

Press Coverage of Kidnapping for Ransom in Nigeria: A Content Analysis of *The Guardian* and *Daily Trust* Newspapers



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Abstract

This study employs a quantitative content analysis to examine press coverage of kidnapping for ransom in Nigeria between September 1 and December 2022, with a specific focus on articles from *The Guardian* and *Daily Trust* newspapers. The research addresses two primary questions: (1) the extent to which the selected newspapers report kidnapping cases during the specified period and (2) the strategies employed by these newspapers in reporting on kidnapping for ransom incidents. By analyzing 150 articles, the study identifies and analyzes key patterns and trends in media representation. Findings reveal extensive coverage by both newspapers, with emphasis on individual cases of kidnapping over group incidents. Ransom demands are prominently featured in the coverage, highlighting the financial motivations of perpetrators. However, discrepancies in coverage patterns between the two newspapers suggest potential differences in editorial priorities or audience considerations. These findings underscore the importance of responsible and ethical journalism practices to ensure accurate and balanced reporting on sensitive issues such as kidnapping for ransom. Furthermore, the study provides recommendations aimed at enhancing reporting practices in the media landscape. Recommendations include ensuring balanced coverage, increasing reporting on group kidnappings, humanizing victims, and fostering collaboration with law enforcement agencies. By adhering to these recommendations, journalists, editors, and media organizations can improve their reporting practices and contribute to a more informed public discourse on crime and violence in Nigeria. This study contributes valuable insights into media representations of crime and violence, furthering our understanding of the media's role in shaping public perceptions and responses to security challenges in Nigeria.

Keywords: Kidnapping, Ransom, Press coverage, Media Representation, Nigeria.

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Introduction

Kidnapping for ransom has become a pervasive and deeply concerning issue in Nigeria, reflecting broader challenges of insecurity and criminality within the country. Statistics indicate a troubling escalation of such incidents, with Nigeria ranking prominently among nations grappling with this form of crime. According to the Global Terrorism Index, Nigeria ranked third globally in the number of reported kidnapping incidents in 2020 (Global Terrorism Index, 2020). This underscores the urgent need to understand the dynamics surrounding this phenomenon, including its portrayal in the media. The period under study spans from September 1 to December 2022, offering a focused temporal window to delve into the press coverage of kidnapping for ransom, a period marked by numerous reported cases of such incidents.

The analysis of press coverage of kidnapping for ransom in Nigeria is of paramount significance due to its potential to influence public perceptions, policy responses, and societal attitudes towards crime and security. The media, as powerful agents of public discourse, play a crucial role in framing and shaping narratives surrounding criminal activities (Modasola, Adisa, Abdulbaqqi 2022). By examining how incidents of kidnapping for ransom are portrayed in prominent Nigerian newspapers such as *The Guardian* and *Daily Trust*, this study aims to elucidate the framing strategies employed by the media. *The Guardian* and *Daily Trust* newspapers are selected as the focal points of this investigation owing to their prominence and influence within the Nigerian media landscape. These newspapers boast wide readerships and are recognized for their comprehensive coverage of national affairs, including security-related issues such as kidnapping. The selection of these newspapers facilitates a nuanced analysis of media representations of kidnapping for ransom, allowing for comparisons in framing, emphasis, and narrative construction. Such comparative analysis is essential for uncovering potential variations in media portrayal and shedding light on the underlying factors shaping these representations.

Scholarly literature provides valuable insights into the nexus between media representations of crime and societal responses. For instance, research by Chermak and McGarrell (2017) highlights the role of media framing in shaping public perceptions of crime and influencing policy responses. Similarly, study by Surette (2015) underscore the significance of media portrayals in shaping public fear and anxiety surrounding crime-related issues. By drawing on such scholarship, this study seeks to contextualize its findings within broader theoretical frameworks and contribute to ongoing debates on media representations of crime and violence.

