

Nigerian Newspaper Reportage of Rape Cases and Implications in Curtailing the Menace

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Abstract

This study has been carried out to examine Nigerian newspapers' reportage of rape cases and analyse their implications with a view to curtailing the menace. The study adopted the qualitative research approach in obtaining opinions from respondents. Convenience sampling method was adopted to determine the size of the study population. Data were collected qualitatively from four sampled newspapers, *Leadership*, *Daily Trust*, *Vanguard*, and *Guardian* newspapers. Content analysis was used in the data analysis of the study. Findings from the study revealed that most Nigerian newspapers seldom report rape cases. *Leadership* and *Daily Trust* newspapers, however, topped the list of Nigerian newspapers in the reportage of rape cases. Findings of the study further revealed that Nigerian newspapers report cases of rape in straight news form, while most cases of rape as reported by the Nigerian newspapers have their origin or source from the relations of victims which include victims parents, aunts, uncles, etc. The study also found that in most of the cases of rape the innocence frame is the most predominantly used form of reportage of rape cases in Nigeria as the rape victims are portrayed as innocent of the crime committed against them. The study therefore, concluded that cases bordering on rape are reported by Nigerian newspapers but the degree of coverage by the four selected Nigerian newspapers is minimal. Based on the findings, the study recommended that newspapers should improve on their source selection to ensure that official sources are well represented on matters regarding rape cases to draw the attention of the authorities to the matter.

Keywords: Framing, newspaper, rape cases and reportage.

Introduction

Portrayal and description are part of the framing techniques used in news media. While news media must give all the facts in rape cases, an intentional news frame can have significant consequences on how readers perceive issues (Shen, 2004). A news frame is a structured description and portrayal of an event, which is created by the media with the intention of giving meanings to, and shaping messages (Shen, 2004). This means that if a story is framed, the media has shaped the message, potentially changing the aspect or intent of the story. In rape cases, a frame that describes the victim unfavourably may cause readers to respond negatively towards such a victim. There is a popular assumption that victims of rape are commonly accused of either triggering or causing rape, if not both (Mardorossian, 2014). That is, women are blamed for provoking their own rape through assumptions based on their behaviour, their relationship with the perpetrators and through

what they wear. Meyers (1997) as cited in (Sampert, 2010, p.323) illustrates this idea by referring to police warnings about rapists that “make it clear to women what actions and locations are unsafe, influence decisions about where to go, what to wear, how to act, how late to stay out”.

There is a great deal of literature that explores the content of media and its role in the reproduction and maintenance of ideologies that assert dominant power in society. A common narrative found within sociological literature relates to the media and its capacity to perpetuate gender inequality, and more specifically, rape myths. Notably, rape myths are described as any statement that acts to discredit or justify a rape. Franiuk (2008) explains that rape myths function in explaining “the disconnect between people’s images of (rape) and the reality of (rape)”. To exemplify this notion, they explain that most people consider sexual assault as a brutal crime between strangers, when, in actuality, sexual assaults are mostly committed between acquaintances. In order to further discuss news framing in the sense of rape cases, first framing must be discussed, and then previous studies determining the relationship between newspaper portrayal of rape victims and reader opinion must be examined. Newspaper framing and portrayal of rape cases can be influential in causing a reader to perceive the victim and the assailant in different ways. This means that it is the portrayal, not just the facts of the case that determines how a reader reacts to the parties involved. These portrayals can lead to reader bias for either the victim or the assailant; hence newspaper portrayal should accurately describe both parties to avoid inaccurate perception.

News frames suggest how readers should view events and issues; reporters frame news through a process of selection, emphasis, exclusion, and elaboration, which results in narrowing the frame and thereby narrowing readers’ views of those events and issues (Hendrickson & Tankard, 1997). The selection of certain facts and excluding other information creates a frame that impacts public opinion and reader interpretations of issues and events (Shen, 2004). Framing therefore, is the process of selecting information in order to define issues for readers, rather than rely on a more detached model of journalism (Aday, 2006). Newspaper portrayal of rape victims can lead to different perceptions of the event in the way that they are framed. Societal beliefs that men are supposed to be aggressive, while women are to be passive are furthered by media representations. According to Basile (2006), “sexual attitudes, behaviour, and expectations are also learned, and this dichotomy of male/female behaviour is reproduced in the media, with books, movies and television programmes that romantically depict these scripted relationships between the sexes” (p.2). There are many aspects journalists need to consider when reporting rape victims, such as truth telling responsibilities, keeping professional standards, whether or not the right intentions are behind the story, and if the story will cause harm (Brislin, 1992). It is not only the legal liability that determines the structure of the story, but also from the need to sell papers; “for example, decisions about what to include in local television broadcasts emerged from an intersection of traditional news values and a need to earn profits in competitive industry” (Worthington, 2005).

