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# **Exploring the Dominant Network Television Coverage of Child Labor Crisis in Nigeria**

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## **Abstract**

This work explores media sensitivity to the child labor crisis in Nigeria by investigating its online coverage on three dominant television networks – the *Nigerian Television Authority (NTA)*, *African Independent Television (AIT)*, and *Television Continental (TVC)* from 2015 to 2017. Findings show that coverage was low. Of the 116 stories published, AIT put out the most with 77.6 percent, leaving TVC and NTA with 12.9 and 9.5 percent, respectively. Only 7.8 percent of the stories appeared on the index pages, with 92.2 tucked in the interior pages. As the networks sourced their stories, it is surprising that none of their reporters had any substantial direct contact with the child laborers to tell their stories. The networks have to create a reportorial schedule subject to regular evaluation to reverse the low reporting.

**Keywords:** Child labor, television networks, online coverage, Nigeria.

## **Introduction**

The International Labor Organization (ILO, 2013, p. vii) reports that approximately 168 million children aged between five and 14 are globally engaged in one form of child labor. This figure accounts for 11 percent of the child population as a whole. Nigeria is home to many of these children.

Abubakar (2018) reports that more than half of the country's 79 children aged 17 and below are child laborers. They work as street vendors, car washers, shoe shiners, apprentice mechanics, farmhands, domestic servants, and the like under hazardous conditions. Indices show that they are not psychologically and physically fit for those jobs. Another proof of the prevalence of the problem is that more than 15 years after adopting the National Children's Rights Act in Nigeria, only 24 out of 36 states of the federation have domesticated the law.

In contrast, at least ten states of the country's northern region have refused to adopt it. This behavior makes unrealistic article 16(2) of the United Nation's Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) of putting an end to abuse, trafficking, and all types of savagery and torment against youngsters. This work explores the visibility of the child labor issue in the country through the contents of the dominant media.

Children the world over are

regarded as the most vital resource of any nation, so the future depends on how they are raised (Tade, 2010). The Universal Declaration of Human Rights in 1948 by the United Nations (UN) had stressed that adolescence was qualified for extraordinary care as each child had the inborn right to life. This would recognize and shield them from abuse. Despite the efforts of multilateral agencies to enhance the status of young people, child labor continues to be an issue exacerbated by the irresponsible attitude of governments of many countries. The insensitivity makes this attitude complex of the media to the problem. It appears children are not viewed as hotly debated issues for the media unless they are the central figures in an appalling story riled with stunning information.

Researchers (Sharma, Kukreja & Shama, 2012; Ali, Shahab, Ushijima & Muynck, 2004; Osita-Oleribe, 2007) have observed that media coverage influences how government addresses the issues of societal concern and how the citizens respond. Media challenges have made the coverage of such issues as child labor unattractive. Hence, in terms of effectively raising awareness, scholars and advocates of the eradication of child labor are compelled to reassess the social responsibility credential of the media in terms of the coverage they give the crisis (Oyero, 2011).

## **Objectives of the Study**

The objectives of the study are the following:

1. To determine the profile of child labor reporting in Nigeria by the dominant broadcast media in various dimensions.
2. To determine the sources of child labor reporting by the dominant media and the extent to which they report directly from child laborers.

## **Research Questions**

1. What is the profile of child labor reporting in Nigeria by the dominant broadcast media in various dimensions?
2. What are the dominant networks' sources of child labor reporting, and to what extent do they report directly from child laborers?

## **Significance of the Study**

The claim exists about Nigeria that child labor issues are not prominent in the public space due to the media's insensitivity. This conjecture will need to be substantiated by empirical evidence. This work covers the gap and investigates the media coverage of child labor, and puts it in the

proper perspectives for easy referencing. This work serves as an eye-opener for the authorities and policymakers, organizations, non-governmental organizations, multilateral agencies, and individuals who need to make decisions based on facts. The work could be the beginning of a solid attempt to give the Nigerian child a voice and wake up the relevant authorities to their children's responsibility and welfare. This study also widens the research trajectory and makes literature available for consultation by scholars and researchers interested in the area.

