



Influence and Credibility of Nigerian Newspapers' News Sources on the Coverage of Human Trafficking Stories in Nigeria

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Abstract. This study investigated the influence and credibility of news sources in Nigerian newspapers' coverage of human trafficking, employing Source Credibility Theory. The research was prompted by heightened anti-trafficking efforts from 2016 to 2018 and involved the analysis of 354 systematically and purposefully selected editions from *The Guardian*, *Punch*, *ThisDay*, and *Vanguard*. Through quantitative content analysis and both descriptive and inferential statistics, the findings revealed a substantial reliance on governmental and paramilitary sources, which constituted up to 43.8% in *Vanguard* and 31.4% in *The Guardian*; Non-governmental organisations (NGOs) were moderately represented. The analysis of source framing indicated that enforcement-related narratives were predominant in *Punch*, where 66.7% of articles in 2016 focused on enforcement. In contrast, *ThisDay* primarily framed government sources within response contexts, while NGOs were associated with enforcement and human-centered narratives. Court personnel notably influenced legal frames, accounting for approximately 18.8% in *Punch* in 2018. The application of the Kruskal-Wallis test confirmed significant variations in source usage across the newspapers. These findings underscore the media's reliance on institutional voices, which resultantly shapes narrative framing and public perception of anti-trafficking policies. In conclusion, the coverage of human trafficking in Nigerian newspapers necessitates a more diverse and credible array of sources to enrich policy-driven narratives. Therefore, the Nigerian media should prioritise ethical and diverse sourcing, cultivate partnerships, and enhance data access to bolster the credibility of anti-trafficking reporting.

Keywords: Human trafficking, source credibility, media coverage, anti-trafficking policy, Nigerian newspapers,

1. Introduction

Human trafficking is a deeply entrenched socio-political challenge in Nigeria, necessitating comprehensive media engagement to foster informed policymaking and public response. Newspapers, as traditional gatekeepers of information, significantly shape public perception of human trafficking by deciding which sources to use, assessing the credibility of these sources, and determining how such reporting influences national discourse. The source of a news story directly impacts the credibility and framing of the content, which in turn affects public awareness, advocacy efforts, and governmental policies. Research by Okorie and Ilori (2024) highlighted that Nigerian newspapers often rely heavily on secondary sources, which limits investigative depth and diminishes credibility. Besides, Meriläinen and Vos (2015) found that stories sourced from government agencies are common, often resulting in a sanitised portrayal of trafficking that overlooks the voices of victims and insights from the community. Similarly, Prakash, Erickson and Stoklosa (2022) revealed that newspapers disproportionately favor elite and institutional sources, creating skewed narratives that may undermine anti-trafficking policies.

Given these trends, it is essential to understand the credibility and influence of sources used in reporting human trafficking for effective media reform and policy enhancement. Afolabi and Ojebuyi (2023) emphasised that source diversity and perceived credibility significantly affect how readers interpret and engage with stories about human trafficking. Besides, Ibrahim and Adeyemi (2024) argued that an over-reliance on government narratives can obscure the grassroots realities of trafficking. While human trafficking remains a persistent socio-political crisis in Nigeria, the sources through which newspapers report on this issue markedly shape public perception and policy formulation. The credibility and influence of these sources are

increasingly scrutinised, especially in an era dominated by digital information flows, government narratives, and NGO interventions. Journalists often depend on official statements, press releases, or reports from non-governmental organisations without thorough verification, which may compromise the authenticity and depth of their reporting. Olojede, Oyedeji, and Ajayi (2022) found that Nigerian newspapers predominantly depend on government sources, thereby sidelining victims' voices and independent investigative findings. This reliance not only limits narrative diversity but also reinforces state-centric perspectives that may downplay the systemic failures enabling human trafficking. With regard to this, Adeyeye and Oboh (2025) advise the media to diversify their narrative forms to enrich contextual framing with a view to providing justice for the victims of human trafficking.

