

## **NIGERIAN NEWSPAPER FRAMING OF HUMAN TRAFFICKING: THE NEXUS OF PUBLIC PERCEPTION**

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### **Abstract**

Over the years, the problematic issue of human trafficking has become a salient feature in Nigerian newspapers. While the media salience of human trafficking has a considerable impact, some argue the overall coverage of the phenomenon has been superficial, leading to varying perceptions and interpretations of the issue. Using a combination of quantitative content analysis and questionnaire survey methods within the framework of agenda-setting theory, this paper investigated the coverage of human trafficking by Nigerian newspapers and how the coverage implicates public perception of the problem. Findings revealed the newspapers frame human trafficking predominantly as direct or straight news. It emerged that the newspapers' framing of human trafficking issues had a significant positive relationship with public perception of the problem. The result suggests that readers are open to news stories where alternative views and nuanced perspectives about human trafficking are provided. The findings underscore the need to educate the readers about the multifaceted nature of and consequences of human trafficking. Providing broader well-researched stories from multiple sources could engender a nuanced public perception about human trafficking.

**Keywords:** Public Awareness, Public Perceptions, Newspaper Framing, Human Trafficking

### **INTRODUCTION**

Human trafficking continues to attract intense media scrutiny as the practice evolves globally. Human trafficking is a convoluted term that spans the trafficking of men and children for forced and cheap labour in domestic, agricultural, textile, and construction enterprises. It includes the trafficking of people for organ harvesting and ritual purposes (Prina, 2004). Increased media spotlight over the years has helped to create more awareness about the problematic issue. However, while the media salience of human trafficking has a considerable impact, some argue the overall coverage of the phenomenon has been superficial (Gulati, 2010, 2012), leading to varying perceptions and interpretations of the issue over space and time and among different social groups.

Existing scholarship on media coverage of human trafficking, which is mainly on European, American, and Asian societies, has tended to focus on the framing of human trafficking (Gulati, 2010; Sanford, Martinez and Weitzer, 2016; Sobel, 2014, 2016; Virku, 2014); focus of

coverage especially Sex trafficking (Gulati, 2012; Martinelli, 2012; Ngan, 2014); trafficking of women and children (Manzo, 2018), and the sources of information (Gulati, 2010; Kaye and Hastie, 2015). Similarly, in Nigeria, studies on human trafficking have tended to focus on narrow and specific aspects such as causes of human trafficking (Adepelumi, 2015; Badejo, 2016), trafficking of women and children (Dugan, 2016; Kwagyang, Saulawa and Daud, 2016; Manzo, 2005; Nkememena, 2009; Nwodu and Ezeoke, 2013) and preventive measures (CTDC, 2020).

To date, little or no research has examined the relationship between newspaper framing of human trafficking and public perceptions of the social issue. Therefore, this article aims to ascertain whether newspaper framing influences public perception of human trafficking issues in Nigeria. It was hypothesised that 'there is a significant relationship between newspapers' framing of human trafficking stories and public perception of human trafficking issues in Nigeria. . The following section presents an overview of human trafficking globally, Nigeria mainly.

### **The Context**

Human trafficking has emerged as one of the greatest crimes against humanity in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. The United Nations (2000) defines human trafficking as the 'recruitment, transportation, transfer, harbouring, or receipt of persons, using threat or use of force, other forms of coercion, of abduction, of fraud, of deception, of the abuse of power or a position of vulnerability or of giving or receiving of payments or benefits to achieve the consent of a person having control over another person for exploitation'. Kuhl (2011) describes human trafficking as a reincarnation of the slave trade abolished over two hundred years ago. Okeshola (2018) agrees that human trafficking is a modern form of slavery and an illegal form of business that constitutes a social problem. Some scholars conceive human trafficking as an affront to basic values and the fundamental belief that everyone everywhere deserves to live and work safely and with dignity (Sanford, Martinez, and Weitzer, 2016).

Scholars are unanimous that human trafficking is a heinous act that affects different categories of people in varying degrees, causing an unbridled myriad of hardships on victims - primarily women and children (Kwagyang, Saulawa, and Daud, 2016; Oster, 2015). Human trafficking affects the dignity of the victims by putting them in a position of feeling helpless, depressed, and unwanted in society. It produces other harmful consequences, including curtailment of victims' freedom, fundamental human rights, a threat to life, deprivations, and trauma, including depression. (Kwagyang, Saulawa, and Daud, 2016).