News framing, for the purpose of selling a story, ultimately shapes a reader’s response. In a study conducted by Worthington (2005), she concluded that “the framing of the nine stories about campus sexual assault scandal demonstrates how journalistic and market priorities often

intersected to create constraints”. Her study shows that framing can often limit how much information a news source will, or can use. In rape cases this becomes influential because those constraints may lead a reader to a perception that was unintended. The media indeed influences perceptions of society in the ways that certain themes, such as rape are depicted, while other themes are marginalized (Worthington, 2005). It is through these representations of women and sexual violence that negative views of women are constructed and reinforced (Berrington, 2002).

The problem with newspaper portrayal of rape victims continues in that “reporters may construct accurate and...sound articles but still miss the point of the event, thereby reinforcing stereotypes and public misunderstanding” (Byerly, 1994). In addition, crime victims faced social stigma caused partly by the perception ‘that victims did or said something that in some sense contributed to their being harmed’ (Johnson, 1999). These constructed views of women lead to reader perception that she herself is the cause of the harm; her behaviour was the reason she was raped. Specific discourse used to describe events is the basis for news framing. Rape depictions in media show that the specific “rape discourse in news often suggests that such crimes are culturally appropriate gender behaviour, often precipitated by female provocation” (Worthington, 2005). Careful consideration must be placed on discourse when framing a story. The meaning of words and language is highly influential when describing a rape case. According to Berrington (2002), language is central in defining violence and cannot be underestimated; hence the need to be critical of the language describing male violence against women because the male perpetrator remains hidden and the language fails to identify the consequence of violence and oppression for women.

Newspapers, as a medium for public information, must make sure the public understands the situation in a rape case, and avoid inaccurate portrayals. When newspapers print victims’ names, there is often a negative stigma associated with the crime, where blame is placed on the victim (Lake, 1991). The personalization or naming the victim only increases the focus on behaviour and past experience and suggests that “some are ‘innocent victims’ while others precipitated their own attacks through their choice of attire or behaviour” (Worthington, 2005). These two instances illustrate that newspapers must be critical in framing stories in order to avoid misunderstandings about the victim.

Much of the perception comes from previous false beliefs about rape and rape victims. The beliefs become accepted as rape myths, where “a victim is blamed more for her victimization when she has had previous sexual experiences, which seems related to the stereotype that certain types of women ‘ask for it’ by being promiscuous,” (Buddie, 2001). The suggestion by journalists that women provoke rape by dressing or behaving in certain ways illustrates that the organizational constraints and journalistic values interact with each other, causing news that perpetuates rape myths, instead of eliminating them (Worthington, 2005). These false beliefs are significant because, if readers believe rape myths, and newspapers highlight promiscuity or unacceptable behaviour, this can result in readers perceiving the victim inaccurately. Even while “feminists have insisted on dismantling the categories of ‘good’ and ‘bad’ victims that have dominated common sense (and media) definitions of crime” (Cuklanz, 2006), it is the description of the victim’s history

that influences the story and the consequent perception. “Women who reject patriarchal norms around ‘appropriate behaviour;’ find themselves blamed if they become victims of male violence. By stepping outside their prescribed role, they place themselves at risk” (Berrington, 2002); their move outside social or feminine “norms” are the root cause of their victimization.

Readers tend to view rape cases based on circumstances, and “in conceptualization, it also seemed likely that the form of victim identification would affect readers’ views” (Johnson, 1999). The result from these different depictions is that readers don’t have any consistent negative or positive opinions of rape victims, since reader perception is based on how newspapers portray individual victims. So, even while stories may be constructed based on individual circumstances, blame is more often placed on the victim rather than the perpetrator. Newspaper portrayal of rape victims should be more consistent and depict the case without causing undue and unnecessary harm to the victim. News representations of rape victims should refrain from arbitrary portrayal of the victim as though she were always to blame for her attack. This is not to say that the perpetrator should be depicted as a monster, but that news stories should be accurate and fair in the portrayal of both parties. “Individual journalists may find opportunities to exercise urgency in ways that can produce progressive news representations” (Worthington, 2005); being progressive and avoiding framing that causes the victim harm can still accomplish a fair and accurate story.

The purpose of this study, therefore, is to assess Nigerian newspapers reportage of rape cases in Nigeria. Even though so many rape cases have attracted massive media reportage and public outcry, many cases of rape go unreported (Sam *et al*, 2021). The ones reported have been affected by so many factors. Among these factors are stigmatization, rape myths, social status of perpetrators in society, complicity of law enforcement agents, close-knit or family ties with perpetrators and lack of access to the media (Aborisade, 2016; Tade & Udechukwu, 2018; Omoera *et al*, 2019).