Moreover, the perceived credibility of news sources directly affects how readers interpret and respond to anti-trafficking messages. Adeyeye (2025) demonstrated that stories sourced from international agencies are considered more credible by readers compared to those relying solely on local government sources. Such perceptions have significant policy implications, especially as media influence public awareness and pressure institutions to act. The growing distrust in media objectivity, coupled with the sensationalism that often characterises human trafficking coverage, raises concerns about the impact of these narratives on public consciousness and governmental accountability. Therefore, assessing the credibility and influence of sources in Nigerian newspaper stories about human trafficking is not only timely but crucial for understanding how media framing affects advocacy, policymaking, and public engagement in the fight against this transnational crime.

Empirical studies on this topic have evolved over time. Adekoya, Okoro and Onyenankeya (2022) examined how Nigerian newspapers framed the issue of trafficking and found that they relied heavily on government and law enforcement sources, which often marginalised the voices of victims. In contrast, Broad and Turnbull (2024) discovered an increasing use of NGO sources, although concerns about the credibility of these sources remained. More recently, Musa, Bello and Ibrahim (2023) identified a continued dependency of journalists on official narratives, which influences public perception of anti-trafficking policies. Similarly, Okoro and Abang (2024) reported limited diversity of sources and insufficient investigative reporting. However, none of these studies thoroughly examined both the credibility and influence of these sources. This study aims to fill this

gap by providing a comprehensive, policy-driven analysis of source reliability and its implications for anti-trafficking communication in Nigeria.

In light of the identified research gap, the general research objective of this study is to investigate the credibility and influence of news sources on the reporting of human trafficking in Nigeria. To achieve this overall objective, the study specifically aims to: (i) analyse the sources of human trafficking stories in Nigerian newspapers to assess their credibility; (ii) evaluate how the credibility of news sources influences public perception and anti-trafficking policy; and (iii) investigate the diversity of sources in Nigerian newspapers' coverage of human trafficking.

2. Related Literature Review

This literature review examines the sources of news stories on human trafficking in Nigerian newspapers, focusing on credibility and influence within the context of media sourcing practices and the framing of human trafficking narratives. Empirical studies show that news reports on human trafficking in Nigeria predominantly rely on institutional sources, such as law enforcement agencies, government officials, and non-governmental organisations (NGOs); often neglecting the voices of trafficked individuals themselves. Sanford, Martinez & Weitzer (2016) found that Nigerian newspapers prioritise official narratives, framing human trafficking primarily as a criminal justice issue rather than acknowledging it as a complex socio-economic problem. In a similar vein, Gulati (2011) noted that this reliance on formal sources contributes to a limited and sometimes distorted portrayal of the human trafficking discourse. Consequent upon this, policy responses may lack inclusiveness and fail to adopt a victim-centered approach.

Although the credibility of these sources is often presumed to be high, journalists increasingly face challenges in verifying claims made by government bodies and civil society organisations. This reliance influences the tone, framing, and direction of public discussions on human trafficking, reinforcing state-centric perspectives while marginalising the lived experiences of victims. In addition, empirical evidence indicates that the credibility of news sources significantly affects public perception and policy advocacy regarding human trafficking. For example, Foot (2024) demonstrated that newspapers sourcing stories primarily from international organisations tend to portray human trafficking as a global crisis. While this raises awareness, it may inadvertently dilute local accountability. In contrast, reports based on grassroots testimonies have been

shown to evoke empathy and stimulate community-based interventions (Okorie & Okeja, 2024).