Some scholars attribute the increase in prostitution, armed robbery, forced labour, domestic violence, child and adult abuse, sex trafficking, domestic servitude, and debt bondage to human trafficking (Manzo, 2005). The global impact of human trafficking manifests in deteriorating economies, increasing global violence and threat to public health and safety, erosion of families, and social cohesion necessary for progress (Oyero, 2012).

Over the years, human trafficking has grown in magnitude and geographic spread, causing the United Nations to criminalise it under the protocols of Transnational Organized Crime in 2000

(Johnston, Friedman and Shafer, 2012). Globally, over 108,613 individual cases were reported in 2019 across 164 countries on five continents (CTDC, 2020). In the Americas, over two-thirds of victims trafficked experience sexual exploitation, more than 80% of victims are female, and almost a third, children. The majority of victims trafficked in Europe are adults, with a slightly higher proportion trafficked for labour than sexual exploitation.

In Africa, the report showed that more than half of those trafficked were children with almost equal proportions male and female. Most victims of human trafficking in Asia faced labour exploitation, particularly domestic work. Only Oceania had very few cases of human trafficking or exploitation, according to the CTDC global victim of trafficking dataset. In general, children are indicated to be controlled more through physical abuse and psychoactive substances than adults, while psychological control tactics were used to control victims of trafficking for sexual exploitation (CTDC, 2020).

Like in many parts of the world, human trafficking is a significant problem in Nigeria. The Trafficking in Persons (Prohibition) Law Enforcement and Administration Act (2003), defines trafficking as ‘all acts and attempted acts involved in the recruitment, transportation within or across Nigeria borders, purchases, sales, transfer, receipt or harbouring of a person involving the use of deception, coercion or debt bondage to place or hold the persons, whether for or not involuntary servitude (domestic, sexual or reproductive) in forced or bonded labour, or in slavery-like conditions’.

Human trafficking is the third most common crime in Nigeria after drug trafficking and economic fraud (Badejo, 2016). Nigeria occupies an unenviable position in the “Tier 2 Watch list” by the United States Department’s Office to Monitor and Combat Trafficking in Persons. In the Global Slavery Index (2018) report, Nigeria ranked 32/167 of the countries with the highest number of slaves –1,386,000 – and the country’s National Agency for the Prohibition of Trafficking in Persons (NAPTIP, 2016) reports that the average age of trafficked children in Nigeria, is 15years. The agency’s report showed that trafficking across state borders accounts for 75 per cent of trafficked people within Nigeria, while 23 per cent are trafficked within states. Only 2.0 per cent of victims were trafficked outside the country.

For instance, in Edo and Lagos states, cases abound where human trafficking agents who promised to smuggle many young girls to Italy, Germany, Cairo (Egypt), and other parts of world duped them of large sums of money. Despite the knowledge that they risked being trafficked for prostitution or exposed to various physical and health dangers, including HIV/AIDS and sometimes death, many young Nigerians continue to succumb to the lure of human traffickers.

Government and non-governmental organisations have introduced several measures, including laws to combat the menace of human trafficking. Titilayo Atiku, the wife of the former vice-president of Nigeria, initiated the first worthwhile effort to draw attention to human trafficking in Nigeria with the establishment of the Women Trafficking and Child Labour Eradication Foundation (WOTCLEF) in 2000(NAPTIP, 2017),. The Foundation provided the platform for a coordinated fight against human trafficking. Subsequently, the National Agency for

Prohibition of Trafficking in Persons and Other Related Matters (NAPTIP) was established in 2003 and entrusted with observing, arresting, and prosecuting human traffickers and rehabilitating victims of human trafficking in Nigeria. The NAPTIP Act was amended in 2005, prohibiting all forms of human trafficking and increasing penalties for trafficking offenders. The law prescribed a monetary fine and five years' imprisonment with hard labour, among others (NAPTIP, 2017). Nevertheless, the illicit trafficking of Nigerians persists.

Some scholars attribute the increasing vulnerability of Nigerians to human trafficking to extreme poverty, corruption, conflict, and climate change, which results in migration and 'western consumerism' (Adepelumi, 2015). Others blame the continuous rise in the cases of human trafficking in Nigeria on globalization, which has created discriminations and imbalances resulting in the migration from poor economic regions, usually rural areas, into big cities perceived to have more in terms of economic prospects and stability. The concomitant effect of this rural-urban migration is congestions in some major cities in Nigeria such as Lagos, Ibadan, Abuja, Aba, Onitsha, Kano, and Port-Harcourt because of the preconceived notions of a better life in these urban areas by the trafficked persons.

