

# Representing Insecurity: A Critical Analysis of Photograph Selection and Presentation in Nigerian Newspapers

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## Abstract:

*The selection and layout of photographs in a newspaper reveal relevance and details about an event to readers. Such details supposedly embody a publication's editorial philosophy, deflect perceptions, pronounce slants, and intentions. Arguably, the pictorial representations in print journalism signpost an understanding that a set of principles guides gatekeepers. These editorial factors come into play when making decisions regarding news images, though these considerations may not always be explicit. Therefore, this research sets out to empirically ascertain the considered elements during the decision-making process, influential factors, and the overall decision's effect on photo preference and positioning in newspapers. The study examines the selection and presentation of photographs in three Nigerian newspapers (Punch, The Guardian, and Leadership) from October 2023 to March 2024. Anchored on content analysis, the research investigates the editorial factors influencing the choice and presentation of photographs depicting banditry and insecurity in Nigeria. This research draws its strength from framing theory and Lewin's theory of forces. The study reveals that the selected newspapers prominently feature harsh-toned photographs related to banditry and insecurity. However, the editorial staff lacks explicit guidelines for photograph selection and presentation, relying instead on implicit knowledge of newspaper traditions. This research contributes to understanding how newspapers shape public perceptions of insecurity with pictures and highlights the need for more transparent editorial decision-making processes.*

**Keywords:** Banditry, Editorial Decision-Making, Framing, Insecurity, Photograph Selection

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Erich Solomon, the "father of candid photography," first used the term "photojournalism" in 1892, using images to convey ideas. The term "photojournalism" is a combination of the two essential terms, "photo" and "journalism." That is, the reporting of events or persons via images. Okoro (2002) describes photojournalism as pictures that convey information, education, communication, and entertainment. Although photography is a skill that may be learned via training, mastering various approaches is still vital to producing quality photographs, as it also strengthens and complements innate abilities (Osho, 2008). Images have a common language that evokes the same feelings in persons from disparate educational and linguistic backgrounds (Fasheke, 2004). Meanwhile, despite the media convergence necessitated by new and emerging technologies, many Nigerians rely heavily on either hard or soft copy newspapers as their primary source of information. Therefore, it is essential to understand how the print media outlets source, process, and present photo/visual information for their readers.

The widespread banditry and security risks in the Northwest region of Nigeria, especially in the states of Zamfara, Katsina, Kaduna, Sokoto, and Niger, have raised

serious concerns among the people about national security (Olaniyan & Yahaya, 2016). Seven thousand cattle were reportedly rustled from traditional herders and commercial livestock farms in Northern Nigeria between October 2013 and March 2014 (Bashir, 2014; Tauna, 2016). Between January and July 2019, 1,460 bandit attacks and 1,460 recorded deaths occurred (Abdullahi, 2019). Before taking away their cows, the bandits typically killed, wounded, and sexually assaulted the villagers (Akowe & Kayode, 2014). On rare occasions, however, they also abducted girls or women (Adeniyi, 2015; Yusuf, 2015).

Consequently, media coverage profoundly impacts public perception during crises. Positive or negative portrayals of the situation, the prominence given to specific issues, and the framing of stories can shape how the public perceives banditry and its anti-social activities. The media's ability to set agendas and influence public discourse can significantly impact people's behaviour and responses. More importantly, the effect of the news reportage may not be as enduring and impactful as the photographs that encapsulate the graphical representation of the devastating impact of banditry. The composition, angling, coverage details, and caption of a news photo culminate in a psychological and cathartic reaction from the readers. Images are analysed in terms of both their compositional structure and content. According to Fahmy,

Bock, and Wayne (2014), visual pictures imply reality, establish causal linkages, and encourage interaction. The effects of the reception determine the degree and variation in action, reaction, or inaction depending on the reader's cognitive and cultural knowledge.

This research is set to unravel the frequency, prominence, and tone of bandit-related pictures, vis-à-vis the essential elements considered in the editorial direction of the selected Nigerian newspapers. This study, however, considered Punch, The Guardian, and Leadership newspapers in Nigeria. Their selection is based on their strategic location, readership, popularity, and niche audience, emphasising photographs depicting insecurity and banditry from November 2023 to March 2024.