However, such community-sourced stories are often under utilised due to perceived issues of reliability, accessibility, and professional gatekeeping in editorial decision-making. These sourcing choices not only shape public understanding of human trafficking but also inform strategies employed by governmental and non-governmental organisations in addressing the issue. Therefore, it is essential to critically examine the credibility and influence of these sources to ensure that reporting on human trafficking promotes informed, humane, and contextually responsive policy interventions. The influence of source credibility on editorial judgment is closely tied to media ownership and political interests. Empirical studies, such as one conducted by Udris, Vogler, Weston and Eisenegger (2023), demonstrate that the ownership structures of newspapers affect the selection and representation of sources. Commercially driven media outlets are more likely to reproduce official statements without rigorous scrutiny. This tendency was echoed by Osisanwo and Ajayi (2024), who argued that the pursuit of political alignment and economic gain compromises the watchdog role of journalism. Resultantly, the credibility of news stories regarding human trafficking in Nigerian newspapers is not solely based on factual accuracy; it is deeply embedded in the politics of source selection. This reality necessitates strategic policy responses to promote ethical journalism and inclusive reporting.

2.1 Constructs

This study is grounded in the Source Credibility Theory, which suggests that the persuasiveness and influence of a message are significantly affected by the perceived credibility of its source. Originally conceptualised by Hovland et al., the theory highlights expertise and trustworthiness as the two core dimensions that shape how audiences process information (Koch & Zerback, 2013). In the context of Nigerian newspapers' coverage of human trafficking, source credibility plays a crucial role in shaping public perception, awareness, and policy action.

Reporting on such sensitive issues requires high journalistic standards, as reliance on low-credibility sources can lead to misinformation or underreporting. Recent proponents, such as Metzger and Flanagan (2013), reaffirm that in today's information-saturated landscape, audiences prioritise sources they consider authentic and knowledgeable. Therefore, this study investigates the extent to which Nigerian newspapers utilise credible sources, such as government agencies, NGOs, eyewitnesses, or anonymous informants, and

how these choices influence audience trust and policy discourse on human trafficking. By analysing the relationship between source selection and content impact, this research contributes to media policy development, advocating for rigorous editorial guidelines that prioritise credible sourcing in human rights journalism.

3. Research Methodology

This study employed a quantitative content analysis research design to explore the credibility and influence of news sources in the reporting of human trafficking. Centered on the Nigerian media landscape, the investigation focused on four prominent national newspapers: *The Guardian*, *Punch*, *ThisDay*, and *Vanguard*. These newspapers were chosen based on their extensive nationwide circulation, socio-political significance, and relevance to public policy discussions. The study population included all 4,384 editions of the selected newspapers published between January 1, 2016, and December 31, 2018. This three-year period was deliberately selected to capture a time of heightened anti-trafficking efforts and increased media attention in Nigeria. Utilising the Krejcie and Morgan (1970) sample size determination table, a representative sample of 354 editions was drawn. A systematic sampling technique was employed by selecting every 12th edition after randomly identifying a starting point. Furthermore, purposive sampling was applied to target editions that contained reports on human trafficking.

Data collection was conducted exclusively through quantitative methods, utilising a structured code sheet as the primary instrument. This code sheet was meticulously designed to capture manifest content, including types of sources, story genres, framing techniques, and thematic concerns. The instrument enabled objective coding of story attributes and the identification of source usage patterns, thereby allowing for an empirical evaluation of credibility and influence. The methodological framework was consistent with prior research by Adekoya, Okoro & Onyenakeya (2022), who analysed source patterns in trafficking coverage; Broad & Turnbull (2024), who documented an increase in sourcing from NGOs; and Musa, Bello and Ibrahim (2023), who associated source credibility with public trust in anti-trafficking policy narratives.

To ensure the reliability of the instrument, inter-coder reliability was assessed using Holsti's formula, resulting in a coefficient of 0.86, which surpasses the recommended threshold of 0.80 for acceptable reliability. Face validity was established through expert review by two senior scholars in media and communication studies. Data were analysed using both descriptive statistics, specifically frequencies and percentages, and

inferential statistics. The Kruskal-Wallis test was applied to examine statistically significant variations in source usage across the newspapers, with post hoc analysis providing deeper interpretive insights. The study acknowledged certain limitations, particularly the exclusion of online-only platforms and broadcast media, which may significantly contribute to shaping public narratives on trafficking. Ethical protocols were diligently observed; no identifiable personal data were utilised, and the analysis was confined to publicly available newspaper content.