## **Literature Review and Theoretical Framework**

### *Characteristics of Child Labour*

*Child labor* is still a prevalent incident in the world though it is more challenging in emerging economies. The phrase may sometimes be confusing because a person considered to be a child in a particular clime or context might be different in another (Basu, 1998, p.413). Many would think that child labor only pertains to prostitution, scavenging, or back-breaking activities in construction sites. In contrast, the definition is more complex than these. It would include different activities in a wide range of situations in which ethical and legal responses could be different.

ILO (2013) defines child labor

as an exploitative activity or quasi-slavery of feudal relationships. An individual below 18 years engages in full-time, works long hours with over the top physical, social and mental strains that hinder the person's development. Child labor can also be explained to mean exposing children to long, unpaid, or underpaid hours in the workplace in an unhealthy environment at the expense of their education. The characteristics of child labor, according to ILO, also include the following:

- Starting all-day work at a very early age.
- Depriving offspring of their rights to education and training even where schools are accessible and affordable.
- Participating in work that ends in unreasonable physical, social and mental strains on the child.
- Working as errand boys and girls in a way that does not advance them mentally.

### **Types of Child Labor in Perspectives**

In the context of the definition given by ILO, some situations have been categorized as child labor. They include the following.

#### *Child Trafficking*

Child trafficking involves the sale of children for economic activities and profit. The practice has existed for a long time. However, it gained traction in the 1990s when children were being moved from the Republic of Benin to Cameroon, Nigeria, Cote d' Ivoire, and Gabon to work as undocumented housemaids and servants. Sadly, no correct figure exists, but estimates of between 980,000 and 1,225,000 youngsters are in the constrained work situation due to this trafficking.

#### *Sexual Exploitation and Pornography*

Sexual exploitation, prostitution, and smut are among the foulest types of child labor that should attract well-meaning people and be eradicated. UNICEF (1999) studies indicated that child prostitution and pornography were common in Port Harcourt, Calabar, and Owerri. Children pornography entails a child who is engaged in actual or simulated sexual activities primarily for sexual gratification.

#### *Street Begging and Forced Labor*

There are three major categories of child beggars. First are those who beg entirely on their own to feed. Second, are those who lead their blind parent or relative. The third comprises those

who beg on behalf of parents. These parents hide from the public view but supervise the kids from a close distance – all on the streets. This practice has social, psychological, and health consequences. Children remain vulnerable because they engage in tasks that include running between cars in heavy traffic, which puts them in danger of accidents.

#### *Illicit Activities Including Drug Trafficking:*

Drug trafficking is a global problem. The United Nations characterizes illegal drug activity to mean production in whatever form, offering for sale, distribution, and delivery of any narcotic drug or any psychotropic substance contrary to law or convention. There is an association between the commitment of youngsters to child trafficking, substance misuse, and wrongdoing. Children who are utilized as a part of the illegal activity of drugs gradually end up being dependent on those drugs, thereby increasing their tendencies for criminal activities.

#### **Child Labor in the Media and Television Portrayal**

The media assume the responsibility of shaping citizens' conduct and government policies and actions through the content they publish. Understanding how the media effect works and how to utilize the media productively can be a fundamental

tool for those individuals who advocate children's rights. However, the media effect is impossible without media content. Coverage of child labor issues in Nigeria, and many developing nations is low despite the evidence of child labor and prostitution by unscrupulous elements, including those done under the guise of charity. It is not surprising that most Nigerians are oblivious to the plight of children who are forced into labor. This lack of knowledge extends to the provisions of the Child Rights Act. This fundamental law deals with this situation as it remains unpopular among the people.