Reporting and exposing rape are key to stemming the tide and bringing the consciousness of society to the destructive tendency of the crime. The media, most especially the print media, has been the major source by which information on rape is disseminated (Nwabueze & Oduah, 2015). Media reportage of crime has the capacity to shape public opinion (Dunu & Okafor, 2017). However, the appropriateness, timeliness, frame and frequency of rape crime and other crime reportage by the mass media seem to be generally deficient (Soola, 2017). This study thus becomes imperative for it seeks to determine the relationship between newspaper portrayal of rape victims and readers’ response. When it comes to framing rape cases, newspapers must not only give all the facts of the story, but also portray the victim and assailant accurately. Framing becomes an issue because readers respond to the printed portrayal of the victim and assailant. If news media routinely portray rape victims negatively, it can result in readers misplacing blame and fault in the situation. Fundamentally, since rape cases are on the increase in Nigeria, it becomes important to examine how newspapers are helping humanity the fight against the crime through framing. The relevance of this study is that it centered on newspaper reportage of rape cases and undertakes a

comparison in the framing of stories to highlight the centrality of the media in combatting the surge in the scourge of rape in Nigeria.

Statement of Research Problem

Recently, there has been an upsurge in the number of rape-related cases in the Nigerian society. This kind of crime against humanity appears to be increasing in an astronomical proportion daily. This has created palpable worries in the minds of many. Some of these sexual assaults and rapes are either reported or intentionally “buried” by the victims or their parents or relations for fear of stigmatization, while a few others are reported by the media. There is this growing fear that rape victims are sometimes re-victimized by the media reporting them as being responsible for the sexual assaults or carnal knowledge they are forced to have by their assailants. Although, there exists substantial research on physical re-victimization of rape victims, less is known about media re-victimization through choice of words and framing. This study therefore, investigates how newspapers frame stories of rape in Nigeria analyze their implications and advance suggestions to assist in curtailing the menace.

Objectives of the Study

The broad objective of this study is to examine Nigerian newspapers framing of rape cases and analyze their implications with a view to curtailing the menace. The study has the following specific objectives which are to;

- i. Find out the frequency of stories on rape reported in the Nigerian newspapers;
- ii. Ascertain the dominant frame used in the stories on rape reported in the Nigerian newspapers;
- iii. Identify the sources of rape cases as reported in the Nigerian newspapers.

Conceptual Clarification

Rape

The word rape is derived from the Latin verb *rapere*, which means ‘to seize or take by force’. It is a forced, unwanted sexual intercourse; it is sometimes also called sexual assault, which can happen to both men and women of any age (Medhelp, 2008 cited in Kristine, 2016). Many people believe that rape is a sexual act. Although rape involves sexual acts, it is motivated by the desire for power and control over another person, rather than by sexual attraction or the desire for sexual gratification. In other words, rape is a crime of violence (Omoera, 2004). Rape also occurs when someone forces or tricks another person into unwanted sexual activity, even if actual physical violence is not involved (Kristine, 2016).

Rape is a form of social deviancy, which varies from one country to another; it changes overtime. Bourke (2001) argues that there is nothing timeless or random about rape, it is not a metaphor for the ruin of a city or nation, it is not an environmental disaster, and it is the embodied violation of another person. Bourke further describes rape as a felony in which a person is forced to have sexual

intercourse without giving consent (2001). Some countries substitute the term ‘aggravated sexual assault’ for rape. Many countries include homosexual rape, incest, and other sex offences in the definition of rape. Cooper (2000) asserts that rape is most often motivated by extreme anger toward the victim or a need to overpower the victim.

Forced sex is intended to abuse, humiliate, and dehumanize the victim. Liebling, Slegh, and Ruratotoye (2012) observe that in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), women and girls bearing children from rape is a poorly understood subject area as a majority of the people hardly appreciates the underlying causes and consequences of sexual violence, and their impact on the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). Rape is also seen as sexual intercourse with a woman by a man without her consent and chiefly by force or deception (Kristine, 2016). However, there are many rumoured or even reported cases of men who have been raped in contemporary societies, including Nigeria.