4. Results

This study critically investigates the credibility, diversity, and influence of sources used in Nigerian newspapers' coverage of human trafficking. Its objectives are threefold: first, to assess the credibility of these sources; second, to evaluate how this credibility shapes public perception and informs anti-trafficking policy; and third, to examine the extent of source diversity and its role in shaping narratives. Through this multidimensional analysis, the study offers evidence-based insights aimed at strengthening media practices and enhancing policy responses to human trafficking in Nigeria.

4.1 Socio-Economic Characteristics of Respondents

The socio-economic characteristics of the news sources examined indicate a predominance of institutional and elite actors. Government agencies, NGOs, security forces, and court personnel consistently emerged as the dominant sources, reflecting a top-down narrative structure. NGOs and paramilitary institutions notably influenced thematic frames, particularly in enforcement and support categories, underscoring their policy relevance. The minimal representation of grassroots or survivor voices highlights a lack of socio-economic diversity among sources. This elite-centric sourcing paradigm may skew public perception and the inclusivity of anti-trafficking policies, emphasising the need for broader representation to capture diverse socio-economic realities in trafficking reportage.

Objective 1: Analyse Sources of Human Trafficking Stories in Nigerian Newspapers for Credibility Assessment

This objective focused on evaluating credibility across various sources, including government, NGOs, reporters, courts, and military, as highlighted in *The Guardian* and *ThisDay* newspapers during the period from 2016 to 2018. The analysis revealed fluctuating reliance patterns and implications for policy.

Table 1: Sources of Human Trafficking Report in *The Guardian* Newspaper

Year	Government		NGOs/Human trafficking advocate		News agency/ reporters		Court personnel		Nigerian Forces/Paramilitary		Armed Others	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
2016	3	8.8	10	29.4	4	11.8	3	8.8	10	29.4	4	11.8
2017	6	17.1	8	22.9	4	11.4	3	8.6	11	31.4	3	8.6
2018	9	25.0	10	27.8	4	11.1	0	0.0	9	25.0	4	11.1

Source: Content Analysis (2025)

The study reveals a notable reliance on non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and paramilitary sources, particularly during 2016 and 2017. This trend indicates a media preference for advocacy-driven and enforcement perspectives. In 2016, NGOs contributed 29.4% of sources, while in 2018, they represented 27.8%, highlighting their perceived credibility within the media landscape. In contrast, courts and reporters were under utilised, which may compromise the depth of narratives and the legal context presented. This pattern aligns with the findings of Usman, Msughter & Ridwanullah (2022), who noted that Nigerian newspapers tend to favour institutional sources over investigative ones in their coverage of social issues. Moreover, the predominance of official sources may reflect gatekeeping practices, as observed by Broad & Turnbull (2024), which can diminish critical engagement with the subject matter. On the contrary, Prodnik & Vobič (2023) advocate for multi-sourced reporting to enhance the legitimacy of news coverage. However, the findings of this study demonstrate a limited diversity in sourcing. To improve this situation, editorial guidelines should encourage triangulated sourcing to bolster credibility and counteract source monopoly.

