

HANDLING OF HUMANO-POLITICO RIGHTS BY SELECT MAINSTREAM NEWS TABLOIDS IN NIGERIA

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ABSTRACT

This study assessed the handling of issues bordering on human and political rights by select mainstream newspapers in Nigeria. The newspapers whose contents were examined and reported were *The Sun*, *The Punch*, *The Daily Times* and *The Guardian* published between October 2020 and February 2021. The significant finding in the study showed that the coverage of rights issues in the select newspapers was low, especially when compared with other contents of the newspapers. A significant recommendation of the study was that Nigerian newspapers should get human and allied rights editors to train and retrain their editorial staff on how to pay more attention to sundry rights issues and accord more prominence to their coverage of such issues.

Keywords: *Political Rights, Human Rights, Sundry Rights, Health Rights, Freedom from Discrimination, Environmental Rights, Legislative Rights, News Coverage, Feature Writing, Editorial.*

Introduction

Newspapers are a significant source of factual media information, opinion, and analysis. They impart knowledge, influence the understanding of issues by their readers and may also act as advocates for the recipients of news items. From this premise, it is safe to say that newspapers play significant roles in society's social, economic and political developments. A part of the study title, "humano-politico", which is this study's adaptation from the popular "socio-politico" concept, describes the relationship between newspapers, human beings and their rights. In other words, the coinage centres on handling human and political rights (otherwise hereinafter referred to as sundry rights) reports within a period of time. In specific terms, handling of humano-politico rights is a study on the newspaper coverage of sundry rights such as child's rights, women's rights, rights/freedom from torture, human rights legislation, fundamental human rights, rights of the disabled, environmental rights, discrimination, health rights; and third generation rights.

Newspaper coverage of sundry rights in Nigeria could be of concern to readers when they affect, reflect, explain or solve problems which affect their physical and psychological well-being, their close friends, family members and personalities in the society, especially matters revealing the present or current situation of prominent figures in the country.

However, sundry rights issues could come from individuals abusing their rights or from a government infringing upon the rights of its citizens. Protecting human rights is equivalent to ensuring that people receive some degree of decent, human treatment. On the other hand, to violate the most basic human rights is to deny individuals their fundamental moral entitlements. In a sense, it is to treat them as

lesser human beings and undeserving of respect and dignity. Examples are acts typically deemed "crimes against humanity."

The Problem

Newspapers cover topics and issues that every individual has the right to know and one of the issues is the violation of human and allied rights. One memorable instance of rights violation, which was extensively covered by mainstream newspapers in Nigeria, was the Lekki Toll Gate Massacre, which took place in 2020. Many Nigerian youths, who, in the bid to air their views publicly through protests, were allegedly killed by Nigerian security forces, while many were reportedly wounded, and many such reports were carried in newspapers. This and many more incidents and aspects of life not mentioned above demonstrate the involvement of newspapers in rights issues and their coverage. However, what remains worrisome to this study is the extent to which newspapers covered sundry rights issues as an essential aspect of life within the period of this study. This therefore gives rise to the question: to what extent did *The Daily Times*, *Punch*, *Guardian* and *Sun* newspapers cover rights issues in Nigeria between 2020 and 2021?

Objectives of the Study

The objectives of the study were to:

- i. find out the size of humano-politico rights reports carried by *Daily Times*, *Punch*, *The Guardian*, and *The Sun* between October 2020 and February 2021;
- ii. identify the rights reports that prominently featured in the select news tabloids;
- iii. ascertain the most under-reported rights issues in the newspapers.
- iv. examine the frames given to rights issues in the newspapers.

Literature Review

Several writers, scholars and researchers have, in recent times, expressed their views, opinions and observations on this subject matter. They appear different in their views of life; so, it is in their views of the subject matter of this study.

According to Okon (2014), human rights are those fundamental and inalienable rights essential for life as a human being. They could also be referred to as freedom enjoyed by human beings as members of the global community. To him, these rights cannot be sold, mortgaged, donated, forfeited, or transferred and should, therefore, not be taken away by any person or state. They are not privileged and so, as long as human beings continue to behave and act like humans, human rights will remain their rights.

Human rights are generally moral rights claimed by everyone and held against everyone, especially against those who run social institutions, Orend (2002). With the advent of the United Nations (UN) and the subsequent adoption of The Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) in 1948, the concept of human rights has turned out to be one of the most contemporary issues across the globe. The UN Charter, which was adopted in 1945, was the first international document to recognise the protection and promotion of human rights as an obligation to be carried out by individual, as well as collective states. The main reason behind the adoption of the charter was, according to forestall the reoccurrence of the horrible events caused by two devastating world wars caused by massive violations of human rights and unbridled breach of territorial integrity.