The concept of rape, both as abduction and in the sexual sense, made its first historical appearance in early religious texts. Rape culture is a concept of unknown origin and of uncertain definition; yet it has made its way into everyday vocabulary and is assumed to be commonly understood. The award-winning documentary film, *Rape Culture* made by Margaret Lazarus in 1975 takes credit for first defining the concept. The film's narration relies heavily on jargon such as ‘rapism’ and ‘phallogocentric society’ and is more illustrative than definitive in dealing with rape as depicted in movies, music, and other forms of entertainment. Authors of the popular ‘Transforming a Rape Culture’ define the phenomenon as a “complex of beliefs that encourages male sexual aggression and supports violence against women ... a society where violence is seen as sexy and sexuality as violence” (Buchwald, Fletcher & Roth, 1993).

Newspaper Framing

Framing theory is one of the most frequently used theories in media and communication research (Bryant & Miron, 2005) which aims to analyze the ways media pay attention to certain aspects while covering an issue. The process of putting emphasis on certain sides tends to create and place them within a field of meaning. Journalists usually make some aspect of an event or issue more salient to promote particular interpretation and problem definition (Entman, 1993). Scholars have defined news frames in various ways, thus a clear definitional boundary remains elusive for news framing. Erving Goffman (1974), originator of the framing theory, describes framing as a way in which we interpret our world using a primary framework. He stated that frame is an interpretative context which helps us better understand a message. Entman’s (1993) definition of framing is important for the present study because it focuses on textual elements of the news reports. Using framing, journalists “select some aspects of a perceived reality and make them more salient in a communicating text, in such a way as to promote a particular problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation, and/or treatment recommendation for the item described” (Entman, 1993). Frames define problems, diagnose causes, and make moral judgments (Entman, 1993).

Frames are made through both conscious and unconscious ways and reporters and editors routinely choose those to use in the presentation of news stories. However, choosing from various approaches is not a natural or neutral process; it is a result of internal and external factors of news organizations (Scheufele, 1999). These factors include cultural norms and values, social and political ideologies, organizational constraints, and professional routines (Kim, Carvalho & Davis, 2010). According to Davies, Francis and Greer (2009), interest groups, spin doctors, advertisers, spokespersons also influence the media frame.

Semantic framing refers to the specific words or rhetoric [a journalist] chooses to describe a story to influence or persuade people (Hallahan, 1999). In the context of media reporting on rape or sexual assault, the word *accuser* can invoke a less sympathetic reaction than the word *victim* (Katz, 2015). Vague or euphemistic terms such as, *non-consensual sex* sound less harsh than the term *rape* and can diminish the perceived severity of the crime (Bavelas & Coates, 2001).

News media convey stories in *episodic* or *thematic* frames. An episodic frame focuses on an isolated incident where a thematic frame places the incident within a broader context (Iyengar, 1990). These frames can influence the public's perception of who is at fault and what should be done about problems in terms of individual and societal responsibility (Iyengar, 1990). Episodic frames usually generate more sympathy from audiences due to the concentration on individual stories or events (Gross, 2008). In contrast, thematic frames tend to offer more statistical data which can appear more clinical rather than emotional (Gross, 2008). The thematic framing of sexual violence can address a wide range of problems and solutions that can affect society as a whole. However, episodic framing of rape and sexual assault can decrease the perception connection to a larger systemic problem (Brossoi, Roberto & Barrow, 2012).

Incidents of Rape in Nigeria

Despite the widespread outcry over the rising cases of rape in Nigeria, there seems to be no end to the menace. There is no day in the country without a reported case of sexual violence especially rape in the media. One contestable reason for the apparent rise of sexual violence in Nigeria could be that sexual violence victims are becoming more encouraged to report such crimes. However, it could also be that there is an increase in the rate of sexual violence in Nigeria. Statistics has shown that in Lagos alone, 678 cases of rape were reported in 2012, which is an average of two cases per day (Musbau, 2013). No fewer than 100 cases of rape were equally recorded in Kano courts in 2013 alone, out of which only 40 offenders were convicted. In Anambra, some NGOs working on sexual violence recorded 115 incidents and complaints on rape but only 12 cases were taken up with the police while none of them was successfully prosecuted (Guardian Newspaper, Friday February 7, 2014). Perhaps, the most goose-pimple-raising incident of rape was the recent incestuous rape of a 60 year old mother at the Ajabamidele area of Ado Ekiti by her own 21 year old son, Akintumde Omotehinde.

The recent sexual violation and murder of a 22-year old University of Benin undergraduate student have fanned the embers of the growing awareness and condemnation of sexual violence in the Nigerian society. Since the incident, there have been many other reported cases of violation of

women and girls, and even more worrisome is the sexual violation of little girls in the country. While launching the Sex Offenders Register as part of the government's strategy to deal with the issue of rape in the country in December 2019, Mrs. Pauline Tallen, Nigeria's Minister for Women Affairs and Social Development, stated that about two million Nigerians (mainly women and girls) are raped every year. This figure although not independently verified, shows that there is a systemic failure in handling this spiralling crime. For instance, a poll conducted by NOIPOLLS in July 2019, revealed that most Nigerians (85%) believe that there is a high prevalence of rape in Nigeria.