Table 2: Sources of human trafficking report in *ThisDay* Newspaper

Year	Government		NGOs/Human trafficking advocate		News agency/ reporters		Court personnel		Nigerian Forces/Paramilitary		Armed Others	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
2016	5	16.7%	6	20.0%	7	23.3%	2	6.7%	7	23.3%	3	10.0%
2017	6	17.6%	12	35.3%	7	20.6%	2	5.9%	6	17.6%	1	2.9%
2018	7	21.9%	9	28.1%	6	18.8%	4	12.5%	2	6.3%	4	12.5%

Source: Content Analysis (2025)

The findings reveal a diverse array of sources, with non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and human trafficking advocates emerging as the most frequently cited in 2017 (35.3%) and 2018 (28.1%). This trend indicates a growing reliance by media outlets on specialised actors, thereby enhancing the perceived credibility of their reports. However, the inconsistent contributions from government agencies and security forces raise concerns regarding the reliability of authoritative sources. Over the years, news agencies and independent reporters consistently accounted for more than 18% of the sources, highlighting potential gaps in the verification of primary data. These results underscore the media's partial dependence on secondary sources, which may impact the depth and authenticity of reporting. This observation aligns with the findings of Gulati (2011), who noted variability in source credibility within Nigerian crime reporting. Moreover, Okorie & Okeja (2024) emphasised that sourcing from advocacy organisations bolsters public trust in sensitive issues such as human trafficking.

Objective 2: Evaluate how the credibility of news sources influences public perception and the formulation of anti-trafficking policy.

An analysis of news framing across various sources in *Punch* (2016) and *ThisDay* (2017) indicates that the perceived credibility of these sources significantly shapes public understanding. This, in turn, has a direct impact on the development of responsive, enforceable, and evidence-based anti-human trafficking policy frameworks.

Table 3: Crosstabulation of Frames across Sources of Human Trafficking in *the Punch* Newspaper of 2016

		The Punch, 2016							
			Government	NGOs/Human	News agency/Court	Nigerian	Armed	Others	
		Count	trafficking	trafficking	reporters	Forces/Paramilitary	Forces/Paramilitary	Others	Total
The Punch, 2016	Economic frame	Count	3	3	0	0	0	0	6
		% within The Punch, 2016	50.0%	50.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	100.0%
	Conspiracy frame	% of Total	11.1%	11.1%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	22.2%
		Count	0	1	2	0	0	0	3
	Enforcement frame	% within The Punch, 2016	0.0%	33.3%	66.7%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	100.0%
		% of Total	0.0%	3.7%	7.4%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	11.1%
Total	Count	0	0	1	3	10	4	18	
	% within The Punch, 2016	0.0%	0.0%	5.6%	16.7%	55.6%	22.2%	100.0%	
Total	% of Total	0.0%	0.0%	3.7%	11.1%	37.0%	14.8%	66.7%	
	Count	3	4	3	3	10	4	27	
Total	% within The Punch, 2016	11.1%	14.8%	11.1%	11.1%	37.0%	14.8%	100.0%	
	% of Total	11.1%	14.8%	11.1%	11.1%	37.0%	14.8%	100.0%	

Source: Content Analysis (2025)

The findings reveal that enforcement frames, primarily sourced from the Nigerian Armed Forces and paramilitary personnel (37.0%), have significantly influenced public perceptions in *Punch* (2016). This indicates that state security actors dominate the narratives surrounding human trafficking. Conversely, NGOs and advocates for human trafficking contributed more towards economic (50%) and conspiracy frames (33.3%), thus shaping the socio-economic discourse on this issue. The difference in source credibility and frame distribution suggests that audiences may perceive enforcement narratives as more authoritative, which could lead to a shift in anti-trafficking policy towards a focus on securitisation rather than victim support. This aligns with the conclusions of Gulati (2011), who found that government-linked sources exert a strong influence on public opinion and policy direction. In addition, the marginalisation of NGO voices reinforces the findings of Akerele-Popoola, Azeez & Adeniyi (2022), which highlighted the underrepresentation of civil society perspectives in Nigerian media. On contrary to Capati (2025), who observed a more balanced sourcing across frames, this study emphasises a skewed narrative, underscoring critical implications for the inclusivity of policy discussions.