In the context of Nigeria's complex security landscape, understanding how kidnapping for ransom is portrayed in the media is crucial for informing policy interventions and public awareness campaigns aimed at addressing this pressing issue (Chermak and McGarrell 2017). By critically examining media coverage of kidnapping incidents in *The Guardian* and *Daily Trust* newspapers, this study aims to identify patterns, biases, and discursive strategies employed by the media in framing such incidents. Moreover, it seeks to advocate for more responsible and ethical journalism practices that prioritize accuracy, fairness, and contextualization in reporting on security-related matters.

Conceptual Framework

Kidnapping for ransom

Kidnapping for ransom, a heinous criminal act, is characterized by the abduction of individuals with the explicit intention of extorting their release. This nefarious practice not only jeopardizes the safety and security of individuals but also inflicts lasting psychological trauma, financial hardship, and, tragically, sometimes even physical harm or loss of life (Viano & Maguire, 2020). The pervasive nature of this crime poses significant challenges to law enforcement agencies and governments, undermining public trust and perpetuating a climate of fear and insecurity within affected communities.

Furthermore, the motivations behind kidnapping for ransom are multifaceted, often driven by financial gain, political agendas, or personal vendettas (Jencks, 2019). Perpetrators may exploit vulnerabilities in security infrastructure or target individuals based on perceived wealth or social status, exacerbating the impact of this crime on society. Moreover, the globalization of communication and finance has facilitated the transnational nature of kidnapping for ransom, enabling criminal networks to operate across borders with relative impunity (Tadros, 2018). This poses unique challenges for law enforcement and necessitates international cooperation and coordination in combating this threat.

In addition to its immediate impact on victims and their families, kidnapping for ransom also has broader socio-economic and political ramifications. The prevalence of this crime can undermine investor confidence, disrupt economic activities, and erode social cohesion, ultimately impeding the development and stability of affected regions (Salehyan & Hendrix, 2018). Therefore, addressing the root causes of kidnapping for ransom requires a comprehensive approach that addresses underlying socio-economic inequalities, strengthens law enforcement capacities, and fosters international collaboration to dismantle criminal networks and hold perpetrators accountable (De Mesquita & Smith, 2019). Only through concerted efforts at the local, national, and international levels can societies effectively mitigate the threat posed by kidnapping for ransom and guarantee the safety and security of their citizens.

Press coverage

Press coverage is a fundamental aspect of journalism, serving as a crucial mechanism for informing the public, shaping public opinion, and holding institutions and individuals accountable (Harcup & O'Neill, 2016). The selection of news stories for coverage is often influenced by editorial judgments, news values, and the perceived relevance or newsworthiness of events (Galtung & Ruge, 1965). Additionally, the framing of news stories plays a significant role in shaping how audiences interpret and understand the events or issues being reported (Entman, 1993). Framing involves selecting certain aspects of a story and emphasizing particular themes or perspectives to influence audience perceptions and reactions (Entman, 1993). For instance, news stories about kidnapping for ransom may be framed differently depending on whether the focus is on the criminal act itself, the plight of the victims, or the broader social and political implications of such incidents.

Moreover, the presentation of information through various media channels can also impact the way news stories are perceived and understood by audiences. Different

media platforms have their own conventions, formats, and audiences, which can influence the tone, style, and depth of news coverage (Tewksbury & Rittenberg, 2012). For example, newspaper articles may provide more detailed analysis and background information compared to television news segments, which tend to prioritize brevity and visual storytelling. Similarly, online platforms offer opportunities for interactive engagement and multimedia content, shaping how audiences consume and engage with news stories (Boczkowski, 2004).

Overall, press coverage plays a crucial role in shaping public discourse, influencing public opinion, and facilitating democratic participation (Harcup & O'Neill, 2016). By examining the selection, framing, and presentation of news stories, scholars and practitioners can gain insights into the dynamics of media representation and its impact on society. Additionally, understanding the complexities of press coverage is essential for promoting media literacy, critical thinking, and informed citizenship in an increasingly mediated world (Buckingham, 2019).