When human trafficking became prominent in Nigeria in the late 1990s and early 2000s, the press was in the vanguard of creating awareness about the menace. Since then, the media has reported efforts to stop sex trafficking, brothel raids, and measures by the legislature and law enforcement officials to prevent human trafficking. That the Nigerian media covers human trafficking is clear, but how this coverage influences public perception of this social problem is unclear. This article attempts to fill this gap.

### **Dialectics over newspaper coverage and framing of human trafficking**

Coverage of human trafficking continues to elicit divergent views in the literature. For instance, a content analysis of leading newspapers in the US, Great Britain, and Canada found that although coverage of human trafficking has expanded, especially within newspapers with higher circulation (Burnette, 2010), the majority of stories focused primarily on sex trafficking (Gulati, 2010). This is consistent with previous studies (Marchionni, 2012) that investigated media representation of human trafficking.

Similarly, in their analysis of 'media framing of human trafficking in India, Thailand, and the USA', Sobel (2014) notes that newspaper articles focus 'on crime and officials while human rights and public health received little attention. More importantly, Sobel found that the voices of the victims were subdued or absent in the human trafficking stories analysed,

Gulati (2010) attributes the absence of alternative voices in human trafficking stories to the tendency of newspapers to frame their reports from official or dominant perspectives, which the newspapers rarely challenge (Sanford, Martínez, and Weitzer, 2016.)

According to Gulati (2010), the predominant viewpoints about human trafficking in mainstream media are often a reproduction of the narratives held or canvassed by official sources. Many newspaper articles tend to follow the frames of references constructed by the government in identifying the prescribed, 'legitimate' or 'ideal victims' of trafficking – mostly

vulnerable minors and females subjected to hardships (Lee, 2010). The heavy reliance on official perspectives and sources limits 'alternative views' on the issue and 'legitimize the views and decisions of established policymakers and criticism of government policy' (Gulati, 2010: 1).

In the Nigerian media landscape, the coverage of human trafficking remains shallow, focusing on human-interest stories such as the trafficking of women for sexual exploitation. Also frequently featured are the ugly experiences of young men caught up in the vicious web of human trafficking operations as they seek to emigrate abroad for greener pastures, albeit illegally (Dugan, 2016). These stories rarely contextualise the issues, especially the socio-economic problems of human trafficking or the closely-knit network of syndicates. Instead, much attention is given to portraying personal traumas, presenting victims as naïve and sometimes in an overly compassionate manner (Oster, 2015). For instance, in 2018, the media carried news stories of the repatriation of many Nigerians trafficked to Libya. After breaking these stories, there was no further news or follow-up to ascertain what the government was doing to forestall future re-occurrence or re-integrate the victims back to society.

The inability to carry out in-depth and investigative reporting is not peculiar to human trafficking issues. Generally, in-depth and investigative reporting in national newspapers has waned in recent years. Ciboh (2017) found that only 25% of newspaper news content is sourced independently or through the personal enterprise of journalists. Onyenakeya and Salawu (2020: 97) attribute the situation to 'a welter of socio-cultural, economic and professional deficits'. When covering human trafficking and unmasking the individuals and entities involved in the heinous racketeering, the Nigerian press has been found wanting. Many of the revelations on the issue have become known through international media and agencies.

There is no gainsaying that the news media can significantly influence public perceptions of and policy directions on social issues such as human trafficking (Riffe, Lacy and Fico, 2014; Vance, 2012). Because the mass media reaches a vast and diversified population simultaneously, it can disseminate messages about burning societal issues more widely, rapidly, and continuously (Martinelli, 2012). The media plays a vital role in audience perceptions. However, by selecting specific issues and portraying them frequently and prominently, the media can lead people to perceive those issues as more important than others (Wu and Renita, 2009). Newspaper framing can influence readers' perception leading to the acceptance of a specific meaning or viewpoint. This suggests that negative framing of social problems such as human trafficking can significantly influence people.

Media representation of human trafficking has focused on the human-angle stories and criminality associated with the menace. Contrary to the pervasive media framing, which projects criminal activity as the primary causative factor of human trafficking (Gulati, 2010), multiple factors have allowed the illicit business to flourish. While human angle stories about human trafficking are important and must be encouraged, however, focusing on this type of stereotypical reportage, which often sensationalise the criminal aspects of the sex trade and illegal immigration, fails to capture the multidimensional nature and exploitation inherent in human trafficking (Dugan, 2016; Oster, 2015).