Concerned people and organizations regard television as the media through which the child's rights can be advanced. The United Nations Fund for Population (UNFPA) and Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA) sponsored in Nigeria a family-oriented 30-minute TV serial titled "*I Need to Know*" targeted at adolescent youths and children in general and aired on the Nigerian Television Authority (NTA) network about two decades ago. The serial featured prominent Nollywood actors and actresses, including Funke Akindele, Amaka Ekwuatu, and Taiwo Lesh. The series depicts the life chaos associated with prostitution, teenage marriages, HIV/AIDS, child labor, the benefits of sound productive

health, open dialogue on sexual matters, and regular parent-child communication. Another serial titled 'Izozo' also came on national television, sponsored by the Women Trafficking and Child Labour Eradication Foundation (WOTCLEF), to tackle the problem. Child labor and abuse constitute a severe menace as disasters are associated (Fuller-Thomson, Stefanyk, & Brennenstuhl 2009, 214). The serials depicted all these.

Observers claim that these programs are insignificant compared to the volumes of content published in such areas as politics, sports, and the economy. Dinopoulos and Zhao (2007, p.554) note that it is time for revival to create awareness and educate the citizens about its dangers. Okorie, Loto, and Omojola (2018, p. 291) support this, stressing that the media must focus on areas other than politics to move the nation forward.

Even then, the claim of de-prioritizing of child labor issues, especially by the media, has remained conjectures as empirical evidence is not visible to prove it. In this study, we present the results of the child labor coverage on three dominant Nigerian television networks in various dimensions and how their reporters connected directly with child laborers in their reporting.

### **Theoretical Guidance**

This work is anchored on the Agenda Setting and Priming theories. The agenda-setting postulation developed sequel to the findings of Max McCombs and Donald Shaw's study of the 1968 Presidential election in the United States, is that media audience will regard as necessary those issues that frequently occur in the news and that the media do not reflect reality, but they can shape it (McCombs & Stroud, 2014, p. 70; Groshek, 2008, p. 58; Davie & Maher, 2006, p. 361; McCombs & Shaw, 1993, p. 59; Wiebe, 1972, p.134).

The idea is that media can set a country's agenda, focusing the public attention on some key issues previously not popular with the public. This assertion means that if the media focus attention on child labor issues, the audience will make these issues top in the hierarchy of the content they get from the media. The agenda-setting system has been subject to debate by several authors (Cornway, Kenski & Wang, 2015, p.364; West & Turner, 2013, p. 378; Ragas & Roberts, 2009, p. 55; McCombs, 2005, p. 545), but the basic postulations still stand. In this study, the theory guides us into the knowledge of how much and frequently the dominant television networks in Nigeria had published on child labor.

Priming theory (Iyengar, Peter

& Kinder, 1982, p. 848) avers that the media audience does not have detailed knowledge about issues and consider this knowledge when making decisions. However, the media can set the agenda for them and then shape the thinking and decisions of this agenda in the way they report, thereby having a significant psychological ramification on that audience. While the agenda-setting system deals with the saliency of issues in the news, priming orientates people's judgment of those issues.

The media do the shaping by reporting some issues in a particular way, thereby altering the standards by which people evaluate those issues. For instance, after making an issue salient, the media can continue to use a particular bold font to draw people's attention to it or publish it in a particular position on the front cover. As this media practice continues, it tends to shape the judgment of that audience on that issue. The saliency of issues can happen in a short time, but priming takes a while. Iyengar, Peter and Kinder (1982) first identified the priming effect in their study of some television news programs. The theory has undergone much critiquing (Scheufele & Tewksbury, 2007; Ferguson & Dyke, 2012, p.221; Bushman, 1998, p.538; Goidel, Shields, & Peffley, 1997), but the original characteristics still subsist. In

this study, the prominence in presentation, positioning of stories, among others, are discussed.