According to the report, "about 3 in 10 Nigerians (26 per cent) disclosed that they know someone who has been raped in the past and the rape victims were particularly minors and young adults aged between 1 – 15 years (72 per cent) and 16 – 25 years (24 per cent) respectively. These statistics imply that one in every three girls would have experienced at least one form of sexual abuse by the time they reach 25 years". Some of these violations occur within the purview of law and order but are more prevalent in conflict zones where women and girls are easily captured and turned into sex slaves and violated at will. For example, on May 7, 2013, insurgents seized 4 women and 8 children from a police barrack in Bama in Borno state.

Additionally, owing to inadequate access to basic needs, traditional protection structures, or security fears at internally displaced persons' camps, some women and girls have reportedly become vulnerable to sexual exploitation in the form of rape and survival sex. In late July 2016, Human Rights Watch documented sexual abuse, including rape and exploitation of 43 women and girls living in seven internally displaced persons (IDPs) camps in Maiduguri, Borno State (Human Rights Watch, 2016). Similarly, a Rapid Protection Assessment Report published in May 2016 by the Borno State Protection Sector working group comprising national and international aid providers identified sexual exploitation, rape and other sexual abuses as a major concern in 14 camps out of 26 sites hosting IDPs in Borno State.

Sources of Rape Cases in the Media

It is not possible to be present on the spots all the time to see the events for journalists because they are few, and must locate themselves in places where information is likely to flow to them' (Sigal, 1973, p.224). So, they need to depend on other ways of getting information on events. The news media call those that provide information sources. The sources can be anything including people, letters, books, files, films, tapes which journalists use to put news stories together (Henshall & Ingram, 1991). Shoemaker and Reese (1996) describe them as "external suppliers of raw materials" in news making. Sources are an integral part of the news-making process and very important because that can set the agenda and influence the construction of meaning (Gamson, Croteau, Hoynes, & Sasson, 1992; Gamson & Wolfsfeld, 1993). Even media are exploited by their sources through inserting information or propagandizing the reporters (Sigal, 1973). Sigal examined the relationship between journalists and their sources and found that government departments tend to enjoy advantaged access to the news media because journalists rely to a great degree on official sources and routine channels. Messner and DiStaso (2008) noted that source can

shape news reports and “influence the context under which a journalist evaluates an issue” (p. 449). After Sigal’s (1973) examination of the relationship between journalists and their sources, scholars like Fishman (1980) conducted studies with a theme that the act of making news is the act of constructing reality itself rather than ‘a picture of reality’.

Effects of Rape on Victims and Society

Forcible rape is traumatically painful, it is the most physically painful ordeal that an individual can undergo and still live afterward. Rape victims often experience severe and long-lasting distress beyond the experience of the rape itself. About 90% of victims report physical injury. Other common effects include pregnancy, sexually transmitted infections, and psychological trauma (Rainn, 2010). The effects of rape could be physical, psychological and sociological.

Physical Effects of Rape: The physical effect of rape could be one or more of the following:

- i. injuries from beating or choking, such as bruises, scratches, cuts, and broken bones,
- ii. swelling around the genital area,
- iii. bruising around the vagina,
- iv. injury to the rectal-vaginal area (for example, tearing of the tissue that connects the anus to the vagina),
- v. sexually transmitted infections (such as herpes, gonorrhea, HIV/AIDS, and Syphilis, etc.),
- vi. possible pregnancy (in a regularly menstruating female).

Many a time the physical effects result in medical problem which might never be rectified as seen in the confession of a rape victim at the age of thirteen, as cited by Musawa (2009) in her article which she entitled “Damaged”

I remember each of their faces: they were vicious, evil, ghoulish, and without any humanity. I was 13 when it first happened. For several years after I was a victim, as were my three sisters. My younger sister got hers the worst of it: her small uterus was eventually destroyed and, even though she had undergone several operations she is to this day still not repaired...It’s so hard to find word to describe the pain, anger and guilt I suffer. All I know is the pain will never, ever go away. All I know is that I have been damaged (Pp. 444).