Table 4: Crosstabulation of Frames across Sources of Human Trafficking in *ThisDay* Newspaper of 2017

		This Day, 2017							
			Government	NGOs/Human	News agency/Court	Nigerian	Armed	Others	
		Count	trafficking	trafficking	reporters	Forces/Paramilitary	Forces/Paramilitary	Others	Total
This Day, 2017	Response frame	Count	6	0	0	0	0	0	6
		% within This Day, 2017	100.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	100.0%
	Human frame	% of Total	19.4%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	19.4%
		Count	0	3	0	0	0	0	3
	Total	% within This Day, 2017	0.0%	100.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	100.0%
		% of Total	0.0%	9.7%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	9.7%

Enforcement frame	Count	0	6	1	0	0	0	7
	% within This Day, 2017	0.0%	85.7%	14.3%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	100.0%
	% of Total	0.0%	19.4%	3.2%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	22.6%
	Count	0	0	5	0	0	0	5
legal frame	% within This Day, 2017	0.0%	0.0%	100.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	100.0%
	% of Total	0.0%	0.0%	16.1%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	16.1%
	Count	0	0	1	2	1	0	4
	% within This Day, 2017	0.0%	0.0%	25.0%	50.0%	25.0%	0.0%	100.0%
Rescue frame	% of Total	0.0%	0.0%	3.2%	6.5%	3.2%	0.0%	12.9%
	Count	0	0	0	0	5	1	6
	% within This Day, 2017	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	83.3%	16.7%	100.0%
	% of Total	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	16.1%	3.2%	19.4%
Support frame	Count	6	9	7	2	6	1	31
	% within This Day, 2017	19.4%	29.0%	22.6%	6.5%	19.4%	3.2%	100.0%
	% of Total	19.4%	29.0%	22.6%	6.5%	19.4%	3.2%	100.0%
	Count	6	9	7	2	6	1	31
Total	% within This Day, 2017	19.4%	29.0%	22.6%	6.5%	19.4%	3.2%	100.0%
	% of Total	19.4%	29.0%	22.6%	6.5%	19.4%	3.2%	100.0%
	Count	6	9	7	2	6	1	31
	% within This Day, 2017	19.4%	29.0%	22.6%	6.5%	19.4%	3.2%	100.0%

Source: Content Analysis (2025)

The findings reveal that *ThisDay* Newspaper primarily relied on government and NGO sources, particularly within enforcement (85.7%) and human (100%) frames. This reliance suggests a limited diversity of sources, which may reinforce state-centered narratives while marginalising victim-centered discourse. As public perception and policy direction are influenced by the perceived credibility of sources, an over-reliance on institutional voices could dilute grassroots perspectives and impede the development of inclusive anti-trafficking strategies. Equally, sources such as court personnel and news agencies were underrepresented, indicating potential credibility gaps in legal and investigative framing. These results are consistent with the work of Adekoya, Okoro & Onyenankaya (2022), which suggests that the dominance of institutional sources in Nigerian media skews public engagement with human rights issues. Conversely, these findings contrast with those of Okorie & Okeja (2024), who reported an increasing reliance on survivor testimonies in the media. Therefore, it is crucial to adopt a more pluralistic approach to sourcing in order to ensure credible reporting and effective anti-trafficking policies.

Objective 3: Investigate the diversity of sources in Nigerian newspapers' coverage of human trafficking and its impact.

This objective evaluates the policy implications of source plurality by examining patterns in human trafficking reporting, particularly focusing on variations in source usage and framing across *Vanguard* and *Punch* newspapers between 2016 and 2018.