## II. RESEARCH QUESTIONS

In pursuit of the objective of this research, the study answers the following research questions:

1. What is the frequency of the bandit-related photograph reportage in the selected newspapers between November 2023 and March 2024?
2. How prominent were the banditry photographs on selected newspapers' pages between November 2023 and March 2024?
3. How has the choice of photographs determined the tone of banditry reported by selected newspapers?
4. What elements influence the choice and display of photographs depicting banditry in selected Nigerian newspapers?

## III. LITERATURE REVIEW

### *A. Insecurity and Banditry in Nigeria: Meaning and Overview*

According to Okolie and Okpaleke (2014:351), "the incidences of armed robber or allied violent crimes, such as kidnapping, cattle rustling, and village or market raids" are referred to as banditry. It involves criminal opportunists and syndicates using force or threats of force to intimidate an individual or group of individuals to rob, rape, or kill them in rural areas and on national borders. Banditry is further defined as "armed violence driven principally by the criminal intent to steal and plunder" Kokli (2019:1). "Crime against persons, including murder, rape, and robbery, has grown in scale and viciousness in Nigeria since 1999" claims Rotberg (2007:33). This is exemplified by the widespread tendency of armed banditry in the nation, particularly in northwest Nigeria, which essentially reflects the situation across Africa. The banditry issue in Nigeria, particularly in Katsina, is closely linked to disputes between farmers and herders and borders on existence over shared economic interests. These people frequently battle over territory, its resources, and their survival ability in the same geographic area.

The statistics are alarming: in the six northwest Nigerian states in 2018, over 2,000 people were murdered; in 2019, over 2,200 people died; and in 2020, 1,600 people died between January and June. Over 41,000 refugees have been created as a result of their actions alone, distancing about

247,000 individuals from their homes. More than 8,000 people have been killed in Zamfara alone in the past ten years. Two hundred thousand people were internally displaced, and more were escaping to adjacent states (Okolie & Okpaleke, 2014).

The mass media have often been blamed for inflaming crises, mainly due to the nature of their reportage (Hamid & Baba, 2014). Previous studies by Arcan (2013), Zia and Syedah (2015), and Savrum and Miller (2015) on conflict reporting focused more on significant terrorism attacks, ethnic conflicts, and the rise of insurgencies across different parts of the world and found bias in newspaper framing of the crisis. Asemah & Edegoh, 2012; Okoro & Odoemelam, 2013; Ngwu et al., 2015; Nwankpa & Onyekosor, 2015, and Jimoh, 2014 have also focused more on the newspaper reportage of Boko Haram insurgency, Niger-Delta crisis, Jos crisis, Chibok Girls crisis, EndSARS, among others. However, few studies have examined how newspapers frame the conflict in photographs in each geopolitical zone of the country.

### *B. Photojournalism and Newspaper Publication in Nigeria*

In Nigeria, photojournalism has permeated newspaper production so much that it is uncommon to discover a newspaper without images. Due to the limited technology available to Rev. Henry Townsend when he founded the first newspaper in Nigeria (Iwe Irohin) in Abeokuta in 1857, the newspaper did not use many photographs; however, later colonial newspapers included pictorial presentations to enhance news stories and decorate their pages (Onakpa, 2010). Furthermore, it is disclosed that The Daily Times, the top newspaper in Nigeria from 1960 to the 1970s, introduced a new angle to photojournalism by raising public awareness of the value of photography as a medium for documenting events.

The way Nigerian newspapers deliver news has been substantially improved with photojournalism. Okwechime (2006) asserts that one of the most crucial components of newspaper layout is using images to illustrate news stories. This is because, according to Onakpa (2010), "actions speak louder than words," and images capture actions. Dominick (2013) supports the idea that images speak louder than words by pointing out that photography drastically cuts down on how long it takes for newspaper readers to understand the news story's message. Readers could look at photos much more quickly than reading a story's long text.

There are numerous ways in which photography enhances the efficacy of mass communication with newspapers in Nigeria and other parts of the world. According to Wogu (2005), newspaper photojournalism uses the most potent and practical universal language that cuts across nationality, politics, religion, and race. Because its messages are clear and easy for everyone to understand, it spreads information without any problems. Secondly, photojournalism is the most immediate and reliable form of expression that can clearly and forcefully portray what is happening in closed and heavily regulated cultures. Additionally, photojournalism easily persuades individuals of social phenomena, which makes it a valuable tool for propaganda and/or bolstering patriotism. Finally, it is

claimed that photojournalism improves the aesthetics of newspaper pages.

