

REPORTING HUMAN KILLINGS FOR MONEY RITUAL IN NIGERIA: A COMPARATIVE CONTENT ANALYSIS OF *VANGUARD* AND *THE PUNCH* NEWSPAPERS

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Abstract

This study examined newspaper coverage of human killings for money rituals in Nigeria, a content analysis of Vanguard, and The Punch newspapers from January 2021 to December 2023. The study was anchored on framing theory which gives insight into the pattern at which the media being a creator of messages structure and put forward ideas or the messages intended for the public on a matter of importance. Meanwhile, the research used content analysis as its design with a code guide and code sheet as instruments for data collection. A sample of 318 editions of both newspapers were selected from 2,160 editions making the study population. Data were analysed using SPSS and interpreted in a simple frequency and percentage distribution table. Findings revealed that most Nigerian newspapers reported stories about human killings for money rituals in straight news rather than features, editorials, or commentary/opinions that could help in analysing the issue deeply. It was also discovered that most of the stories were found in the newspapers. This study concluded that the Nigerian mass media is doing a lot in the coverage of human killings for money rituals in Nigeria. However, the print media would have to scale up its efforts in reporting this menace. It was recommended that Nigerian newspapers improve their coverage of human killings for money rituals by focusing more on the use of features, editorials, commentaries, and opinion articles which help to give deeper perspectives for informing and educating the public about the menace of money-motivated ritual killings.

Key Words: *Newspaper, Coverage, Human Sacrifice, Money Rituals, Content Analysis*

Introduction

Before now, existing religious literature such as the Holy Bible and Quran established that sacrifices were made using animals and fruits in the early days of Christianity and Islam. However, the first religious event relating to human sacrifice was established in *Genesis 22, 1-13* of the Holy Bible, and *Surah As-Saffat- 102* of the Holy Quran respectively where God demanded the sacrifice of the only son of Abraham as a test of his faith and trust in Him. But, He (God) eventually gave a ram to be used as a sacrifice to Him in place of Isaac (*as in Christianity*) or Ishmael (*as in Islam*). Drawing perspectives from the anthropological point of view, religion has continued to be part of human life and as such has played a very crucial part in human existence (Crosby, Ritt, and Slunaker, 2018). At the same time, activities relating to sacrificial rites have not seized to date, and have evolved from the giving of fruits at alters and killing of animals at shrines to the taking of human life to be sacrificed to a supposed supernatural being (Musana, 2014). Sacrificial killings, particularly those that involve the use of humans: some specific parts, blood, etc have become a global phenomenon and continue to raise universal debates. Nonetheless, most of the arguments have been premised on rites relating to religion and culture thereby leaving out no ethnic or cultural groups throughout the world.

Aside from satanic practices that involve vampirism and witchcraft leading to human sacrifices in the United States, the United Kingdom in 2002 witnessed the first of its kind African belief system of human killing for ritual purposes involving the mutilation of a young boy who was believed to have originated from West Africa (Barron's, 2021; *Punchng.com, 2021*). Resulting of this scenario, it is a fact that the perspective or belief system about human sacrifice in Europe and America is quite different from that of Africa and Asia, particularly as it

bothers on the white and black race disparities in perceived system beliefs. Leeson (2014) while discussing human sacrifice, argues that universally, human sacrifice is presented as a religious obligation, and as such behaviourist ideation is based on the concepts of the “economic man”. Therefore, when human sacrifice is put into perspective, the act is based on two major religious views in the case that those involved in the act of sacrificing humans are either: (1) looking to uplift their control of the environment and people around them, or (2) to create wealth in order to raise their standards in the society, such is the scenario about human sacrifices around the world.

In Nigeria, killing of human beings for money rituals has consistently been the talk of the society. In other words, money ritual has become the order of the day amongst the young and old. Many have argued that this could be linked to the level of poverty and economic hardship in the country. Some so-called men of God and public office holders are not excluded from this practice. For instance, in 2022, *The Cable* reported the arrest of one Mr. Felix Ajadi, a pastor over the killing of a 39-year-old person in Ogun state (Ayodele, 2022). As a result of the incessant killings for ritual purposes, the Nigerian government declared a state of emergency in 2022, while urging the security apparatus to tighten its surveillance to stop rampant human killings for money rituals (Obadare, 2022). The Nigerian traditional media industry in its quests for national advancement has continued to inform and educate the Nigerians on the implications of human killing for ritual purposes on the socio-economic and socio-political development of the country.