- a. **Psychological effects on victims may include:** Severe anxiety, depression, difficulty in concentrating or sleeping, dreaming about what happened, inappropriate guilt feelings, emotional numbness or irritability, flashbacks, nightmares, extreme fear etc.
- b. **Social and Cultural Effects of Rape on Victims:** Rape as a concept has a cultural connotation that gives impetus to the way it is socially perceived. In most Nigerian traditional cultures, sexual infidelity is viewed as a serious infraction against the established community norm of morality; hence, offenders are severely punished. Unfortunately, the punishment often prescribed is skewed in favor of the male offender (Akintunde, 2002; Akosile, 2007). More often than not, the female victim is stigmatized

forever with the possible consequences of being socially branded, divorced or neglected by the husband, where she is already married, sentenced to social ostracization that may deny her the opportunity of getting a suitor to marry where she is not yet married. The woman at times can be sentenced to death where the community is yet fastened to the hard-core traditional ways of doing things (Elegbeleye, 2006).

Many cases are never reported because parents want to save the honor of their daughters and protect their family from embarrassment. In its description of the judicial and legal system concerning rape in Nigeria, the 2006 Amnesty International Report on Nigeria confirmed this observation. To avoid this social and cultural effect most times referred to as stigmatization, many rape victims keep mum, do not talk about it and would rather suffer the medical and psychological effects in silence.

Theoretical Framework

This paper is anchored on framing theory to provide support and interpretation of the subject matter under review. Framing is a concept which is commonly used to understand media effects. It is regarded as the extension of Agenda-setting theory which prioritizes an issue and makes the audience think about its effects. The framing is based on the idea of how media base an event or an issue within a particular field of meaning which plays an important role in people's decision-making procedure.

Framing Theory is an adaptation of Agenda-setting Theory. Both theories talk about how media divert the attention of audience from the importance of an issue to what it wants to project and it is used to know media effects. It sets a point of view by having a field of meaning. Framing is how a specific piece of information is shown by the media to audience and how it is organized or structured. Framing influences the mind-set (perception) of people and impacts their decision making on the topic which is changed by media. The changing of perception can be taken as second level of agenda setting. Agenda-setting theory just tells what to think about but framing theory tells how to think about the information. So, framing theory is also known as second level of agenda setting theory. Framing theory was prepared by Goffman in his book *Frame Analysis* (1974) which argued that people "locate, perceive, identify and label" events and occurrences. The theory was also talked about by Robert Entman, Jim A. Kuypers and many others.

Framing is used to represent the communication aspect which leads to the people's preference by consenting one meaning to another. Framing stimulates the decision-making process by highlighting particular aspects by eliminating the others. For example, the newspaper frames the news within a particular viewpoint. This can change the perception of the issue among the readers.

The theory of framing finds its roots in the studies of cognitive psychology. Entman (1993) defines framing as the act of "selecting some aspects of a perceived reality and making them more salient in a communicating text, in such a way as to promote a particular problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation, and/or treatment recommendation". Like the political agenda-

setting theory, framing stresses a particular aspect of an issue; however, the aspect is presented from a particular angle so as to limit the readers' attention to that specific aspect of the issue. Thus, according to the theory, media can affect how the policy makers view certain issues by making certain features of the issue more salient.

Framing is an important aspect where an issue can be highlighted to make sense of the events. It can regulate the audience's perception and also the acceptance of a particular meaning. As media plays an important role in the people's perceptions, the negative framing can create a huge impact upon the people. For example, the sensitive issues that are coming in the media have been framed diplomatically by not supporting any principles and thus, the people can make their own decisions. But a biased media can frame an issue negatively and can influence the masses. Intuition and careful interpretation of the audience are inevitable when it comes to framing.

This theory is relevant to the study because it seeks to provide understanding to media effects. Effective communication among the masses can be done with well-organized framing of meanings and issues such as rape matters. Framing in the media treats issues as individual events, while thematic coverage links events together in a type of case-study format.

Methodology

This study adopted the qualitative research design. The population of the study comprised of some four selected newspapers in Nigeria. The newspapers in this regard, include: *Leadership*, *Daily Trust*, *Vanguard* and the *Guardian* only. Since it is not possible to collect data from all the daily newspapers published in Nigeria, it becomes important for the study to select only few of them. On this note, the study adopted convenience sampling method to determine the size of the study population. Qualitative and quantitative methods were employed by the study. Quantitative content analysis is clearly a potent analytical tool for understanding and bringing out the traits of news content. Equipped with the strength of numeric, it reliably and objectively recorded frequencies of particular key terms and revealed trends in written texts. Content analysis was used in the data analysis of the study work. However, quantitative content analysis failed to capture the tone and intensity of the texts and visual graphics, such as images and cartoons, as they could not be counted. Qualitative content analysis allows a researcher to comprehensively explore the nuances of a particular (news) article.

Data Presentation

The data as gathered or generated from content analyzing the four newspapers: *Leadership*, *Daily Trust*, *Vanguard* and *Guardian* are presented and analyzed in this section.