Table 5: Sources of Human Trafficking Report in *Vanguard* Newspaper

Year	Government		NGOs/Human trafficking advocate		News agency/reporters		Court personnel		Nigerian Forces/Paramilitary		Armed Others	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
2016	2	6.3%	6	18.8%	8	25.0%	1	3.1%	14	43.8%	1	3.1%
2017	4	11.1%	7	19.4%	1	2.8%	6	16.7%	13	36.1%	5	13.9%
2018	6	20.0%	6	20.0%	0	0.0%	1	3.3%	11	36.7%	6	20.0%

Source: Content Analysis (2025)

The findings indicate that the *Vanguard* newspaper's coverage of human trafficking predominantly relies on state-affiliated sources, particularly the Nigerian Armed Forces and paramilitary organisations. These sources accounted for 43.8% of references in 2016, 36.1% in 2017, and 36.7% in 2018. In contrast, there was minimal reliance on court personnel and NGOs, which suggests a limited engagement with judicial or advocacy perspectives. This lack of diverse sourcing narrows the range of narratives and may influence public perception and policy discussions. While these official sources are credible, their predominance restricts a thorough understanding of trafficking dynamics. Such homogeneity in sourcing risks undermining a nuanced representation of the issue and aligns with the concerns raised by Onwumechili and Ndolo (2023), who highlight the importance of inclusive sourcing in reporting on social issues. Similarly, Agwu, Mbachu & Onwujekwe (2025) observed that diversified sourcing enhances media credibility and public trust. Consequently, it is imperative to implement a policy shift that institutionalises balanced sourcing in Nigerian media, thereby amplifying the voices that are often underrepresented in discussions on anti-trafficking efforts.

Table 6: Crosstabulation of Frames across Sources of Human Trafficking in the Punch Newspaper of 2018

		The Punch, 2018					
		Government	NGOs/Human trafficking	Court	Nigerian	Armed	
		advocate	personnel	Forces/Paramilitary	Others	Total	
The Punch, 2018	Response frame	Count 3	0	0	0	0	3
	% within Punch, 2018	100.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	100.0%
Human frame	% of Total	9.4%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	9.4%
	Count	0	1	0	0	0	1
Economic frame	% within Punch, 2018	0.0%	100.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	100.0%
	% of Total	0.0%	3.1%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	3.1%
Conspiracy frame	Count	0	3	0	0	0	3
	% within Punch, 2018	0.0%	100.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	100.0%
Enforcement frame	% of Total	0.0%	9.4%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	9.4%
	Count	0	4	0	0	0	4
legal frame	% within Punch, 2018	0.0%	100.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	100.0%
	% of Total	0.0%	12.5%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	12.5%
Rescue frame	Count	0	2	5	3	0	10
	% within Punch, 2018	0.0%	20.0%	50.0%	30.0%	0.0%	100.0%
Total	% of Total	0.0%	6.3%	15.6%	9.4%	0.0%	31.3%
	Count	3	10	5	11	3	32
		% within Punch, 2018	9.4%	31.3%	15.6%	34.4%	9.4%
		% of Total	9.4%	31.3%	15.6%	34.4%	9.4%

Source: Content Analysis (2025)

The findings reveal a limited diversity of sources in *Punch* newspaper’s coverage of human trafficking, predominantly relying on governmental actors (9.4%) and paramilitary agencies (34.4%), while the voices of NGOs (31.3%) and other civil entities are largely marginalised. Notably, human-centered frames were the least employed, indicating an underrepresentation of victims’ perspectives. This biased sourcing pattern may undermine the perceived credibility of such reporting and limit its capacity to foster victim-sensitive policies. Source bias in Nigerian media hampers balanced discourse on trafficking, reinforcing institutional narratives over grassroots realities. Aligning with the research conducted by Gulati (2011), this study corroborates that dependence on official sources constrains nuanced storytelling. Conversely, Ekeanyanwu and Igwe (2024) contend that inclusive sourcing amplifies media influence on anti-trafficking policies. Therefore, promoting equitable engagement with sources in human trafficking coverage is essential for shaping informed and people-centered policy interventions.