Oster (2015) holds that by reinforcing stereotypical and negative images about people, the media misrepresents individuals' involvement in issues and project a single often top-down narrative that conflates and complicates the understanding of the multidimensional nature of human trafficking. This is because such media representation excludes alternative views, especially the voices of victims, and limits the ability of the public to come to an informed opinion. According to Ngan (2014), media coverage of human trafficking from narrow, sensational, and establishment perspectives can implicate public perception and attitude to the issue (Ngan, 2014).

Additionally, what the media report and how it reports goes some way in shaping policy, government's action agenda and implications for those involved (Ngan, 2014). Some scholars hold that the nature of newspaper coverage of issues relating to human trafficking in Nigeria could determine to a great extent whether the public considers it a problem or not (Kaye and Hastie, 2015). Superficial coverage of human trafficking that criminalises and sensationalises victims' ordeals can result in selective perception and limit the ability to galvanise society against these inhuman activities. The article, therefore, uses media representation and the assembled data as a case study of the agenda-setting theory and examines the impact of positioning, framing, and sourcing of human trafficking news on public perceptions of the issues

## **METHODS**

The study adopted the quantitative research method through the combination of quantitative content analysis and survey. A total of 386 copies of questionnaires were administered to respondents drawn from six states. The respondents cut across the six geopolitical zones in Nigeria. At the same time, the content analysis utilized data from two national newspapers, The Punch and The Guardian, randomly selected from newspapers with wide coverage and readership spread across the country. A total of 368 editions of The Punch and The Guardian newspapers published between November 1, 2018, and April 30, 2019, were analysed to determine the format, prominence, and framing of human trafficking stories contained in the units of news, reports, editorials, features and opinion articles. Data were analysed using descriptive and inferential statistics. Multiple linear regression was used to test the hypothesis and determine the significance level of relationship between selected newspapers' coverage of human trafficking stories and public perception of human trafficking issues in Nigeria. The hypothesis was tested at a 0.05 level of significance.

## **RESULTS**

### **Dominant format of human trafficking issues**

The analysis showed that news reports (58.6%) emerged as the predominant format of presenting human trafficking issues by the two newspapers Punch and Guardian (Table 1). In other words, the newspapers tend to cover human trafficking issues as straight news based on occurrence. This implies that the newspapers are likely to report human trafficking related stories from the perspectives of official sources without detailed investigation or search for

alternative views. Presenting or framing human trafficking as news or informational item leaves the interpretation of the story at the mercy of the audience.

When it comes to the issue of focus, sex trafficking received more attention (46.7%). This is consistent with previous findings, which showed that newspapers worldwide focus primarily on sex trafficking (Gulati, 2010; Marchionni, 2012) and crimes (Dugan, 2016; Oster, 2016; Sobel 2014). The high number of women and girls trafficked to different parts of Africa and Europe as sex workers may be a plausible reason for the concentration on sex trafficking. The most frequent stories on sex trafficking include reports of deportation of trafficked women and girls, physical abuse or death of trafficked women and girls, ordeals of female victims who refused to comply with the terms of traffickers, and arrest of traffickers and their agents in foreign countries.

### **Prominence of stories**

Prominence is usually measured by the position a news story occupies in any publication. The general assumption is that newspapers place the most important stories on the Front and Back pages readily accessible to readers. The Other Front Page (OFP) refers to stories whose headlines appear on the front page, but the story details appear on the inside pages. These stories are regarded as the third most prominent and usually the top stories on the inside pages. As shown in Table 2, stories relating to human trafficking appeared more on the Other Front Pages (46.6%), with the captions promoted on the Front pages. Positioning human trafficking stories on the Other Front Pages implies that the newspapers consider them less important than the stories slated for the Front and Back pages. If this is the reasoning, why then do the newspapers promote such stories on the front pages? This may be due to the need to draw attention to the human trafficking stories. When analysing the coverage according to news units, it was found that the highest unit of news on human trafficking was on the aspect of forced labour and related issues (44.8%). This may be due to timeliness. The treatment, deportation of trafficked Nigerians from Libya, and the attendant hardships they went through, including forced labour were the trending news items within the sampled period.