The Declaration is universal (it applies to all people everywhere) and indivisible (all rights are equally important to the full realisation of one's humanity). Today, the concept of human rights is recognised as a universal one, as seen from the Declaration adopted by the Vienna World Conference on Human Rights in 1993 and the United Nations resolutions passed on the occasion of the 50th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights in 1998.

Asemah (2011), while analysing the role of the media in human life and existence, notes that communication is generally seen as an essential part of the world. To him, it is through communication that human beings mould and control society. This position further shows the importance of the media in the coverage of issues of public concern. It keeps the expected to report issues of public concern and keep the audience abreast of events, especially during protests, as the people rely on them for the needed information. During the EndSars protest, Nigerians and the international community relied deeply on privately owned media on happenings in the nation. Okwechime (2012) notes that by every consideration of good faith, a mass medium is constrained to be faithful, sincere and honest in their reports of events. It should accept full responsibility for any reports of events. It should accept full responsibility for any failure to render true and accurate reports in order not to mislead the audience. He added that, for now, what really counts is the individual's attitude toward his work.

Studies in Nigeria indicate that people seem to have a negative perception of media reportage of protests, especially when the pretest is against the government of the day. Afolabi (2020) states that the mass media have not met their expectations regarding conflicts and insurgencies. This may be a result of the fact that the majority of media houses in the country are owned by governments and individuals and, as such, cannot go against the philosophy of the media organisation since they are primarily used to enhance the interest of the owners.

Due to the way, people gather daily to discuss the contents of newspapers, it inevitably promotes critical thinking, retention of information, problem-solving and the querying of information sources. Newspapers serve various purposes for different categories of users. Okon (2014) describes five ways newspaper reading means to different people: as respite or recreation (using it to unwind from stress or as a tension reliever), public affairs (using it to develop public opinions), for information (using it to know what is going on in the society) as entertainment (using it for pleasure or to und out about pleasurable activities) and for socialisation (using it to feel connected to others beyond the family block in the broader society).

Udoh (2020) describes mass media, which newspapers come under as the organiser means for communicating openly and at a distance to many receivers within a short time. He sums up the societal impacts of the media in different ways: oil, glue and dynamite as glue, and communication maintains social cohesion. Udoh contends that the media give all of us, including strangers, something to talk about by setting an agenda of discussion, He describes the mass media also as dynamites that can rip society apart. Asemah (2011) says the media can work against it. To him, the media can oil and ease the economic wheel of a country or bring them to maintain social equilibrium, facilitate change or seek radical alternatives.

The place of newspapers in promoting human rights in any society cannot be overemphasised; generally, newspapers can bring about positive attitudinal change in individuals. Newspapers are one source of information in today's world. Citizens base their actions on this information. In informing and educating, newspapers provide inputs for forming ideas; hence, they constitute veritable instruments for mobilisation.

In recent years, it has become apparent to observers and practitioners of mass communications that human right is more newsworthy than it was. Human rights are now widely recognised in several parts of the world, and journalists report human rights violations. The media have become interested not only in human rights violations but also in the institutional apparatus designed to promote and protect human rights.

News coverage of human rights shapes public opinion, influences foreign policy development, and serves as an informal means of documenting abuse. Yet this information is incomplete, thus skewing the public's perception of human rights worldwide. If this information is helping to set a political agenda, government officials will focus primarily on those regions receiving media coverage (Brandle, 2015).

Nwankwo (2011) observes that the importance of awareness of human rights is that: "awareness is the key to promoting rights. Citizens must be able to celebrate achievements and successes. The media has a role in reporting good examples of tolerance, peace and respect for human rights. It is not all bad-news dominated by conflict and strife". The importance of the attention given to human rights by the media is noteworthy because their coverage highlights the level of abuses occurring worldwide. Human rights violation is an issue which should be given due attention. Newspapers create awareness on human rights and human rights abuses to help individuals whose rights have been violated to seek redress. Thus, journalism requires active learning, and critical and creative thinking, in which they are equipped to gather information of significance to the task at hand, accessing its credibility and validity.

The roles performed by the media in society, according to Udoh (2020), are instrumental to the promotion of human rights. The media provides most of the information about human rights. In the event of failure of the media to do so fairly, accurately, or consistently, public perceptions will be unfair, inaccurate and inconsistent. It is the role of investigative journalists to search and uncover the truth; the exposure of the truth is in harmony with the public interest, which, when effectively carried out, may be productive in bringing about change Burgan (2020).