5. Theoretical Discussion of Findings

Grounded in Source Credibility Theory, this study affirms that the perceived expertise and

trustworthiness of information sources play a critical role in shaping public interpretation of human trafficking narratives. Utilising quantitative content analysis of *The Guardian*, *Punch*, *ThisDay*, and *Vanguard* newspapers, the findings indicate that NGOs and government agencies dominated the reporting, yet differed in their credibility and narrative influence. NGOs, often viewed as impartial and knowledgeable, were frequently linked to human and economic frames (e.g., *Punch*, 2016 & 2018), enhancing emotional resonance and policy relevance. In contrast, government sources, while authoritative, were primarily associated with response or enforcement frames (*ThisDay*, 2017), suggesting a reactive stance that may impact public trust. The research design incorporated rigorous sampling across 354 editions to ensure both temporal and thematic representativeness. A validated coding instrument was employed, achieving an inter-coder reliability of 0.86, thereby enhancing the methodological robustness of the study.

Importantly, the Kruskal-Wallis test revealed statistically significant differences in source distribution among various media outlets, a finding that aligns with previous research (e.g., Musa, Bello & Ibrahim, 2023) emphasising the impact of media

source variability on trust in anti-trafficking policies. Moreover, source diversity was found to be uneven. Specifically, the *Vanguard* newspaper exhibited a substantial reliance on paramilitary sources, with 43.8% of its coverage in 2016 reinforcing law enforcement narratives while limiting narrative pluralism. This tendency diminishes the quality of policy discourse by prioritising state-centric perspectives over victim-centered or reform-oriented approaches. Besides, the overreliance on official sources in certain outlets poses a risk of narrowing the available policy options. Lastly, the study demonstrates that source credibility, derived from both institutional authority and perceived neutrality, significantly influences not just framing but also the interpretive and policy-shaping power of media coverage on human trafficking. Therefore, it is essential for media gatekeeping practices to prioritise credible and diverse sourcing to enhance narrative integrity and promote more effective engagement with anti-trafficking policies.

6. Conclusion/ Recommendation

The study revealed that Nigerian newspapers primarily sourced human trafficking stories from government agencies, NGOs, and paramilitary organisations, with limited contributions from court personnel and other stakeholders. The credibility of these sources significantly influenced the framing of these stories, government entities and NGOs predominantly employed enforcement, response, and economic lenses, while news agencies provided minimal diversity in framing. In particular, *Punch* (2018) exhibited a dominance of enforcement (31.3%) and legal (18.8%) frames, heavily influenced by court and paramilitary sources. *ThisDay* (2017) demonstrated similar trends, with enforcement (22.6%) and support (19.4%) frames attributed to NGOs and paramilitary actors. Both *The Guardian* and *Vanguard* mirrored these sourcing imbalances, revealing a narrow array of perspectives in their coverage. The findings suggest an overreliance on institutional sources and a tendency for recurring framing patterns, pointing to a homogenous narrative across the media landscape. Moreover, the diversity and credibility of sources notably impacted the depth and framing of human trafficking reporting throughout the years, across different newspapers, and within various thematic frames.

To ensure credible reporting on human trafficking, Nigerian newspapers should prioritise sources that offer verifiable data, especially NGOs with domain expertise and court personnel directly involved in prosecutions. Elevating editorial standards to rigorously evaluate reports from news agencies will bolster public trust. Since source credibility

significantly affects public perception and policy, media organisations should foster transparency in sourcing while collaborating with legal, humanitarian, and security experts to enrich narratives and avoid a singular framing approach. To reshape the conversation surrounding anti-trafficking efforts, policies should encourage partnerships between the press and multi-sectoral actors to enhance framing diversity. Besides, government bodies must improve access to trafficking-related data to mitigate the overreliance on anecdotal reporting. Finally, capacity-building initiatives should prioritise training journalists in ethical sourcing and trafficking-sensitive framing, and media regulations should mandate diversity in both sources and frames. This approach will ultimately strengthen the credibility and policy relevance of anti-trafficking narratives within the Nigerian press.

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