### **Patterns of framing human trafficking stories**

The analysis shows both newspapers framed stories relating to human trafficking from human interest (39.5%) and poverty (22.2%). Expectedly, the stories focused on the hardships suffered by the victims, mainly women and children, including deprivations and bondage. The majority of the stories are negatively framed, focusing on the ordeal of Nigerians deported from overseas, especially Libya, and stories of women and children lured into the hands of traffickers in their desperate bid to emigrate abroad. The tendency to highlight exploitation and abuse could be a strategy to accentuate the mainstream viewpoint that illegal immigration is dangerous. Another plausible reason for emphasising hardship may be the desire to attract empathy to deported victims and demotivating others from embracing the 'journey to hell'.

Other frames used by the newspapers to anchor their stories on human trafficking include security, crime (11.9%), and economic consequences (Table 3). This finding is consistent with previous results that suggest articles on human trafficking focus on soft news that frequently

portray victims as vulnerable and likely to have suffered hardships which is in line with the official assumption of "ideal victimhood" (Sanford, Martínez and Weitzer 2016). Although previous studies sampled a higher number of newspapers for a more extended period, this study only covered publications of two newspapers within six months. However, the finding compares significantly with past studies that identified sex trafficking as the most referenced issue on human trafficking stories (Gulati, 2010; Sanford, Martínez and Weitzer, 2016).

### **Public Perception of Human Trafficking**

The analysis showed that the overwhelming majority of the public (72.2%) perceives human trafficking as a societal issue on the increase (Table 4.). This is in line with the newspaper framing of the case as not only a localized problem involving local criminal networks and vulnerable individuals but one involving international syndicates. Nearly two-quarter of the respondents see human trafficking as affecting more women and girls. Those who hold this view also believe human traffickers prey on the weak and vulnerable. This follows the newspapers' focus on sex trafficking, especially women and girls' ordeals entangled in sex work and other sexual exploitation. This is consistent with Scheufele and Tewksbury's (2007) view that the framing of a news item influences its interpretation.

Contrary to media representation, which frames human trafficking as poverty-induced, 40.3% of the respondents attribute the rise in human trafficking to the desire of young people to migrate. In other words, the desire to explore, to seek new opportunities, and not poverty is a contributing factor to young people falling victim to traffickers. Generally, the findings suggest that newspapers were an essential source of information about human trafficking. The results also indicate that the public's perception of human trafficking is relative to the limited information the newspapers provide on the subject. The public perception of human trafficking appears to follow the particular viewpoints that newspapers highlight.

### **Relationship between Newspaper framing and public perception of human trafficking issues**

Multiple linear regression was used to test the hypothesis that 'there is a significant relationship between newspapers' coverage of human trafficking stories and public perception of human trafficking issues in Nigeria' (Tables 5a and 5b). The test established strong statistical significance between the newspapers' coverage and public perception of human trafficking issues ( $\beta = 0.764$ ,  $r = 0.488$ ,  $T = 11.063$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ). The model indicates that newspaper coverage of human trafficking explained 27.1 percent ( $\text{Adj. } R^2 = 0.271$ ) variation of public perception of human trafficking issues confirms that newspapers' coverage of human trafficking issues significantly influenced the public perception about those issues. The analysis suggests that although information about human trafficking can be derived from other media sources such as radio, television, and the internet, a significant amount of information about human trafficking emerged from the newspapers.



## DISCUSSION

Consistent with previous findings, the results from the study have established direct or straight news as the dominant form of newspaper coverage of human trafficking issues in which eyewitness accounts and establishment officials are the primary sources of information (Gulati 2010; Sobel, 2014). There were few feature or investigative stories to probe official assumptions or provide alternative narratives. This aligns with the views of Sanford, Martínez and Weitzer (2016) that newspapers hardly challenge official constructions and policy directions regarding human trafficking even with their imperfections.

Reporting human trafficking issues from official perspectives is problematic as it precludes alternative views (Gulati, 2010; Kessler, 2015; Sanford, Martínez and Weitzer, 2016). As Virku (2014) observes, the media hide a lot of information from the public. They tend to pay more attention to politics and governance to satisfy the government of the day while devaluing other societal issues. The finding of this study shows that coverage of human trafficking is no exception. The newspapers highlighted the sex trafficking aspect of human trafficking while paying less attention to other issues.