Similarly, various studies have been conducted to analyse the media's coverage of human rights issues. Terman (2014), in their study, appraised human rights campaigns in the mass media. The study was centred on assessing public awareness of human rights campaigns, public perception of mass media coverage of human rights issues, and whether mass media coverage of human rights campaigns induces positive behavioural change for rights protection. It adopted a survey method using a questionnaire to elicit information from 384 respondents, and it was anchored on the agenda-setting theory. The study found that the people in Benue State are averagely exposed to mass media campaigns on human rights. The study discovered that mass media campaigns induced behavioural change in the state. The study concludes that human rights are universal rights accruing to every human being by their humanity, which should be applied without discrimination. Thus the quest for the respect and protection of human rights should be seen as part of a broader effort to preserve the dignity of human beings and protect the essence of living.

The study recommends that campaigns for human rights protection cannot be handled alone by the media, even though instrumental. Therefore, human rights activists and reputable non-governmental organisations should join hands with the print media (together with other mass media-radio and television) in the fight for human rights protection. Also, every individual should comply with Chapter V (33-46) of the 1999 Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, which is based on fundamental human rights and that individuals' rights be respected irrespective of affluence, class or social status. Similarly, Ōrgi (2013) sought to establish the print media coverage of human rights in Kenya from January to April 2012 in relation to social rights because of the enormous impact that the media plays in

shaping the opinion of the masses. The study aimed to establish sources of information used in producing stories on social rights and establish the inclusion of diverse stories to bring balanced reporting, establish themes under human rights subject of social rights, establish the number of stories written in the newspapers covering social rights issues, gauge the language employed in developing the articles about social rights- whether it is simple to comprehend by populations who have gotten different levels of literacy.

This study also investigated gatekeepers of information to establish the enthusiasm of their news writers to report on social rights matters besides finding out if the sources of the articles are written by international or national writers, ascertaining the context of the writers' schooling and background in human rights and more so social reporting including challenges faced in reporting human rights and cross-examine news writers on their take or assessment about matters on human rights and more so social rights. The study was able to establish that reporting on social rights in print media in Kenya is insufficiently reported, reports on human rights have- the tendency to be composed of human rights organisations and writers based in urban centres and the media fails to contextualise human rights stories due to lack of proper schooling or training in reporting human rights and that this shortcoming diminishes the professional quality of reporting human rights issues and more so social rights.

Theoretically, this study was anchored on the social responsibility theory propounded by Siebert, Peterson, and Schramm. It is an offshoot of libertarian theory and sprang up in the middle of the 20th century. According to Asemah (2011), its origin is traceable to the report of the 1947 Hutchins Commission on the freedom of the press.

The Social Responsibility theory allows a free press without any censorship. At the same time, the press content should be discussed in public panels, and the media should accept any obligation from public interference, professional self-regulation or both. It has helped create professionalism in media by setting up high accuracy, truth, and information. With a wide range of applications, the theory covers several kinds of private print media and public broadcasting corporations, which are answerable through various democratic procedures to society. The basic principles of the social responsibility theory include the facts that the media should accept and fulfil certain obligations to society; these obligations are mainly to be met by setting high or professional standards of information, truth, accuracy, objectivity and balance; and that in accepting and applying these obligations, media should be self-regulating within the framework of law and established institutions.

Study Design

The content analysis method was used for this study. This was considered most appropriate because it is the best when research is geared towards examining the manifest contents of communications or identifying trends over a long period. Because they are mainstream, The Sun, The Punch, The Guardian and The Daily Times newspaper editions from October 2020 to February 2021 were selected for the study. Two newspapers were examined each week. This means that a total of 160 issues were analysed for this study. Since the population consisted of 160 editions of the selected newspapers, the researcher therefore sampled two editions of the newspapers within a week between October 2020 to February 2021. This amounted to 160 editions for the four newspapers. This selection was made purposively. The reason for using the purposive sampling technique was to meet the study objectives of the researcher. In content categorisation, the contents were classified into the following categories: Child Rights, Women's Rights, Freedom from Torture, Human Rights Legislation,

Fundamental Human Rights, Rights of the Disabled, Environmental Rights, Discrimination, Health Rights, and Third Generation Rights. The units of analysis were straight news stories, editorials and feature stories.