Nigerian newspapers' use of photographs for the aforementioned purposes does not negate their limitations. According to Wogu (2005), photojournalism is experiencing a confidence crisis. The days of readers fully absorbing the messages in photos are long gone. The impartiality and veracity of photos published on newspaper pages are being questioned due to the broad availability of computer software that enables photo cropping and other image alteration techniques. Additionally, photographs contain many meanings that each observer can carefully interpret. Therefore, newspaper readers must be directed by captions accompanying the images to convey the correct message. Some newspaper readers, however, may never view the captions. By doing this, they can give the published photo a completely different meaning. The fact that photos only document acts and not motivations is another way that photography is limited in its ability to convey news stories. This allows a photograph to convey messages that are entirely out of context.

### ***C. Reporting the news images with ethics***

The selection of photographs is part of the complex process of creating the multimodal textual elements that news editors use to represent and interpret social reality. As noted by Andén-Papadopoulos (2013), Bednarek & Caple (2012), Bersak (2006), Chouliaraki (2006), 2008, Chouliaraki & Blaagaard (2013), Cromey (2010), Hill & Hi (2005), Lester (1991), MacKenzie, Burke, Carvalho, & Eades (2006), Wilkins & Coleman, 2005, and Zelizer (1998), the question of ethical responsibility in the use of images in news reporting is a crucial one for news editors. Because editors can crop, tone, or frame photos to fit the news story's context or to accomplish editorial goals, photos in newspaper stories are not immune to technological embellishment and manipulation (Cromey, 2010). News editors are ethically obligated to tell their stories using images that accurately reflect the social realities they cover.

News editors should adhere to specific ethical guidelines while utilising photos to tell their stories. Lester (1991) identified six ethical constructs: the veil of ignorance (i.e., weighing the editor's feelings if he were the target of moral action)"; the golden rule (i.e., the editor treating his news subjects as he would treat himself); the categorical imperative (i.e., what goes for one should go for everyone. No discrimination by the editor while using a photograph); utilitarianism (i.e., critical assessment of different images to maximise ones that are good for the most significant number of news audience); hedonism (i.e., using the image that feels good); and the golden mean (i.e., finding a middle ground between the extremes),

## **IV. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

The selection and presentation of an image entails placing it in an understandable context for readers. Specific interpretations are highlighted over others in the selection and subsequent production of the image; news editors and readers' standard cultural codes are given preference, and an explanatory

background is established. Lewin's theory of forces and Framing theory explain this position better.

### ***A. Framing Theory***

The foundation of this study is Framing Theory. According to McQuail (2005), framing theory is a philosophical postulation that explains how a media source usually shapes and contextualises news content. Because of its close connection to agenda-setting theory, it is frequently referred to as second-level agenda-setting. It is a platform for the media to situate different perspectives on a newsworthy event. Framing describes how the media arranges and disseminates information about particular topics or events to the public. It provides them with a specific context to impact interpretation and demands that they exercise selective influence over how the public perceives reality.

Despite decades of research, framing continues to be the target of debates and research concerning its role in constructing cultural, political, and societal patterns through mass communication and journalism. The media's presentation of information affects how the audience understands societal concerns, making the media framing theory relevant to this study. Consequently, public opinion in the nation undoubtedly reflects the reporting by the Nigerian media and the inclusion of the argument regarding widespread insecurity. Hence, there is a connection between the Nigerian public's understanding and decoding of the message and the media's approach to insecurity and banditry in the country.

### ***B. Lewin's theory of forces***

Lewin thought it was possible to pinpoint and research the factors that influence people's behaviour. He envisioned a system of channels that units may travel through. A unit may be approved or refused at any point. The forces operating on the messages from both sides of the gate influence the decisions made at each gate. Conflicting influences will, therefore, impact a news unit's transit through the news channels at any decision-making gate. Knowing the forces at play in a particular scenario would aid in comprehending how the result came to be.