The finding that the newspapers report human trafficking events as they unfold without further investigations is not surprising. Previous studies have shown that in-depth and investigative reporting of social issues has declined in national newspapers in recent years (Ciboh, 2017; Onyenankeya and Salawu, (2020). The newspapers essentially conceptualise human trafficking issues as typical soft news stories focusing on human-interest stories that seek to elicit sympathy or demotivation. This may explain the lack of prominence given to human trafficking stories, as exemplified by their placement largely in inside pages. This is consistent with Nigerian newspapers' pattern of reporting issues concerning marginalised groups in society. Nwodu and Ezeoke (2013) state that most stories published on women's and children's rights were hidden or buried in the inside pages of most newspapers. Some scholars hold that the Nigerian media appears more focused on issues of governance and politics (Virku, 2014; Nkememena, 2009). The finding compares with past studies that indicate the media gives less prominence to societal menaces such as human trafficking, child and women's rights issues, drug abuse, cultism, and other forms of modern slavery (Carilli and Campbell, 2017; Dugan, 2016; Nwodu and Ezeoke, 2013).

Although generally, human trafficking has both economic and security implications, evidence from this research shows that newspaper framing of human trafficking related stories was less in those directions. The coverage is primarily narrow and sensational. This pattern was also reported in earlier studies which found that newspapers do not provide a broad view about human trafficking but rather tend to reproduce dominant constructions of human traffic issues (Farrell and Pfeffer, 2014; Gulati, 2010; Sanford, Martínez and Weitzer, 2016). Narrow and prescribed coverage of human trafficking implicates public perceptions of human trafficking and public attitudes to victims (Ngan, 2014).

As evinced from the results, the majority of the respondents perceive human trafficking more as a social problem that endangers lives, curtails fundamental rights, and inflicts hardship

mostly on the vulnerable in society, especially women and children. This is contrary to the prevalent media framing of human trafficking as a poverty-induced problem affecting individuals. This interpretation is consistent with the way the newspapers frame the human trafficking issues. According to Scheufele and Tewksbury (2007), the framing of a news item influences its interpretation. Treating human trafficking issues as just news or informational items takes away the issue's salience and has ramifications for understanding the issue by the public. While straight news satisfies the information needs of readers, it does not provide enough details for proper interpretation and evaluation of the issues. While poverty or hardship deserves to be highlighted, other essential corollaries of human traffickings, such as the economic, criminal, and security aspects, need prominent, comprehensive, and frequent media coverage to draw the government's attention and provide the public with broader perspectives on those issues.

What has emerged from this study is that although human trafficking receives considerable coverage, it has failed to gain media salience. This negates the tenet of the agenda-setting theory of the media. The Agenda-setting asserts that when the media gives salience to issues in terms of story placement and space allotment, the public will perceive such issues as necessary for discussion. To fulfil its Agenda-setting role, the news media must elevate the topic of human trafficking to become a public agenda by emphasising different aspects of the issue. When human trafficking becomes an issue of constant discussion at various fora, policymakers could consider it a crucial social issue and rethink the policy directives. As has been established, giving stories prime positions on the front or back pages of publications captures readers' attention and accentuates their importance (Riffe, Lacy and Fico, 2014; Vance, 2012; Wu and Renita, 2009). It also provides context.

Aside from helping to inform the public about the activities of traffickers and highlighting the dangers trafficked persons face, media, especially newspaper reports, can broaden the understanding of the public by placing human trafficking in the proper perspective. Gulati (2010) points out that journalistic responsibility lies in the effective communication of relevant news stories. In doing that, considerations should be given to the reporting angle, sensitivity to language that victimises subjects, and the extent to which the crime is exposed or camouflaged. However, combating human trafficking becomes problematic if the public perceives victims negatively because of media reportage (Sobel, 2014).

Media constitute proper channels for reaching the audience with relevant information on diverse issues of public concern such as human trafficking. This study found the newspapers to be contributing significantly to this effort. Although newspapers in Nigeria have influenced public perception of human trafficking issues significantly, the direction of such influence appears not to set the correct agenda for both the public and government. The sensitive issue of human trafficking have been framed subtly and as pure news lacking any principles, and thus, allowing the people to make their own decisions. By highlighting sex-trafficking and criminalizing victims, the newspapers tend to eliminate other important aspects especially the socio-economic and criminal factors that drive the illicit business. This can change the

perception of the issue among the readers. There is a sense that the public has come to perceive human trafficking as meaning sex trafficking because of the media focus on this aspect...

The findings of this article highlight the need for the media newspapers, in particular, to intensify awareness creation and to warn against human traffickers and provide a broader frame of references that will, in turn, ensure that public perception of human trafficking is appropriately situated to elicit an appropriate response.