Nonetheless, despite the media's consistent efforts in reporting human killings and activities relating to money rituals due to its social responsibility functions leading to global and local measures in curbing the menace of ritual killings, it beats one's imagination to see that the act has continued to increase amongst the people throughout the world, and particularly among Nigerians regardless of the legal and even spiritual consequence (Obadare, 2022). Sad enough is the general notion that the media is contributing a great deal to human killings for ritual purposes in our society today (Obadare, 2022) despite its efforts in crime reportage. This view however has stimulated the reason the government is taking proactive measures in regulating social media (Ufuoma, 2022). It is on this basis that this study is premised on evaluating the effort of Nigerian newspapers in the coverage of human killings for money rituals.

Research Objectives

Drawing perspectives from the forgoing arguments, the following are the objectives of the study:

- To know the nature of coverage of human killings for ritual in Nigerian newspapers.
- To investigate the prominence given to stories relating to human killings for money rituals in Nigerian newspapers.
- To establish the frame used in reporting stories relating to human killings for money rituals in Nigerian newspapers.
- To examine the age bracket of perpetrators mostly reported to be involved in human killings for money rituals in the Nigerian newspapers.

Literature Review

The Nigerian Newspaper and Developmental Reporting

Developmental reporting refers to a type of journalism that focuses on reporting and analysing issues related to development, progress, and improvement within a society or a country (Covering Migration, 2020). In the context of Nigerian newspapers, it refers to the coverage of news and stories that revolve around the development and growth of Nigeria as a nation. Nigerian newspapers such as “*The Guardian*”, “*The Punch*”, “*ThisDays*”, “*Vanguard*” and “*Daily Trust*” often engage in developmental issues by reporting on the progress of infrastructural projects such as roads, bridges, airports, and public facilities. Covering economic indicators, business activities, investments, and initiatives aimed at boosting Nigeria's economy. Highlighting advancements in education and healthcare sectors as well as challenges, and

improvements in these areas of national development, and further reporting on technological advancements, start-ups, and innovations that contribute to Nigeria's development.

The Newspapers discuss social programs, poverty alleviation efforts, and initiatives to improve the well-being of citizens covering agriculture-related news, modern farming techniques, and efforts to enhance food security reporting on energy projects, electricity generation, and efforts to improve basic infrastructure. Analysing government policies, reforms, and regulations aimed at driving development and progress, highlighting environmental issues, conservation efforts, and sustainable development practices. The Nigerian newspaper industry plays a crucial role in developmental reporting, which refers to the coverage of issues, events, and topics that are significant for the country's development and progress. In the context of Nigeria, where various developmental challenges exist, newspapers have a responsibility to highlight these issues and contribute to finding solutions.

Nigerian newspapers are instrumental in identifying and highlighting critical developmental issues facing the country. These can include topics such as infrastructure deficits, education challenges, healthcare access, poverty alleviation, corruption, governance, and environmental concerns (Adesoji & Alimi, 2012). Many Nigerian newspapers engage in investigative journalism to uncover corruption, mismanagement, and other factors hindering development. In-depth investigations can lead to exposing malpractices and encouraging accountability (Apata & Ogunwuyi, 2019). Newspapers often serve as advocates for change by using their platform to raise awareness about key developmental issues. This can lead to public pressure on policymakers and stakeholders to address these concerns (Oyedokun, 2022).

Newspapers provide a space for public discourse and engagement on development-related matters. Through opinion pieces, letters to the editor, and reader feedback, citizens can voice their opinions, share their experiences, and contribute to the discourse on development. In addition to highlighting problems; newspapers can also focus on solutions (Olajide & Nwangi, 2022). Reporting on successful initiatives, innovative projects, and positive stories can inspire similar efforts and showcase potential ways forward.

Nigerian newspapers often offer insightful policy analysis and expert opinions on developmental matters. This can contribute to informed public discourse and assist policymakers in making well-informed decisions (Nogara, 2019). Newspapers play a role in monitoring the implementation of developmental projects and policies. Regular updates and analysis on the progress of initiatives hold stakeholders accountable and inform the public about the outcomes (Bello & Aminu, 2021).

Many newspapers support community development initiatives through their reporting. They highlight local challenges, successes, and opportunities, fostering a sense of community engagement. While Nigerian newspapers have a significant role to play in developmental reporting, they also face challenges. These include financial constraints, limited resources for investigative journalism, censorship, and threats to journalists' safety (Oyedokun, 2022). Despite these challenges, technological advancements have opened up new avenues for impactful reporting, such as digital platforms, multimedia storytelling, and data journalism. Additionally, collaborations between media organizations, civil society, and international partners can amplify the impact of developmental reporting.