### **Descriptions of Networks' Online Broadcast**

The contents investigated in this work were the child labor stories broadcast online via the websites of television networks. It is usual for the networks to transmit the stories aired on television sets to their online portals. This transmission makes the websites the more appropriate places to conduct content analysis. The stories remain online for a more extended period than television. The three websites investigated were AIT's [www.aitonline.tv](http://www.aitonline.tv), TVC's <http://tvcnews.tv>, and NTA's [www.nta.ng](http://www.nta.ng). The AIT site has on its task menu, on the index page, three items that deal with the news and reports and from where the content investigated in the story were sourced. First is *News*, which contains 20 items of various subjects in its dropdown. The second is 'TV' which contains 14 items on various news subjects and three on the program description, schedule, and presenters. One striking thing about this TV category is that one of the 13 items is labeled "Children," which zeros in on the news and reports about children. The third is *AIT Live*, which streams stories live to its audience.

The NTA's online portal is well

organized. It has on its task menu on the index page nine items, including security and economy. None has a dropdown. Each simply hyperlinked to the stories that capture the item's subject matter in the interior pages. Headline stories are featured on the index page. TVC's site is also well organized. There were nine items on the menu bar. All the items except 'anchor' hyperlink to news stories and reports that relate to the item. Like AIT, one of the items is 'Live streaming.' All these stories were explored from 2015 to 2017 to ascertain which of them were about child labor.

### **Methodology**

Content analysis (Krippendorff, 1989, p.403; Hsieh & Shannon 2005, p.1285; Neuendorf 2002, p. 50-51; Riffe, Lacy & Fico, 2005, p.55) was adopted in this study. The content analysis system looks at "who says what through which channel to whom with what impact (Lasswell, 1948, p.117). "It is a primary message centered methodology" (Neuendorf, 2002, p.9) that enables one to assess the manifest content and produce the requisite empirical evidence contextualized in terms of the "values, goals, states of mind and perceptions" (Carley, 1997) needed to make a decision.

It is important to reiterate that the content investigated were those stories that the broadcast networks transmitted

to their websites' index and interior pages. Those stories could be news, documentaries, features, interviews, special reports, and any other genre as long as it is on the theme of child labor. The networks – NTA, AIT, and TVC– were purposely selected since preliminary investigations confirmed that they contained stories on child labor worth investigating.

Besides that, they are among the dominant broadcast networks in the country with between 15 and 50 years of broadcasting experience and were available for viewing both terrestrially and on the cable system locally, nationally, and globally. The Nigerian government owns NTA, while AIT and TVC are privately owned. Each online portal was investigated between January 1, 2015, and December 31, 2017, with stories in text, photographs, videos, and rare case audio. Each story serves as the unit of analysis. The data gathered were in line with the study's objectives. The data were analyzed as percentages and frequencies.

### **Data Analysis**

#### ***Research Question (RQ) 1:***

*What is the profile of child labor reporting in Nigeria by the dominant broadcast media in various dimensions?*

The following are the tables showing the frequencies and percentages of the content analyzed in different dimensions or levels in alignment with Research Question 1.

**Table 1: Coverage of child labor stories on AIT, NTA, and TVC networks between 2015 and 2017**

<b>TV Networks</b>	<b>*f Coder1</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>f Coder2</b>	<b>f Coder3</b>
<b>AIT</b>	90	77.6	90	88
<b>NTA</b>	11	9.5	12	11
<b>TVC</b>	15	12.9	15	15
<b>n=116</b>	116	100	117	114

**\*Original coder**

Table 1 is significant because it presents the overall picture of the analysis. AIT’s component of the coverage is a whopping 90 (77.6%) of the total child labor stories posted to the sites of the three television networks, TVC published 15 (12.9%). In contrast, NTA published the least with 11 stories, translating to 9.5 percent. Three coders were engaged. In addition to the lead researcher’s count of 116, Coder 2 and Coder 3 counted 117 and 114, respectively. Even

though the coders’ counts show a prima facie agreement, we still went ahead and conducted the inter-coder reliability test.