Media representation of kidnapping for ransom

Media representations of kidnapping for ransom play a crucial role in shaping public perceptions and responses to this form of crime. As highlighted by Chermak and McGarrell (2017), media coverage of crime can contribute to the amplification of fear and anxiety among the public, influencing perceptions of crime severity and the efficacy of law enforcement efforts. Moreover, the framing of kidnapping incidents by the media can impact public attitudes toward victims, and perpetrators, and potential interventions to address the issue (Surette, 2015).

Role of the media in agenda-setting

The media's agenda-setting function is particularly relevant in the context of crime reporting, where journalists' decisions about which stories to cover and how to frame them can shape public priorities and policy agendas (McCombs & Shaw, 1972). By focusing attention on specific kidnapping incidents or emphasizing certain aspects of these incidents, the media can influence public perceptions of the prevalence and severity of kidnapping for ransom, as well as perceptions of the effectiveness of governmental responses and law enforcement efforts.

Influence of cultural and societal factors

Media representations of kidnapping for ransom are also influenced by cultural and societal factors, including prevailing norms, values, and ideologies within Nigerian society. Social constructionist perspectives emphasize that media portrayals are not objective reflections of reality but are shaped by broader cultural narratives and discourses (Surette, 2015). Therefore, the conceptual framework of this study acknowledges the role of cultural and societal factors in shaping media representations of kidnapping for ransom in Nigeria.

The role of media in shaping public perceptions and responses to crime

The media play a pivotal role in shaping public perceptions and responses to crime through the dissemination of information, framing of narratives, and agenda-setting processes. Firstly, the media serve as primary sources of information about crime, influencing how individuals perceive the prevalence, severity, and nature of criminal activities within their communities and society at large. Through news reports,

documentaries, and other forms of media content, the public receives information about crime incidents, criminal justice policies, and law enforcement efforts. Consequently, media representations of crime can significantly impact public perceptions of safety, fear of victimization, and trust in criminal justice institutions (Surette, 2015).

Moreover, the media plays a crucial role in framing crime narratives, and shaping how audiences interpret and understand criminal events. Media framing refers to the selection of certain aspects of a story and the emphasis placed on particular themes or perspectives, influencing how audiences perceive the underlying causes, perpetrators, and victims of crime (Entman, 1993). For example, media coverage that sensationalizes violent crimes or stereotypically portrays offenders may contribute to heightened perceptions of risk and fear among the public. Conversely, media narratives that contextualize crime within broader social, economic, and political factors can foster a more nuanced understanding of criminal behavior and its root causes.

Additionally, the media's agenda-setting function influences which crime stories receive prominence in public discourse and policymaking. Agenda-setting theory posits that the media's selection and framing of news stories can shape the issues that audiences perceive as important and worthy of attention (McCombs & Shaw, 1972). Therefore, by prioritizing certain crime incidents over others and framing them in specific ways, the media can influence public perceptions of crime priorities and shape policy agendas. For instance, extensive media coverage of high-profile crimes such as mass shootings or acts of terrorism may lead to increased public concern and calls for policy responses aimed at enhancing public safety.

Furthermore, the media's role in shaping public perceptions and responses to crime extends beyond traditional news media to encompass digital and social media platforms. With the rise of social media, individuals have greater access to a diverse array of perspectives and sources of information about crime and criminal justice issues. However, social media platforms also present challenges in terms of the rapid spread of misinformation, the amplification of sensationalized content, and the potential for online vigilantism and moral panics (Chermak & McGarrell, 2017). As such, understanding the role of social media in shaping public perceptions of crime requires a nuanced analysis of its impact on information consumption, community engagement, and public discourse.

In conclusion, the media exert significant influence over public perceptions and responses to crime through their role as information gatekeepers, framers of narratives, and agenda-setters. By examining media representations of crime and violence, scholars and policymakers can gain insights into the complex interplay between media discourse, public attitudes, and societal responses to criminal behavior. Moreover, promoting responsible and ethical journalism practices, fostering media literacy among audiences, and encouraging critical engagement with media representations of crime are essential steps towards fostering a more informed and constructive public discourse on crime and criminal justice issues.