Newspaper: The Elitist Medium and Crime Reporting

The newspaper has traditionally been considered an important source of information, but it has also faced criticism for catering to specific demographics and influencing public perception of crime. Historically, newspapers were often considered an elitist medium due to factors such as cost, literacy rates, and accessibility. In many countries, including Nigeria, newspapers were initially aimed at the educated elite, often written in English or another colonial language. This limited the reach of newspapers and their ability to address the concerns of the broader population. Newspapers can have a demographic bias in terms of their readership and content. They might focus on issues that resonate with the interests of the educated and

economically privileged, leaving out the perspectives and concerns of marginalized communities (Banjac, 2022). This can perpetuate inequalities and limit the scope of public discourse.

Crime reporting in newspapers has often been criticized for sensationalism. Crime stories that involve violence, scandal, or sensational elements tend to attract more readership. Newspapers might prioritize such stories to boost sales or online traffic, which can lead to an overrepresentation of certain types of crimes. This can distort public perception and contribute to fear-mongering (Dele & Soremekun, 2013). Newspapers play a crucial role in shaping public perception of crime and criminal justice. The types of crimes highlighted, the language used, and the framing of stories can influence how readers perceive the prevalence and seriousness of crime.

Elitist biases in reporting might lead to a focus on crimes that directly affect the privileged, overshadowing other important issues. Due to resource limitations and the prioritization of certain types of stories, newspapers might not provide comprehensive coverage of crime. Crimes that occur in marginalized communities or that involve vulnerable populations might receive less attention. This can contribute to a skewed understanding of the broader crime landscape.

While sensationalism might boost readership, newspapers have a responsibility to report crime accurately and ethically. Biased reporting can perpetuate stereotypes and contribute to social divisions. Ethical journalism involves providing context, diverse perspectives, and accurate information to help readers form informed opinions. The digital era has brought about opportunities for more diverse voices to be heard through online news platforms and social media. Independent online newspapers and citizen journalism can counteract the elitist bias and provide perspectives from different socioeconomic backgrounds.

Framing Theory

The framing theory gives insight into the pattern at which the creator of a message (the reporter or journalist in this case) structures and puts forward an idea or the messages intended for the public on a matter of importance. This theory according to Baran and Davis (2012, p. 330) was developed by Goffman Erving in 1974 to provide a systematic account of how we use expectation to make sense of everyday life situations and the people in them. Goffman, as cited in Baran and Davis, (2012, p. 332), “used the term frame to refer to a specific set of expectations used to make sense of a social situation at a given point in time”. Goffman further stressed that the frame theory explains that we learn social cues through everyday interaction and from observing how they are used in media content.

Communication spans all spheres of human activities ranging from health to social, political, economic, religious, scientific, and technology. Framing theory is also a very relevant theory that affects the pattern and structure of communication which in turn influences or affects relationships either negatively or positively. For instance, framing theory can be used to address how a political campaign can achieve its objectives. Recent research on this theory reveals that framing theory has been refined by delving into how the elites in our society discuss certain events as many of the events often presented by the media today centre on the upper class who are at the same time the powerful stakeholders in our society. In the same light, studies have also revealed that framing theory has also focused on a slant or content frame that identifies whether a story presented is constructed in a way that either supports or favour one side of people against the other or that such story is constructed to support an idea or opposes it (Littlejohn and Foss, 2009).

In a nutshell, therefore, Rubin (2023) in his views concludes that framing is then a strategy or technique that is adopted by information purveyors to impose their reality on their target audience. However interesting framing theory is, it is just to state from readily available resources on this subject matter, it seems very vague and uncertain to identify the number of frames available. In other words, the various frames available for this theory have not been consistent. For instance, Obi, Okon, and Mbazie (2021) argue that available studies on framing theory identify two main consistent frames which are generic, and unique frames which are those

frames constructed based on the specification of the issue or event presented. On the contrary, *Media Studies* (2023) outlines two frames: sensationalism and stereotyping which are usually adopted today and different from those identified by Obi et al. (2021).