The Cronbach alpha measure computed at a 95% confidence interval was .9997. This result was cross-checked with Kuder-Richardson (K20) measure, which showed the same result. This sameness means that any of the coders’ figures were most appropriate for analysis. The original coder (Coder 1’s) figure of 116 was adopted.

**Table 2: Genre of child labor stories on AIT, NTA, and TVC networks between 2015 and 2017**

<b>Genre of Stories</b>	<b>f</b>	<b>%</b>
News story	97	83.6
Feature	9	7.8
Editorial	8	6.9
Picture/Photo News	2	1.7
Opinion article	0	0
Cartoon	0	0
<b>Total</b>	<b>116</b>	<b>100</b>

**Table 3: The prominence of the child labor stories on AIT, NTA, and TVC networks between 2015 and 2017**

<b>Genres of Stories</b>	<b><i>f</i></b>	<b>%</b>
Index page	9	7.8
Interior page	107	92.2
<b>Total</b>	<b>116</b>	<b>100</b>

**Table 4: Visible themes of child labor stories on AIT, NTA, and TVC networks between 2015 and 2017**

<b>Story sources</b>	<b><i>f</i></b>	<b>%</b>
Children's education	18	15.5
Assistance rendered to children	12	10.3
Children's predicament	44	37.9
NGO's intervention	11	9.5
Government's efforts to curb child labor	24	20.7
Parents/guardians of child laborers	4	3.4
Advice for/call on government	3	2.6
<b>Total</b>	<b>116</b>	<b>100</b>

**Table 5: Direction of the child labor stories on AIT, NTA, and TVC networks between 2015 and 2017**

<b>Direction</b>	<b><i>f</i></b>	<b>%</b>
Favorable (to the children)	79	68.1
Neutral	21	18.1
Unfavorable	16	13.8
<b>Total</b>	<b>116</b>	<b>100</b>

**Table 6: People mentioned in the child labor stories on AIT, NTA, and TVC networks between 2015 and 2017**

<b>People mentioned in story</b>	<b><i>f</i></b>	<b>%</b>
Children	51	44
Politicians	1	0.9
Teachers	2	1.7
Parents/Guardians	5	4.3
Government	48	41.4
Police	1	0.9
NGOs	8	6.9
<b>Total</b>	<b>116</b>	<b>100</b>

### Discussion of Findings from RQ1

Table 1, which shows all the stories published, has a surprising aspect to it. NTA, owned by Nigeria's federal government, published least among the three networks with a disappointing 9.5 percent. A few things may be suggested here as responsible for the low reporting. One is that the network did not do enough to report on child labor or second. The government did not do enough to warrant significant reporting. The second argument appears plausible because no fewer than 12 states of Nigeria's federation had refused to enforce the National Child Rights Act 15 years after it was passed. Incidentally, the majority of the non-conforming states are located in the northern part of the country with its endemic cases of child abuse (Magashi, 2015, p. 66; Sossou & Yogtiba, 2009, p. 1220; Omeni, 2015, p. 131; Hansen, Jima, Abbas & Abia, 2016, p. 86). An implication of this is that if the government scores low in anti-child

labor activities, chances are that beat reporting from this area will be adversely affected. On the other hand, AIT can be accorded some commendation for contributing a whopping 77.6 percent of the stories. This network is the only one that had "children" as a subject on its dropdown list.

Table 2 shows that the networks source their stories mainly as straight news with 83.6 percent. In comparison, features and editorial had 7.8 and 6.9 percent, respectively. This configuration aligns with the global standard of the primacy of news in mass media reportage. It would not make any difference whether the platform of transmission is broadcast, print, or online. However, commendation seems appropriate for all the networks because low reporting notwithstanding, they still managed to push up to 7.8 percent of all the stories on the index page, as shown in Table 3.