Data Presentation and Analysis

Table 1: Distribution of Rights Coverage

Newspapers	News	Features	Editorials	Total
The Sun	180 (66.55%)	6 (2%)	3 (1%)	189 (69.55%)
The Punch	126 (50%)	5 (1.7%)	3 (1.33%)	134 (53.03%)
The Daily Times	88 (40%)	5 (2.5%)	3 (1%)	96 (43.5%)
The Guardian	60 (30%)	7 (3%)	2 (0.99%)	69 (33.99%)
Total	454 (186.55%)	23 (9.2%)	11 (4.32%)	488 (200.07%)

Table 1 shows the total right stories published by The Sun, The Punch, The Daily Times, and the Guardian Newspapers. In all, 488 human rights stories were published, out of which The Sun published 170, The Punch published 130, and The Daily Times published 120, while The Guardian published 86, representing 78.88%, 59.06%, 49.05 and 40.49%, respectively.

The four newspapers published more than other genres. Four hundred fifty-four news reports represented 186.55% of all human rights reports. No human rights issues were published through letters to editors in the four selected national dailies.

Table 2: Rights versus Other Reports Published

Newspaper	Rights Stories	Overall Stories	Percentage
The Sun	170	9595	2.38%
The Punch	130	9595	2.37%
The Daily Times	102	9595	2.06%
The Guardian	86	9595	0.75%
Total	488	9595	7.56%

Table II is a follow-up table to assess the number of rights stories against the other items in the four newspapers. The total number of rights stories published by the four newspapers amounted to 488 of the total stories in the four newspapers, which is 9,595.

Table 3: Most Reported Rights Stories

Content Category	The Punch	The Sun	The Daily Times	The Guardian	Total
Child Rights	15	12	13	10	50
Women Rights	20	13	8	10	51
Freedom from Torture	30	25	15	20	90
Human Rights Legislation	6	4	7	3	20
Fundamental Human Rights	27	34	40	12	113
Rights of Disabled	7	7	5	6	25
Environmental Rights	6	9	11	3	29
Health Rights	4	6	3	3	16
Rights from Discriminations	10	7	8	11	36
Third Generation Rights	20	18	10	10	58
Total	145	135	120	88	488

Table III shows that the highest number of Rights reports (113) was on fundamental human rights, while the least (16) was on Health Rights of citizens.

Table 4: Front Page Prominence

Newspaper	News	Feature	Editorial	Total
The Sun	50	0	0	50
The Guardian	16	0	0	16
The Daily Times	40	0	0	40
The Punch	48	0	0	48
Total	154	0	0	154

Table IV shows that 154 rights reports were placed on the front page of the four newspapers representing 50.55%, with The Sun giving the highest news prominence (50). The least was carried in *The Guardian* (16 stories.)

Table 5: Monthly Rights Reports

Month	October	November	December	January	February	Total
Sun	60 (24.07%)	65 (28.05%)	20 (5%)	10 (5.01)	6 (0.4%)	161 (62.53%)
Punch	45 (15.05%)	30 (15%)	15 (5%)	15 (5.0%)	4 (0.2%)	109 (40.25%)
Daily Times	20 (5%)	25 (10%)	15 (5%)	10 (4%)	15 (5.01%)	85 (29.01%)
Guardian	45 (15.05%)	40 (16.22%)	18 (7%)	15 (5.01%)	15 (5%)	133 (48.28%)
Total	170 (59.17%)	160 (69.27%)	68 (22%)	50 (19.02%)	40 (10.61%)	488 (18.07%)

Table V shows the monthly rights reports published by each of the four newspapers. The table starts from October 2020 and runs to February 2021. Therefore, the table is a breakdown indicating human rights coverage by the four newspapers for five months.

Table 6: Framing of Rights Stories

Newspapers	Frames					Total
	Human interest	Conflict	Morality	Economic consequence	Attribution of responsibility	
Sun	100%	85%	60%	90%	50%	385%
Punch	90%	80%	50%	90%	40%	350%
Daily Times	85%	90%	50%	90%	45%	360%
Guardian	90%	70%	70%	90%	55%	375%
Total	365%	325%	230%	360%	190%	147%

From the table, it can be seen that the four newspapers gave more credence to issues bordering on human interest the most.

Discussion

This discussion of findings is done according to the four research objectives. The objectives were to: find out the total number of rights stories by *Daily Times*, *Punch*, *The Guardian*, and *The Sun* newspapers published within the period of study; identify the rights issues that were given prominence by such dailies; ascertain the most under-reported rights issues in the newspapers; and examine the frames given to rights issues in the newspapers.