In addition, Arowolo (2017, p.3), while discussing framing theory identified four assumptions of the theory: that journalist decide through a selection of the story to publish and decide how kind of story will be presented to determine the issue the public thinks about and how they think about such issue; the public who are at the same time media audiences interpret the information they are being exposed to by the media in their perspective (frame) which might overlap or contradict the frame or perspective of the media; every time frames are evoked in news presentation they are either reinforced negatively or positively and building of frame involves a systematic process that happens over some time. However, going by these assumptions, the frame theory seems very technical since it involves how a journalist perceives a story and determines how such stories are related or painted to the public. By this, the framing theory in my view is very unpredictable when it comes to the feedback that may be gotten from the audience when one understands that even the audience frame of such a story might differ from the initial frame being painted by the journalist or media organisation.

Based on this view, it is a fact that scholars have argued against some of the ideals of framing theory. For instance, while expanding the perception of Denis McQuail in 2010 on his assumption on framing theory, Arowolo (2017) concluded that framing news stories by a journalist is merely a thing of common sense and notion. This argument therefore identifies one great weakness of this theory as argued afterwards. Therefore, it is expedient to discuss the strengths and weaknesses of this theory so that we can better grasp it and how best it applies to the study under investigation.

This theory therefore becomes relevant to this study because it explains that in the cause of making news out of events already created in the society through ritual killing activities for money ritual, the journalist being the first news determinant and the gatekeeper is poised with the charisma and professional capacity to decide how best to carve or structure his news story to attract his readers' attention. In a nutshell, the idea here is that the journalist and other editors who provide reports concerning human killings for money rituals will determine how such stories are being written and presented to the public. This situation, no doubt will determine what the notions and perspectives of the public will be on human killings for money ritual will constitute in the society to inform the actions and inactions of the society on human killings for money ritual.

Methodology

This study is premised on a quantitative content analysis design. This design allows for analysing and interpreting secondary data collected from two Nigerian newspapers: *Vanguard* and *The Punch*. The justification for choosing both newspapers out of over 20 Nigerian newspapers was premised on the general acceptance and readership enjoyed by both newspapers (Cardoso, 2022; *w3newspapers.com*, 2023). The population of the study is derived from the whole editions of *Vanguard* and *The Punch* newspapers published from January 1, 2021, to December 31, 2023, to make a total of 2,160. This means that each newspaper published 1,080 editions throughout the three-year study duration to make 2,160 editions of both newspapers. The rationale for selecting a three-year duration for this study was based on the general outcry concerning the increase in ritual killings. A sample of 159 editions of each newspaper was then selected using the composite week sampling technique to make a total sample of 318 editions of both *Vanguard* and *The Punch* newspapers. Using this technique, the first edition of both newspapers published on Friday, 1st January, 2021 was picked, and another was picked on Saturday of the second week, 9th January 2021 and the third editions were selected on Sunday of the third week, 17th January 2021 to go on in such order (*see table 1 below*).

A code guide and code sheet were deployed as instruments for data collection. Content validity and a pilot study were conducted to determine the validity and reliability of the

instrument respectively. Holsti's formula was used to establish the internal consistency of the research instrument which yielded 6 on a range of 2-10. The Holst's formula is as given below:

$$R = \frac{2M}{N1 + N2}$$

Where:

R= Reliability

M=Number of coding decisions agreed upon

N= Total number of coding decisions made by each coder respectively.

Therefore:

$$R = \frac{2 \times 22}{4 + 4} = \frac{44}{8}$$

$$R = 5.5 = 6$$

On a range of 2 to 10

The code guide consists of units of analysis which were further broken down into content categories with specific numbers (codes). These codes are then matched according to the stories reported in the newspapers being analysed to make meaning of them according to each of the research questions. The data collected was analysed with Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS) and presented in simple frequency and percentage tables for clear and apt understanding.

Table 1: Shows Selected Dates (editions of newspapers) for the Study

MONTH	2021	2022	2023	TOTAL
January	1,9,17,18,26	5,13,21,29	7,15,16,24	14
February	3,11,19,27	6,7,15,23	1,9,17,25	12
March	7,8,16,24	3,11,19,27,28	5,6,14,22,30	14
April	1,9,17,25,26	5,13,21,29	7,15,23,24	13
May	4,12,20,28	7,15,16,24	2,10,18,26	12
June	5,13,14,22,30	1,9,17,25	3,11,12,20,28	14
July	1,9,17,25,26	3,4,12,20,28	6,14,22,30,31	15
August	3,11,19,27	5,13,21,22,30	1,9,17,25	13
September	4,12,13,21,29	7,15,23	2,10,11,19,27	13
October	7,15,23,31	1,9,10,18,26	5,13,21,29,30	14
November	1,9,17,25	3,11,19,27,28	7,15,23	12
December	3,11,19,20,28	6,14,22,30	1,9,17,18,26	14
TOTAL	54	52	53	159 x 2 =318