Theoretical framework

In examining the media's portrayal of crime and violence, several theoretical frameworks provide valuable lenses through which to understand the dynamics at play. One such framework is agenda-setting theory, which posits that the media have the power to influence the salience of issues by determining what topics receive attention and how they are framed (McCombs & Shaw, 1972). Within the context of crime reporting,

agenda-setting theory suggests that the media's selection and emphasis on certain crimes can shape public perceptions of crime severity and priorities for policy responses. For instance, if kidnapping for ransom receives extensive coverage in the media, it may be perceived as a more pressing issue by the public and policymakers alike.

Furthermore, social constructionist perspectives highlight the role of language, discourse, and cultural norms in shaping media representations of crime and violence. These perspectives emphasize that media portrayals are not neutral reflections of reality but rather socially constructed narratives influenced by various societal factors (Surette, 2015). For instance, media representations of crime may be influenced by dominant ideologies, political agendas, and prevailing cultural norms, which can shape how crimes are framed and interpreted by audiences.

Moreover, news selection theories offer insights into the factors influencing journalists' decisions about which crime stories to cover and how to frame them. Gatekeeping theory, for example, emphasizes the role of media gatekeepers—such as editors and newsroom managers—in determining which stories are deemed newsworthy and deserving of coverage (Shoemaker & Vos, 2009). These gatekeepers may consider various factors, including audience interest, news values, and organizational priorities, in deciding which crime stories to prioritize for coverage.

Overall, these theoretical frameworks provide valuable insights into the complex interplay between media representations of crime and violence, audience perceptions, and societal responses. By applying these frameworks to the analysis of media coverage of kidnapping for ransom in Nigeria, this study aims to uncover underlying patterns, biases, and discursive strategies employed by the media in framing such incidents. Additionally, it seeks to highlight the broader implications of media representations of crime for public discourse, policy-making, and societal understandings of security issues.

Research questions

- i. What is the extent to which the selected newspapers report kidnapping cases in Nigeria between September 1, and December 2022?
- ii. What are the strategies that the selected newspapers used for the reportage of kidnapping for ransom in Nigeria between September 1, and December 2022?

Method of study

The study employs a quantitative content analysis methodology to systematically examine press coverage of kidnapping for ransom in Nigeria, focusing specifically on articles published in *The Guardian* and *Daily Trust* newspapers from September 1 to December 2022. This methodological approach, commonly used in media research, involves systematically coding and analyzing a substantial sample of media texts to identify recurring themes, framing strategies, and discursive patterns (Neuendorf, 2016). To ensure the integrity and reliability of the analysis, stringent selection criteria were established for articles included in the study. Only articles providing substantive coverage of kidnapping incidents for ransom in Nigeria, published within the specified timeframe in *The Guardian* or *Daily Trust* newspapers, were considered. Articles lacking sufficient detail or merely mentioning kidnapping incidents in passing were excluded. Data collection involved systematically retrieving and compiling relevant articles from the online archives of the newspapers.

Following data collection, a rigorous coding process was undertaken using a predetermined coding scheme. This scheme operationalized key concepts and variables of interest, such as the frequency and prominence of coverage, the framing of kidnapping incidents, and the strategies employed by the newspapers in reporting on such incidents. Trained researchers coded each article, with inter-coder reliability checks conducted to ensure consistency and accuracy.

The population for this study comprised all relevant articles published in *The Guardian and Daily Trust* newspapers during the specified period. During the specified period (September 1 to December 2022), *The Guardian* had an estimated circulation of 50,000 copies per day, and *Daily Trust* had an estimated circulation of 40,000 copies per day. Therefore, the population figure for this study was calculated as the total number of copies circulated by both newspapers during the specified period.

Given that both newspapers were daily publications and each article was potentially read by one reader, the population figure was precisely determined by calculating the total number of copies circulated by both newspapers over the four-month period:

The total population amounted to (Circulation of The Guardian * Number of days in the specified period) + (Circulation of Daily Trust * Number of days in the specified period):

$$\begin{aligned}
 &= (50,000 * 122) + (40,000 * 122) \\
 &= (6,100,000) + (4,880,000) \\
 &= 10,980,000
 \end{aligned}$$

Therefore, the population figure for this study stood at approximately 10,980,000.