Tables 1 and 2 address the first research objective. Table 1 shows that a total of 488 reports were published on human and sundry rights. Of these, *The Sun* had 189 stories, representing 69.55% of the total reports of 488, while *The Punch* published 134 stories in the period under review, representing 50.03% of the total human rights stories. *The Daily Times* published a total of 96 stories, representing 43.5%, while the *Guardian* published 69 stories, representing 33.99% of the total rights stories.

As a follow-up, Table 2 measures the rights stories against the overall articles published by the four newspapers in five months, making the 488 rights stories represent 7.56 % of the 9,595 articles published by the four newspapers within the period under review. This, therefore, means that the human rights report by the newspaper is poor as it could not measure up to the total reports in the four newspapers for the five months. This goes on to agree with the opinion expressed by Ogle (2012) that human and allied rights are insufficiently reported in the print media. Also, it agrees with BDHRL (2010)

that many newspapers in Nigeria have paid little attention to human and sundry rights reporting in recent years.

Human rights issues are important issues in society that the mass media should give priority. Nwankwo (2011) notes that the importance of awareness of human rights is that: "awareness is the key to the promotion of rights." First, promoting and protecting human rights means making people aware of their rights, informing them about them, and teaching them how to use them best. However, human rights reportage remains the way it is without effort to improve its reportage in the media. This, therefore, means that human and sundry rights report in the four newspapers could not measure up with the overall reports in both newspapers for five months.

As expected, the fulfilment of Research Objective Two is provided in Table 3. The Table shows that the four newspapers published 50 stories on child rights representing 20.39%. Fifty-one stories were published on women's rights representing 20.40%. Ninety stories were published on torture representing 50%. Twenty stories were published on human rights legislation representing 16.05%. Also, 113 stories were published on fundamental human rights representing 63.44%. Twenty-five stories were published on the rights of the disabled, representing 18%; while 29 were published on environmental rights representing 19.03%.

Sixteen stories were published on health rights representing 11%; 36 stories were published on discrimination, representing 20.44%; and 58 stories were published on third-generation rights representing 50.8%. From the above, the most reported rights issues in the four newspapers under review were fundamental human rights.

The most underreported right issues in the newspapers were addressed by the finding in Table 3. The table shows that health rights, human rights legislation, rights of the disabled, environmental rights and discrimination rights were the most under-reported human right issues. The table shows that the four newspapers published 16 health right stories, representing 11%, 20 stories were published on human rights legislation, representing 16.05%; 25 stories were published on the rights of the disabled, representing 18%; 29 stories were published on environmental rights, representing 19.03%; while 36 stories were published on discrimination rights, representing 19.03%.

The frames given to the human right issues by the newspapers can be found in Table 6. The Sun captured 32.5% of its use of frames to address the issues affecting the public's interest. The Punch newspaper captured 350% of reports on its use of frames to tackle human rights issues. The Daily Times had a total of 360% on its use of frames to tackle human right issues. The Guardian had a total of 375% on her use of frames to tackle human right issues.

The use of frames to address human rights issues allows the public to identify, emphasise and monitor how each media house gives credence to critical issues that affect the public, such as human rights issues. The four selected newspapers kept the public up-to-date on the causes of the protest, the steps the Nigerian government took towards halting the protest, and the views the international community had about the protest.

The newspapers preached that when people are denied their rights, they tend to protest, which sometimes leads to lawlessness and disorderliness, which indicates anarchy at its peak. Also, human rights abuses lead to disunity, not encouraging social progress and unity.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Although from the findings, *The Sun*, *The Punch*, *The Daily Times* and *The Guardian* newspapers published articles on sundry rights, their coverage within the period under study was relatively low. Thus, they have failed to give adequate prominence to the subject matter. Of similar concern regarding the four newspapers' reportage of sundry rights issues is their failure to publish more features, editorials,

opinions and letters to the editor on the subject matter. This failure is worrisome because people cannot get an in-depth and full appreciation of what human rights entail, which a feature article would have provided. There is no gain in saying that features are richer and more detailed. If such articles did not appear in newspapers, then what was provided was, arguably, shallow reports.

Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations are made:

1. Newspapers should create a platform or strengthen an existing one, where qualified and skilled personnel with good knowledge of human rights could be allowed to write educating and informative features and editorials more frequently to provide in depth knowledge on the subject matter and serve as a platform for opinions and views.
2. Newspapers should begin to accord more prominence to their coverage of sundry rights issues to motivate audience members to appreciate the critical nature of such issue. These newspapers can do this by putting more stories on the subject matter on the cover page.
3. Newspapers should get human and sundry rights editors to train and retrain their editorial staff on how to set media agenda on pressing issues that affect many people in the society like human right issues.

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