Unit of Analysis

A unit of analysis, according to Trochim (2023) is the major entity that a researcher is observing or analysing in a study. Therefore, the Unit of Analysis or Context Unit for this study includes news stories, editorials, features, cartoons/pictures, commentaries/opinions as may be found in the selected newspapers: *Vanguard*, and *The Punch* Newspapers.

Content Categories and Variables

According to the United States General Accounting Office (1989, p.11), a content category provides the structure for grouping recording units as designed by the researcher concerning the study. In the same vein, Wimmer and Dominick (2011:164) as cited in Nwogbo (2015:44) posit that a precise makeup of content category can vary with the topic under investigation. More so, Variables of content categories are the division of the content categories which the researcher considered appropriate to define the various content categories being analysed in the newspaper. Therefore, the content categories and their various variables for this study are presented below:

- **Nature of Coverage:** this explains the type of story that human killings for money rituals were reported in the newspapers. This could either be straight news, feature,

editorial, opinion, commentary, etc. Therefore, the variables for this content category are:

- i. **Straight News:** These are stories reported by a journalist in a news format
 - ii. **Editorial:** This is the reportage about human killings for money ritual being the opinion and corporate voice of the newspaper.
 - iii. **Feature:** Unlike straight news, the feature story is a deeper reportage about human killings for money rituals in the newspapers.
 - iv. **Commentary/Opinion:** This kind of reportage about human killings for money rituals stems from the individual or general opinions about ritual killings for money rituals in the newspaper.
 - v. **Cartoon/Picture:** This is a pictorial report giving insights into human killings for money rituals in the newspaper.
- **Prominence of Coverage:** This explains the importance given to human killings for money ritual issues in the newspapers. This is thus determined considering the placement of such a story in the newspaper. To this end, the variables for this category are:
 - i. **Front Page:** These are stories found on the front pages of the selected newspapers.
 - ii. **Inside Page:** these are stories found inside but not at the main centre of the selected newspaper.
 - iii. **Centre Page:** these are reports found at the centre spread of the selected newspapers.
 - iv. **Back Page:** these are stories found on the last pages (back) of the selected newspapers.
 - **Frame of Coverage:** this is the style, or idea pictured within a story by the reporter or journalist. In other words, the frame explains how the report about human killings for money ritual is written and presented in the newspaper to the reader. It is believed that how a story relating to human killings for money ritual is presented or written and presented to the reader will determine how the reader perceives the act of human killing for money ritual purposes. Therefore, the variables for this content category are:
 - **Educating:** a report about human killings for money ritual is adjudged to be educating where such a report does show a deep level of condemnation; describe a punishment via law enforcement agencies or court.
 - **Discouraging:** a report about human killings for money ritual is adjudged to be discouraging where such report thus shows a deep level of condemnation; arrest leading to describing a punishment via law enforcement agencies or court of law.
 - **Informative:** this is the type of report that gives information about a previous report on the subject matter. Such a story is in the form of a follow-up of a previous story giving additional information about the incident that has been once reported.
 - **Age Bracket of Perpetrators:** the age bracket of perpetrators explains the ages of those that are mostly reported to be involved with human killings for money rituals in the selected newspapers. This is expected to reveal the most reported age range that is mostly involved in human killings for money ritual purposes. The variables for this category are:
 - **10-20:** coverage shows that those involved in the act were between 10 to 20 years of age.
 - **21-30:** coverage shows that those involved in the act were between 21 to 30 years of age.
 - **31-40:** coverage shows that those involved in the act were between 31 to 40 years of age.
 - **41-50:** coverage shows that those involved in the act were between 41 to 50 years of age.

- **51 Above:** coverage shows that those involved in the act were 50 years of age and above.
- **Other:** coverage does not state the age of the person(s) involved in the act. Or situations where there are two or more persons involved.