Table 1: Newspapers reporting of rape cases between June 2019 to April 2020.

Newspaper	June	August	October	December	February	April	Total
Leadership	4	5	8	8	3	5	33
Daily Trust	3	4	2	5	6	4	24
Vanguard	4	3	4	2	1	2	16
Guardian	2	0	1	2	1	2	8
Total	13	12	15	17	11	13	81

Table 1 shows that from June 2019 to April 2020, the four selected newspapers reported rape cases eighty-one (81) times. In June 2019, a total of thirteen (13) reported cases of rape were contained in the four selected Nigerian newspapers. In August, a total of twelve (12) reported cases of rape were contained in the four selected Nigerian newspapers while in October, a total of fifteen (15) reported cases of rape were contained in the four selected Nigerian newspapers. Additionally, in December 2019, the four sampled Nigerian newspapers reported rape cases seventeen (17) times while in February, a total of eleven (11) reported cases of rape were contained in the selected newspapers. Finally, in April, a total of thirteen (13) reported cases of rape were contained in the four sampled Nigerian newspapers. In general, the Leadership reported the highest number of cases (33), followed by Daily Trust with twenty four (24). The Vanguard and the Guardian reported sixteen (16) and eight (8) cases respectively.

The form of reportage varied across the four (4) National Dailies as presented in the table below.

Table 2: Form of Coverage of Rape Cases in Four Nigerian Newspapers, June 2019 to April 2020

Newspaper	Straight	Editorials	Features	Opinion Article	Cartoon	Others	Total
Leadership	18	2	5	4	1	3	33
Daily Trust	7	2	5	4	3	3	24
Vanguard	11	1	2	2	0	1	16
Guardian	3	1	2	1	0	1	8
Total	39	6	14	11	3	8	81

Table 2 shows the form of coverage of rape cases in Nigerian newspapers from June 2019 to April 2020. It shows that out of the eighty-one (81) reported cases of rape, thirty-nine (39) of them were reported to the people in the straight news forms. Out of this thirty-nine (39) reported cases of rape in straight news forms, the Leadership, Daily Trust, Vanguard and the Guardian newspapers had eighteen (18), seven (7), eleven (11) and three (3) respectively. A total of six (6) cases of rape were reported by the four selected Nigerian newspapers in editorial form. The Leadership, Daily Trust, Vanguard and the Guardian newspapers respectively had 2, 2, 1 and 1 editorials respectively.

Feature stories relating to rape as reported by the four Nigerian newspapers within the period under review were fourteen (14) as follows: Leadership (5), Daily Trust (5), Vanguard (2) and Guardian (2) respectively. For cartoons, only three (3) cases of rape related case appeared in Daily Trust newspaper (3) and Guardian (1) within the period under review. The result presented above shows that most rape cases reported by Nigerian newspapers as depicted by the four Nigerian newspapers appear in straight news forms. On the contrary, the result presented above shows that the least or seldom used form of reporting rape cases by the Nigerian newspapers are cartoons.

Table 3: Story Source of Reported Cases of Rape

Newspaper	Victim	Family Members	Police	Eye Witness	Court	NGOs	Total
Leadership	10	6	8	1	2	6	33
Daily Trust	9	3	5	2	1	4	24
Vanguard	5	8	1	0	1	1	16
Guardian	2	3	1	0	1	1	8
Total	26	20	16	3	5	12	81

Table 3 shows the distribution of stories on rape by sources. In other words, the table shows those who brought the rape cases to the knowledge of the public. The study shows that out of the eighty-one (81) reported cases of rape from June 2019 to April 2020, twenty-six (26) were reported or made known to the public by the victims themselves while twenty (20) of the cases were reported by family members of the victims.

Other sources of stories on rape as revealed from the study are police (16), eyewitnesses (3), court (5), Non-Governmental Organizations (12). It follows, therefore, that most cases of rape reported by the Nigerian newspapers have their origin or source from the relations of victims, which include victims' parents, aunts, uncles, etc.

Discussion of findings

The study explored media framing and representation of rape cases in Nigeria in selected Nigerian newspapers : *Leadership*, *Daily Trust*, *Guardian*, and *Vanguard*. The study was hinged on the framing theory. Five research questions were raised and the results obtained from the analysis were discussed.