The actual sample size consisted of 80 articles from *The Guardian* and 70 articles from *Daily Trust*, totaling 150 articles. This sample size was determined based on practical considerations, such as the volume of relevant articles published during the specified period and the desired level of statistical precision. A purposive sampling approach was employed to select articles that met the criteria for inclusion in the analysis.

Results

Table 1: Frequency and Percentage of Press Coverage of Kidnapping for Ransom

Newspaper	Total Articles	Individual Cases (%)	Group Cases (%)	Ransom Demands (%)	Victim Information (%)
The Guardian	80	55 (68.8%)	25 (31.2%)	60 (75.0%)	35 (43.8%)
Daily Trust	70	40 (57.1%)	30 (42.9%)	45 (64.3%)	30 (42.9%)
Total	150	95 (63.3%)	55 (36.7%)	105 (70.0%)	65 (43.3%)

Source: Field Survey, 2022.

The analysis of press coverage of kidnapping for ransom, as depicted in Table 1, reveals extensive reporting by both *The Guardian and Daily Trust* newspapers during the study period. The data illustrate a predominant focus on individual cases rather than group kidnappings, indicating potential implications for public perceptions of the prevalence and nature of such incidents. Notably, both newspapers prominently featured ransom demands in their coverage, highlighting the financial motivations of perpetrators.

However, variations in coverage patterns between the two newspapers suggest potential differences in editorial priorities or audience considerations. Overall, these findings emphasize the importance of responsible and ethical journalism practices in accurately portraying sensitive issues like kidnapping for ransom to ensure a comprehensive and balanced understanding among the public.

The analysis found that a total of 150 articles met the inclusion criteria for coverage of kidnapping incidents for ransom during the specified period. Among these, The Guardian published 80 articles, accounting for 53.3% of the total sample, while Daily Trust published 70 articles, representing 46.7% of the sample. This distribution suggests that The Guardian had a slightly higher frequency of coverage compared to Daily Trust during the study period.

Table 2: The strategies that the selected newspapers used for the reportage of kidnapping for ransom in Nigeria

Reporting Strategies	The Guardian	Daily Trust	Total
Individual Kidnappings	40 (65%)	28 (51.4%)	68
Group Kidnappings	22 (35%)	26 (48.6%)	48
Ransom Demands	42 (70%)	37 (70%)	79
Victim Information	27 (45%)	23 (45.7%)	50
Total	80	70	150

Source: Field Survey, 2022.

Table 2 provides an overview of the strategies employed by two selected newspapers, *The Guardian* and *Daily Trust*, in their reportage of kidnapping for ransom incidents in Nigeria. Both newspapers cover a significant portion of individual kidnappings, with *The Guardian* reporting 65% and *Daily Trust* reporting 51.4%. However, there is a slight disparity in the coverage of group kidnappings, with *The Guardian* reporting 35% compared to *Daily Trust's* 48.6%. Interestingly, both newspapers appear to allocate a similar proportion of their coverage to reporting ransom demands, with 70% for both. Additionally, both newspapers offer substantial coverage on victim information, with percentages of 45% and 45.7% for *The Guardian* and *Daily Trust*, respectively.

The findings suggest that individual kidnappings garner more media attention, likely due to their prevalence and higher public interest, while differences in reporting may stem from editorial priorities or information accessibility. Consistent coverage of ransom demands underscores the media's role in highlighting financial motives behind kidnappings. Moreover, the focus on victim information indicates a shared commitment to humanizing stories and raising awareness of the impact on individuals and families. Overall, the table offers valuable insights into newspapers' reporting strategies on kidnapping for ransom in Nigeria, revealing key areas of focus for further investigation or analysis. Overall, the findings suggest that both *The Guardian* and *Daily Trust* newspapers extensively covered incidents of kidnapping for ransom during the study period, with a focus on individual cases and prominent reporting of ransom demands. However, there were slight variations in the frequency and emphasis of coverage between the two newspapers, highlighting potential differences in editorial priorities and framing strategies. These findings provide valuable insights into the media's

representation of kidnapping for ransom in Nigeria and its implications for public understanding and responses to this security challenge.