Results

Table 1: Number of Stories Found In Each of the Newspapers within the Year of Coverage

Newspaper	2021	2022	2023	Total
<i>Vanguard</i>	09	17	04	30
<i>The Punch</i>	12	16	03	31
Total	21	33	07	61
Percentage	34.4%	54%	11.4%	100%

Source: Content Analyst, 2024

Table 1 above shows the number of stories found in both *Vanguard* and *The Punch* newspapers within the three years this research is focused on. From this Table, it is revealed that from 2021 to 2023 *Vanguard* newspaper reported 30 cases of human killings for money rituals, while *The Punch* newspaper reported 31 cases within the same year. On the other side, the Table also showed that in 2021 both newspapers reported 21(34.4%) cases. In 2022, both newspaper reported 33(54%) cases, and 07(11.4%) cases in 2023 to make a total cases of 61(100%). This therefore implies that, of the 318(100%) editions of both newspapers analysed both newspapers were able to report 61(19%) stories about human killings for money rituals within 3 years.

Table 2: Nature of Stories

Newspaper	Straight news	Editorial	Feature	Comm/Op	Letter to Editor	Cartoons Pictures	Total
<i>Vanguard</i>	22	01	05	02	00	00	30
<i>The Punch</i>	28	00	02	01	00	00	31
Total	50	01	07	03	00	00	61
Percentage	82%	02%	11%	05%	00%	00%	100%

Source: Content Analyst, 2024

Table 2 shows the nature of stories relating to human killings for money rituals where 82% of issues were straight news, 02% were editorial, 11% were feature articles, 05% were commentary/opinion, letters to the editor were 00%, cartoons/pictures were 00%. This implies that issues relating to human killings for money rituals were majorly reported in straight news.

Table 3: Story Placement

Newspaper	Front Page	Inside Page	Centre Page	Back Page	Total
<i>Vanguard</i>	04	25	01	00	30
<i>The Punch</i>	03	28	00	00	31
Total	07	53	01	00	61
Percentage	11%	87%	02%	00%	100%

Source: Content Analyst, 2024

Table 3 above examines the placement of stories about ritual killings for money ritual. Here, 11% of the story was placed on the front page of the newspapers, 87% were found inside the newspaper pages, 02% at the centre of the newspapers, and 00% on the back page. This reveals that the majority of the reports were placed inside the newspapers' pages.

Table 4: Frame of Coverage

Newspaper	Educative	Discouraging	Neutral	Informative	Total
<i>Vanguard</i>	06	16	00	08	30
<i>The Punch</i>	07	21	00	03	31
Total	13	37	00	11	61
Percentage	21%	61%	00%	18%	100%

Source: Content Analyst, 2024

Table 4 shows the frame used in reporting human killings for money rituals in Nigeria. Consequently, 21% of the reports were educationally framed, 61% were framed to discourage, 00% of the stories were neutrally framed, and 18% were informatively framed. This reveals that the majority of the reports in the newspapers adopted the discouraging frame.

Table 5: Age of Perpetrators

Newspaper	10-20	21-30	31-40	41-50	50Above	Others	Total
<i>Vanguard</i>	04	03	01	03	01	18	30
<i>The Punch</i>	03	01	01	02	01	23	31
Total	07	04	02	05	02	41	61
Percentage	11.4%	07%	3.2%	8.1%	3.2%	67%	100%

Source: Content Analyst, 2024

Table 5 shows the age bracket of perpetrators of human killings for money rituals in the reports. Therefore, 11.4% were between 10-20 years old, 07% were between ages 21-30, 3.2% were between 31-40 years, 8.1% were aged 41-50, and 3.2% were aged 50 and above, while 67% were within other ages. This reveals that the age bracket of perpetrators of human killing for money ritual stories was majorly within all the age brackets.

Discussion

RQ1: What is the nature of coverage of human killings for ritual in Nigerian newspapers?

The focus of this research question 1 is on the nature of coverage that sought to examine whether issues of human killing for money ritual were reported through straight news, editorials, features, commentaries or opinions, cartoons, or pictures in the Nigerian newspaper. Findings reveal that most Nigerian newspapers report stories about human killings for money rituals in straight news (82%) rather than feature articles (11%), editorials (2%), or even commentary/opinion (5%). Therefore, when considering many of the reports relating to other natures of coverage in the Nigerian print media, it is just to conclude that many crime-related news stories are mostly presented in straight news format. This is reflected in many such issues where scholars have had to investigate the nature of coverage in the newspaper medium.