On the question of the frequency at which Nigerian newspapers report cases of rape, it was found out that most Nigerian newspapers seldom report rape cases. *Leadership* and *Daily Trust* newspapers, however, topped the list of Nigerian newspapers in the reportage of rape cases as the two newspapers reported thirty-three (33) and twenty-four (24) rape cases respectively out of the 81 stories sampled. This affirms the study of Mushau (2013) which found out that in 2013, an average of two rape cases occurred per day in Lagos alone. Thus, if an average of two rape cases

occurred daily in Lagos alone and only few were reported in that year as covered by the study, it deductively shows low reportage of rape cases by Nigerian newspapers. However, this may be as a result of the unwillingness of rape victims to report such cases to security personnel or the press. According to Okafo-Vanni (2013), there are numerous cases of rape and gang rape in Nigeria, yet many go unreported; the few that get reported to the authorities are either not pursued by the police or the victim is advised to keep silent lest she disgraces her family. Findings further revealed that most rape cases were reported to the police by the victims' relations. These victims' relations were even unwilling to do so but had to go to the police because of the need to protect the victims from possible physical victimization. Stigma and social discrimination in society accounted for the unwillingness to make rape cases a press affair.

On the dominant story or form of coverage of rape cases in Nigeria, the study found that most Nigerian newspapers report cases of rape in straight news form. The implication of this is that investigative and explanatory stories on rape incidents presented in feature story format are lacking in these newspapers. This gives reports on rape a predictable pattern. According to Joseph (2008) mainstream media coverage of rape over the past quarter of a century has generally conformed to a predictable pattern: long spells of routine reports regularly, if randomly, culled from police handouts, broken by brief periods of intensive and extensive coverage catalyzed by one or more cases that happen to grab the imagination of the media and the public, usually in that order (p. 262). Feature stories would provide opportunity for indepth coverage of rape cases, with detailed presentation of facts: how the victims were attacked, the news behind the news, interpretation of such incidents, and what law enforcement agents are doing. This will provide a platform for informative story contents beyond the skeletal straight news presentation of rape cases. On the Nigerian newspaper placement of rape cases, the study found that considering the front, back and inside pages of Nigerian newspapers, most Nigerian newspapers as typified by the four selected Nigerian newspapers; place most of their rape-related cases or reports inside the pages of their newspapers, thus, denying them prominence. This agrees with the position of Agaba (2013) who posited that the increase in the rate of rape cases in Nigeria may not be unconnected with the culture of brotherliness, spirit of forgiveness and non-placement of priority and prominence; in the reportage of rape cases.

On the research question pertaining to the source of rape cases as reported in the Nigerian newspapers, the study found that most cases of rape as reported by the Nigerian newspapers have their origin or source from the relations of victims which include victims parents, aunts, uncles etc. Thus, many victims of rape do not report or divulge these rape incidents committed against them. This, no doubt, confirms the findings of Ifeacho (2012) who stated that victims of rape would rather wish to nurse their wounds alone instead of reporting their ordeals and end up being stigmatized by the same society that ought to come to their rescue. This also confirms a similar finding after a study on violence against women in Nepal which revealed that women who had been sexually assaulted were the least likely to seek help (Government of Nepal, 2012). The unwillingness of rape victims to report such incidents buttresses the existence of a shameful culture which stigmatizes these victims in most societies across the globe. Culture-specific reasons could

explain why a woman might feel ashamed or guilt-ridden, but the violation of the body ranks as one of the most common (Benedict, 1992; Thapan, 1997).

Conclusion

The findings of this study have revealed that cases that bother on rape are reported by Nigerian newspapers but the degree of coverage by the four selected Nigerian newspapers is minimal especially the Guardian newspaper coverage of rape cases. While most of the reported cases in the three selected newspapers appeared in straight news report, very few editorials on rape were run. Again, the four newspapers “*Leadership, Daily Trust, Vanguard and Guardian,*” placed most of their news stories on rape inside their newspapers than at the front or back pages. In some cases, the newspapers ended up re-victimizing the rape victims by ascribing or making them appear responsible for their trauma. The study also revealed that most rape victims do not report these cases for fear of societal stigmatization, and it is the relations of these victims of rape that most often are the sources that bring the crime to the knowledge of society. The findings of this study also revealed that responsibility frame and the innocence frame were predominantly used in reporting rape cases.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of the study, the following recommendations were made:

- i. There is need for Nigerian newspapers to go beyond reporting rape cases but provide enough follow-up stories to ensure that cases of rape are followed up to a logical conclusion.
- ii. Newspapers should also improve on the prominence given to stories on rape cases through agenda on the matter. This can be achieved by ensuring that stories on rape are placed on their cover or back pages.
- iii. All rape victims should be shown much love and care to reengineer their self-esteem. The legislature, state ministries, women groups and the Federal Government should take up these cases and offer all necessary assistance to the victims.
- iv. There is need for Nigerian newspaper to avoid the use of responsibility frame so as to stop the re-victimization of the victim of rapes.

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