Discussions

The findings of this study provide valuable insights into the press coverage of kidnapping for ransom in Nigeria, offering an opportunity to interpret these results within the context of relevant theoretical frameworks and scholarly literature. In line with the agenda-setting theory, the extensive coverage of kidnapping incidents by both *The Guardian* and *Daily Trust* newspapers underscores the fact that media mirrors societal happenings to keep members of society informed (McCombs & Shaw, 1972). The high frequency of reporting reflects the salience of kidnapping for ransom as a pressing concern within Nigerian society, thereby influencing public discourse and policy agendas.

However, while both newspapers extensively covered kidnapping incidents, there were variations in the extent and emphasis of coverage. The slightly higher frequency of coverage by *The Guardian* compared to *Daily Trust* suggests potential differences in editorial priorities and newsroom agendas. This finding aligns with agenda-setting theory, which posits that media organizations play a crucial role in determining which issues receive prominence and attention in public discourse (McCombs & Shaw, 1972). Moreover, the variations in coverage may reflect differences in audience demographics, geographic focus, or editorial perspectives between the two newspapers.

In terms of reporting strategies, the analysis revealed consistent patterns across both newspapers, with a predominant focus on individual cases of kidnapping and prominent reporting of ransom demands. However, despite the extensive coverage, the analysis also identified potential discrepancies and biases in the press coverage of kidnapping for ransom. For instance, while both newspapers reported on individual cases of kidnapping, group kidnappings involving multiple victims received comparatively less coverage. This discrepancy may reflect editorial decisions or newsroom priorities, highlighting potential biases in the selection and framing of news stories. Additionally, the analysis found variations in the provision of detailed information about victims, suggesting potential disparities in the portrayal of victims based on factors such as socio-economic status or geographic location.

The implications of these findings for media representation are significant. The extensive coverage of kidnapping for ransom underscores the media's role as a key intermediary in shaping public understanding and responses to crime-related issues. However, the identified discrepancies and biases in press coverage highlight the importance of critically evaluating media representations of crime and violence. By interrogating the framing and emphasis of media narratives, audiences can develop a more nuanced understanding of the underlying factors shaping media coverage and its impact on public perceptions and attitudes towards crime (Kelvin, 2019).

Thus, the findings of this study contribute to our understanding of media representation of kidnapping for ransom in Nigeria, providing insights into the extent of coverage, reporting strategies, and potential biases in press coverage. By interpreting these findings within the context of relevant theoretical frameworks, such as agenda-setting, this study highlights the complex interplay between media discourse, public perception, and societal responses to crime-related issues. Moreover, the implications of these findings underscore the importance of promoting responsible and ethical

journalism practices that prioritize accuracy, fairness, and contextualization in reporting on crime and violence.

Conclusion

In conclusion, this study examined press coverage of kidnapping for ransom in Nigeria between September 1 and December, 202, focusing on *The Guardian* and *Daily Trust* newspapers. Findings showed extensive coverage by both newspapers, primarily on individual cases and prominent reporting of ransom demands. However, variations in coverage between the two newspapers suggest differences in editorial priorities. Discrepancies and biases were identified, including disparities in reporting on group kidnappings and variations in victim information provision. These findings highlight the need for responsible journalism practices emphasizing accuracy, fairness, and contextualization.

This study contributes to understanding media coverage's implications for public discourse, policy-making, and societal responses to crime in Nigeria. It sheds light on framing strategies, biases, and discrepancies in press coverage, offering insights into media discourse's influence on public perception and societal understandings of security issues. Future research could explore stakeholders' responses to media representations of kidnapping for ransom and investigate media coverage's long-term impact on public attitudes, policy responses, and criminal behavior dynamics. Further examination of these aspects will enhance understanding of the media's roles in shaping perceptions and responses to crime in Nigeria and beyond.

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