with anti-trafficking organisations: The study found that significant efforts are being made to combat human trafficking in Nigeria. News sources can collaborate with anti-trafficking organisations to provide accurate and up-to-date information on human trafficking and to raise awareness about the issue.

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