Consequently, while examining the Nigeria restructuring debate in the newspaper, Talabi (2018) found out that many stories within newspapers are usually within the pages of the newspapers. In other words, straight news plays a significant role in informing the readers since it is the body of the print media where issues are discussed extensively. More so, Gbolagunte and Popoola (2005) as cited in Talabi (2018, p.14) argue that straight news gives concise but sufficient information about an issue to the reader. Furthermore, reporting such a serious crime like human killings for whatever purpose is expected to be at the front burner of every media considering its implication on the socio-cultural, political, and economic status of Nigeria.

However, it was not the case for the Nigerian newspapers because little or nothing was done using the editorial and feature pages of the newspapers to address this menace despite Omozuwa's (2022) argument that newspaper editorials play a crucial and seminal function by strengthening the ethical foundation of every democratic society. Therefore, despite the weight an editorial and feature article carry in the newspaper medium which bothers on the situational analytical strength if compared with straight news, it however shows that many print media prefer to address very serious crimes like human killings for money rituals with straight news,

thereby subjecting such menace to mere information rather than evaluating this social vices in a deeper sense through an holistic evaluation of the matter.

RQ2: How much prominence is given to stories relating to human killings for money rituals in Nigerian newspapers?

Evaluating this research inquiry by considering whether stories about human killings for money rituals were placed at the front of the newspapers, inside the pages, centre spread or at the back pages of the newspapers, investigation reveals that the majority (87%) of the stories were found inside the newspapers. Though few (11%) of these stories also appeared on the front page, nonetheless, one cannot consider the importance being placed on a news story when it is placed within the pages of the news material. It is generally accepted that the importance of a story is determined by where the story appears in print media. What this implies is that stories that are often placed on the front and back page of a newspaper carry more weight than any other one being placed inside the newspaper. This is because the front and back pages of newspapers are usually the centre of attraction for this medium.

Therefore, whatever story appears on the front or back page of a newspaper is perceived to have more value than those inside the newspaper. Therefore, considering the placement of stories about human killings for money rituals in Nigerian newspapers, it is an obvious fact that many Nigerian newspapers do not consider stories about human killings for money ritual purposes an important issue that needed attention within the period of investigation. Even though, it is a known fact that news stories are usually fighting for space within the newspapers, and as such allocated specific columns and pages. Nonetheless, whatever story is placed at the front burner of a medium is what is present where it can attract the attention of the reader in every media environment. This finding therefore is not different from every other related investigation on prominence which is determined through news story placement in the newspapers. Ajaegbu and Akoja (2022), Ewa-Ibe, and Iroh (2021), Ekweonu (2020), Talabi, Adaja, and Sanusi (2019) established in their findings that in the exception of political stories the Nigerian newspapers often place many stories such as crime, domestic violence, health-related issues, government programmes like SDGs, etc inside the newspaper pages.

RQ3: What is the frame used in reporting stories relating to human killings for money rituals in Nigerian newspapers?

This research question investigates how the stories relating to human killings for money rituals were framed. In other words, the pattern in which the report was written to project a certain perspective that might not be spelled out directly to the reader but when evaluated deeply would send the actual notion of the story to the reader. Although scholars have argued that there is no general pattern to determine how a reporter should frame a story, nonetheless, the frame of the reports on human killings for money rituals in Nigerian newspapers was examined from the point of whether the stories were framed to educate the public on the menace of human killings relating to rituals, discourage the act by reporting the arrest of perpetrators and bringing them to justice, or to pass necessary information about ritual killings. The study therefore reveals that a minority of the stories about human killings for money rituals in Nigerian newspapers were framed to discourage the act. While there were stories that took neutral positions on the subject matter, the discouraging frame took 61% of the entire story. This was followed by the 21% frame that educated the public about human killings for money ritual and its implication on Nigeria, and the 18% frame used in informing the public.

Based on these findings, by framing this social menace in a discouraging manner, the Nigerian newspapers, despite not giving much prominence to covering this issue have been able to educate and inform the public on human killings for money rituals in the view to discourage the public from the dastardly act of killings fellow human beings in order to make money. Although a lot of scholars have examined framing in different studies, no framing pattern has been the same in terms of usage and issues being addressed. This position, therefore, reflects the

argument that there is no generally accepted way to determine how a reporter should frame a story. However, the evaluation of news framing in this research is to establish the cognitive perspective of the print media audiences after being exposed to reports about human killings for money rituals. In line with this idea, D'Anjelo (2002) as cited in Baresch, Hsu and Reese (2010) identifies cognitive, critical and constructionist paradigms for classifying framing research. This finding, however, is placed on the cognitive paradigm which explains that the perspective of the reader is dependent on the process of interaction and negotiation between the media frame and the individual's existing schemas and knowledge. This is therefore seen as the effect such a frame has on the mental wellness of the reader or print audience.