Table 4 exhibits the most visible theme of coverage as *the predicament of child laborers* with 44 percent. At the

same time, attention was also given to their education and the assistance they were getting from different sources. While the themes appear diverse, there is a particular area of coverage that has been neglected. This area pertains to multilateral organizations like the United Nations and its affiliated organizations like Unicef and the ILO. These bodies exert significant influence on the policies and actions of governments the world over. They are the organizations that set the rules of engagement by which government policies and actions on child labor are assessed.

The Table 5 figures that say 68.1 percent is favorable to child laborers is not surprising. The concern is the 13.8 percent that is not favorable. One of such negative stories could be the case of the *almajiris*. These are mainly male children, usually between the ages of five and 18, found in the country's northern parts. Many of them have been

engaged by Boko Haram for terrorist activities. They could gather together and inflict severe injuries on law-abiding citizens with flimsy excuses. Such unfavorable stories could discourage potential helpers of child laborers. Table 6 shows that child laborers and governments were the most frequently mentioned. This shows that the latter's reaction to child labor issues is significant. However, it is difficult to predict whether these reactions advance the interest of the child laborers or not.

**Research Question (RQ)2:**

*What are the dominant networks' sources of child labor reporting and the extent to which they report directly from child laborers?*

The following Table 7 shows the three networks' sources of stories.

**Table 4: Sources of the child labor stories in the selected television stations between 2015 and 2017**

<b>Story sources</b>	<b>f</b>	<b>%</b>
In house (research)	16	13.8
News agencies	31	26.7
Police/Court	1	0.9
NGOs	10	8.6
Government agencies	45	38.8
Unidentified source	9	7.8
<b>Contact with child laborers</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>
Others	4	3.4
Total	116	100

## **Discussion of RQ2**

AIT, NTA, and TVC sourced 13.8 percent of their stories through research. This result suggests the existence of a library – electronic or physical and this is commendable. The networks also relied on the government for their stories (38.8%). The figures corroborate those figures in Table 6 that shows the government constituting a whopping 41 percent of the people mentioned in the news. The networks relied next on news agencies with 26.7 percent and NGOs (10%). The combined percentage of reliance on both government, news agencies, and NGOs (85%) shows some proof of the incapability of the networks to source stories by themselves. The question is: what if there were no stories from these sources? How would they survive and be able to perform their social responsibility to the citizens? These are the questions that deserve serious attention from the media.

The most unimpressive showing of these networks is the zero direct contact their reporters had with child laborers in their reporting (shown in white over black) in Table 7. The meaning of this is that they relied mainly on secondary sources for their stories! This has legal implications and a profound consequence on the ethics of practice. The ethical principles of objectivity and fairness demand that media be accountable for the stories

they publish and the sources of these stories. By sourcing from secondary sources, the accountability principle becomes fragile as the defense of those sources slips out of their control.

## **Conclusion and Recommendations**

This study aimed to determine the level of child labor reporting by analyzing the content posted to the online platforms of TVC, AIT and NTA, three television networks selected based on some criteria, including their status as among the dominant broadcast media. Coverage is low, with a paltry 116 stories published on child labor. Besides the troubled children, the government also featured prominently in their reports, suggesting a significant level of official reactions to the crisis. Nevertheless, the dependence of these networks on the government, news agencies, and NGOs for their news put their journalism practice in jeopardy and undermines their capacity to be accountable. As part of the solution to the problem, the following are recommended:

1. Media houses and their reporters should, as a matter of concern for the country's future, prioritize the reporting of children. This prioritization should be in the form of a policy that makes child reporting mandatory.

2. To enhance performance in child reporting, a reporting schedule, backed up by an assessment mechanism, should be crafted as the guide for performance. Regular evaluation will show defaults in reporting and signpost the way to solve the problem.
3. According to Table 2, the three networks did not have many cartoons and photos to show their coverage. According to Omojola (2016), and Omojola, Odiboh and Amodu, 2018, one of the ways to make an impactful impression on the audience is through the use of symbols, shapes, illustrations, and the like in reporting. This strategy could go a long way in reducing the evils associated with the crisis.

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