## CONCLUSION

This article has investigated the framing of human trafficking issues by newspapers and how such framing implicates public perceptions of those issues. Profiling public perceptions can enhance understanding and construct an acceptable representation of human trafficking in newspapers. A combination of content analysis and survey was used to identify different representations and perceptions of human trafficking in newspapers. The findings showed that news report was the predominant format of presenting human trafficking issues by the newspapers. The newspapers treated human trafficking issues as straight news or informational item, which leaves the interpretation of the story to the audience.

The newspapers frequently framed stories relating to human trafficking from human interest, focusing on the hardships suffered by the victims. The focus of coverage is narrow.

An overwhelming majority of the news items on human trafficking focused on sex trafficking. Generally, newspaper accounts of human trafficking rely on official sources and constructions.

This research demonstrates that newspapers do not consider human trafficking stories important enough to make the front or back pages. The majority of the human trafficking stories are placed on inside pages demonstrating the prominence or significance the newspapers attach to the stories.

Whereas the newspapers frame human trafficking stories as human interest and poverty issues, the public see human trafficking more as a social problem constituting economic and security threats requiring urgent government attention. The findings of this article suggest a strong relationship between newspaper framing and public perceptions of human trafficking issues. Public perceptions of human traffic are poor and conflicting because of the narrow and prescribed nature of the coverage of human trafficking.

There is no doubt that public perception about human trafficking in Nigeria is insufficient and conflicting, which may be why many who had been trafficked and rescued sometimes return, while many others are willing to be trafficked to various destinations. There is a need for the press in Nigeria to improve the coverage of human trafficking issues to provide enriched and nuanced perspectives on the issue. Well-investigated, unbiased and in-depth analysis of human trafficking stories provides the populace with a complete state of human trafficking. It eliminates the perceptive bias around the issue. An in-depth analysis enriched with multiple sources and views can change readers' perceptions and elicit collective action from the citizens

and government towards the control and ultimate eradication of human trafficking, thus influencing people against illegal immigration.

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TABLES

Table 1: Formats of Coverage of Human Trafficking Issues

Type of Human Trafficking Issues				Forms of Coverage of Human Trafficking						
				Features	Opinion	Editorial	Column	News report	Interview	Total Freq
Forced Labour	News paper	The Punch	Freq (%)	1(1.7)	0	0	0	6(10.3)	0	
		The Guardian	Freq (%)	2(3.4)	0	0	2(3.4)	7(12.0)	1(1.7)	
	Total			Freq (%)	3(5.1)	0	0	2(3.4)	13(22.3)	1(1.7)
Domestic Servitude	News paper	The Punch	Freq (%)	2(3.4)	0	0	0	4(6.8)	0	
		The Guardian	Freq (%)	1(1.7)	0	0	2(3.4)	3(5.2)	0	
	Total			Freq (%)	3(5.1)	0	0	2(3.4)	7(12.0)	0
Sex Trafficking		The Punch	Freq (%)	5(8.6)	2(3.4)	0	0	8(13.7)	1(1.7)	
		The Guardian	Freq (%)	2(3.4)	0	0	2(3.4)	6(10.2)	1(1.7)	
	Total			Freq (%)	7(12.0)	2(3.4)	0	2(3.4)	14(24.0)	2(3.4)
Totals	News paper	The Punch	Freq (%)	8(13.7)	2(3.4)	0	0	18(31.0)	1(1.7)	
		The Guardian	Freq (%)	5(8.6)	0	0	6(10.2)	16(27.5)	2(3.4)	
	Total			Freq (%)	13(22.5)	2(3.4)	0	6(10.2)	34(58.6)	3(5.3)

Table 2: Prominence given to Human Trafficking stories

Type of Human Trafficking Issues				Position of Human Trafficking stories				
				Front Pages lead	Other Front page	Back page	Inside pages	Total Freq
Forced Labour	Newspaper	The Punch	Freq (%)	4(6.8)	6(10.4)	0	6(10.4)	
		The Guardian	Freq (%)	3(5.2)	4(6.8)	0	3(5.1)	
	Total			Freq (%)	7(12.0)	10(17.2)	0	9(15.5)
Domestic Servitude	Newspaper		Freq (%)	0	7(12.0)	0	3(5.1)	
			Freq (%)	0	5(8.6)	0	3(5.1)	
	Total			Freq (%)	0	12(20.6)	0	6(10.2)
Sex Trafficking			Freq (%)	1(1.7)	2(3.4)	0	3(5.2)	
			Freq (%)	1(1.7)	3(5.1)	0	4(6.8)	
	Total			Freq (%)	2(3.4)	5(8.9)	0	7(12.0)
Totals	Newspaper		Freq (%)	5(8.6)	15(25.8)	0	12(20.6)	
			Freq (%)	4(6.8)	12(20.6)	0	10(17.2)	
	Total			Freq (%)	9(15.5)	27(46.6)	0	22(37.9)