RQ4: What is the age bracket of perpetrators mostly reported to be involved in human killings for money rituals in Nigerian newspapers?

This research question identifies the specific age bracket that is found perpetrating the act of killing human beings for money rituals in Nigeria. The stimulating factor for this is to understand their mind to see if human killing for money rituals have to do with poverty or excessive quest for wealth asserted by Salihu, Isiaka and Abdulaziz (2022). To this end, the study shows that 67% of the age bracket reported were other ages. What this implies is that those involved in human killings for money rituals cut across all ages. In other words, perpetrators are usually both young and old. Consequently, understanding this information explains that truly, poverty and excessive quest for wealth. However, this finding does not align with the view of Salihu, Isiaka and Abdulaziz (2022) whose findings reveal that only young people are mostly involved in ritual killings; and that perpetrators of human killings for money rituals are often young people are exposed to media contents such as movies (Aniukwu and Ojelibeckwu, 2023). Though this finding does not exonerate the youths going by the data collected in the study which shows that 11% of 10-20 years are also involved in this dastardly act, 8% who are between ages 41-50, 7% of those within the ages of 21-30, while the least of ages involved in human killings are 50 years and above with just 3%.

Conclusion

Human killing for money ritual has become the order of the day in Nigeria and has drawn the attention of both mainstream and new media. It is on this basis that this study focused on newspaper coverage and audience perception of human killing for money ritual in Nigeria, the importance of the efforts of the media in the promotion of a sane society is a matter of social responsibility. As such, the media is expected to live up to this function in the pursuit of national development, particularly as being the fourth estate of the realm- the fourth arm of government whose ethical, and professional role is to be the bridge between the government and the governed. Meanwhile, available studies in the area of newspaper coverage of criminal activities have shown that the Nigerian press, despite being a medium for the elites has continually performed the expected role of informing, educating, entertaining and most importantly, correlating and promoting culture. The effect of human killing for money rituals cannot be overemphasised as reported in the media space. However, some scholars and political leaders have argued that the human killing for money ritual is encouraged by the media. This position is however not true considering the findings stemming from this study as some available literature has pointed to the bad economy, political corruption, and the lackadaisical attitude of government to the yearnings and aspirations of the citizens.

Going by the various literature on ritual killings in Nigeria, it is not out of place to agree that the Nigerian mass media is doing a lot in the coverage of human killings for money rituals in Nigeria. However, with the various findings from this study, one could conclude that the Nigerian print media have not been living up to their responsibility in consistently reporting issues around human killings for money rituals. This was revealed in the level of importance being placed on the stories about human killings for money ritual purposes, even though most of the stories were framed in a manner that discouraged the act as perpetrators were being arrested

and charged to court for trial and persecution. Again, of the 318 samples drawn from the total editions of Vanguard and the Punch newspaper, it is discouraging to observe that 61 articles made up 19% of the entire editions selected for the study. When this is put into perspective, it could be concluded that Nigerian newspapers do not carry out their social responsibilities in reporting human killing for money rituals thoroughly as one would expect of such a serious media. As a result of this, even if the media is generally perceived to be contributing to the increase in human killing for money ritual in Nigeria, the Nigerian newspaper can be partially excluded from this notion considering the little prominence given to this menace. Considering the adoption of framing theory for this study, it is evident to state that the use of discouraging frame by the Nigerian newspapers about human killings for money rituals is a testimony to the relationship that is further established in the study concerning the effort of covering the menace by Nigerian newspapers which in turn can help set agenda in combating this menace in the Nigerian society.

Recommendations

Consequent upon findings, the following are as thus recommended:

1. Nigerian newspapers should endeavour to pay more attention to the coverage of human killings for money rituals considering its negative implications on the socio-economic and political impacts, especially as it bothers very seriously national security.
2. More so, instead of focusing reports relating to human killings for ritual purposes on straight news, the Nigerian newspapers should also do more in the area of feature, editorial, commentary and opinion due to the high level of event analysis that could be achieved when these kind of writings are considered in informing and educating the public about money ritual related human killings.
3. Based on the frame deployed in reporting the events around human killings for money rituals, Nigerian newspapers should continue to use the discouraging frame as this could spur government agenda against the menace, and also put fear in prospective perpetrators of this dastardly act.

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