Table 3: Framing of Human Trafficking Issues

Type of Human Trafficking Issues				Patterns of Framing Human Trafficking stories					
				Crime Frame	Human Interest	Economic consequence	Security Frame	Poverty Frame	Total Freq
Forced Labour	Newspaper	The Punch	Freq (%)	4(6.8)	3(5.1)	2(3.4)	3(5.1)	2(3.4)	
		The Guardian	Freq (%)	3(5.1)	4(6.8)	1(1.7)	3(5.1)	4(6.8)	
	Total			Freq (%)	7(11.9)	7(11.9)	3(5.1)	6(10.3)	6(10.3)
Domestic Servitude	Newspaper	The Punch	Freq (%)	0	7(11.9)	1(1.7)	0	1(1.7)	
		The Guardian	Freq (%)	0	6(8.6)	1(1.7)	0	3(5.1)	
	Total			Freq (%)	0	13(20.5)	2(3.4)	0	5(8.6)
Sex Trafficking		The Punch	Freq (%)	0	1(1.7)	1(1.7)	0	2(3.4)	
		The Guardian	Freq (%)	0	2(3.4)	1(1.7)	1(1.7)	1(1.7)	
	Total			Freq (%)	0	3(5.1)	2(3.4)	1(1.7)	3(5.1)
Totals	Newspaper	The Punch	Freq (%)	4(6.8)	11(18.9)	4(6.8)	4(6.8)	5(8.6)	
		The Guardian	Freq (%)	3(5.1)	12(20.6)	3(5.1)	4(6.8)	8(13.6)	
	Total			Freq (%)	7(11.9)	23(39.5)	7(11.9)	8(13.6)	13(22.2)

**Table 4: Direction of Public Perception of Human Trafficking stories**

Items	SA F (%)	A F (%)	D F (%)	SD F (%)	U F (%)	$\bar{x}$	SD	Average Mean
I believe that human trafficking is a social problem	270 (72.2)	102 (27.3)	-	-	2 (0.5)	4.59	0.94	<b>3.55 (SD= 1.23)</b>
More women and girls are victims of human trafficking	178 (47.6)	185 (49.5)	11 (2.9)	-	-	4.17	0.92	
Victims of human trafficking are more of men and boys	6 (1.6)	25 (6.6)	137 (36.7)	203 (52.3)	3 (0.8)	1.84	1.06	
Human trafficking is on the increase because more young people want to migrate	151 (40.3)	202 (54.2)	17 (4.5)	-	4 (1.0)	4.56	1.37	
Most people who are trafficked do so of their own free will	15 (4.1)	46 (12.2)	171 (45.7)	137 (36.7)	5 (1.3)	2.40	1.26	
Most people who are trafficked do so against their will because they are forced	117 (31.3)	154 (41.2)	10 (2.6)	87 (23.3)	6 (1.6)	3.71	1.20	
Human traffickers prey on the weak and vulnerable and then exploit them for their own financial gains	167 (44.7)	115 (30.7)	25 (6.7)	53 (14.1)	14 (3.8)	3.84	1.22	
Human traffickers use physical and psychological abuse to control and sexually exploit their victims	147 (39.3)	140 (37.4)	30 (8.0)	44 (11.8)	13 (3.5)	3.72	1.27	
Every trafficked person is exploited one way or another	127 (33.9)	209 (55.9)	-	38 (10.2)	-	4.07	1.41	
<b>Average Mean</b>						<b>3.55</b>	<b>1.23</b>	

**Table 5a: ANOVA & Model Summary Testing Significant Relationship between Selected Newspapers' Coverage and Public Perception of Human Trafficking**

	Model	Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	5691.258	2	2870.129	93.891	.000 <sup>b</sup>
	Residual	16503.831	517	31.063		
	Total	22195.089	532			
R= 0.523						
R Square = 0.273						
Adjusted R Square = 0.271						

**Table 5b: Multiple Linear Regression Testing Significant relationship between Newspaper coverage and Public Perception of Human Trafficking**

Construct	B	R	T	Sig.
(Constant)	20.600		15.369	0.000
Newspaper coverage of Human Trafficking issues	0.764	0.488	11.063	0.000
<b>Dependent Variable: Public perception of human trafficking</b>				