Organisations will differ in how many gatekeeping decisions are left to the individual communicators. However, a certain level of autonomy in making decisions usually still exists in the journalistic profession. Forces coming from this level could be assumed to be influenced by one's preferences, prejudices, and dislikes. The idea of news values and specific relevance criteria that direct the decision of what is newsworthy is a crucial component of news routines. These ideals are significant because many forces influencing news units will have their roots in them. Though some overlap may exist, the values emphasised in contests will likely differ from those favoured in the news context. They thought the winning shots had a very unfavourable tone. The majority were defined by action-driven emotional intensity. Over 80% included violent crimes, accidents, and disasters.

Before a news photo can even be conceived, it is essential to establish the nature of a news event. Even when an event has reached a point where it is deemed worthy of being photographed, ideology (in its broadest sense) continues to play a pivotal role in determining what qualifies as an event,

as Sontag (2004) argues. A photograph, or any form of evidence, cannot exist until the event has been identified and described.

Just as viewers cannot derive meaning from an image devoid of ideological context, photographers will not aim their cameras at events that do not align with their understanding of newsworthy content. Moreover, the society and culture of the photographer and their publication shape their perception of what is newsworthy. The best selection is the one that presents the most potent image (a term that this study will delve into to identify the components of a compelling picture). The question often concerns whether the image fits the space and best represents the words. Editors may find it arduous to balance depicting violence in a manner they believe readers would accept and showing it in a way they think readers should see, regardless of their preferences (as will be evident from the interviews quoted later in this work).

At first glance, photographs seem to be the most fundamental objects - nothing more than a replica of a real-life scene. Moreover, the reader who glances at the newspaper's photograph first would likely perceive it as little more than that. This simplicity, however, belies a laborious process that goes into creating, choosing, altering, and presenting the image to the audience. Decisions that modify the image or images are made at every stage. Some possible interpretations of the picture are overemphasised at the expense of others. According to Lewin's theory of opportunities, certain factors will show up as positive forces that support the choice or presentation of the photograph. At the same time, other aspects will take the form of opposing forces. The goal of the analysis is to ascertain which elements were considered during the decision-making process, what factors influenced their relative importance, and how the final result was affected by the relative importance of those factors.

## V. METHODOLOGY

The research design used in this study is qualitative content analysis. The content analysis examined issues of Frequency, prominence, and tone used in The Punch, The Guardian, and Leadership newspapers published between October 2023 and March 2024 (six months) about photographs depicting banditry. Five hundred forty-nine (549) items were selected for the three newspapers used for this study; each had 183 issues published in the six months studied. Thirty-one issues from each newspaper were chosen randomly by blind draw and monthly quota sampling based on this figure.

### A. Data Analysis

The data analysis in this study is a thematic analysis of captions, headlines, and image content presented in line with the respective research questions.

**Table 1: Frequency of Photographs on Banditry-related issues**

PUBLIC ATION	O C T.	N O V.	D E C.	J A N.	F E B.	M A R.	T O T A L	PER CEN TAG E

<b>Punch</b>	28	34	34	27	25	26	<b>174</b>	<b>32%</b>
<b>The Guardian</b>	30	36	22	25	23	24	<b>160</b>	<b>29%</b>
<b>Leadership</b>	36	40	39	35	36	29	<b>215</b>	<b>39%</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>94</b>	<b>110</b>	<b>95</b>	<b>87</b>	<b>84</b>	<b>79</b>	<b>549</b>	<b>100</b>

Source: Survey, 2024.

Table 1 above indicates a total of 549 news frames that touched Banditry-related photographs on the pages of the selected newspapers; that is, 174 photographs' frames were analysed in the Punch newspaper, which represents 32%, while 160 photographs' frames were analysed in the Guardian newspaper, representing 29%; and 215 photographs' frames were analysed with 39%; These frames cut across the selected newspaper front and back page, that is, 549 editions: (183 in each) of the newspapers) between October 1<sup>st</sup> 2023 to March 31<sup>th</sup>, 2024.

**Table 2: The Prominence of the Photographs on Banditry-related issues**

POSITION	PUNCH	GUARDIAN	LEADERSHIP	TOTAL	PERCENTAGE
<b>Front Page</b>	60	92	102	254	46%
<b>Inside Page</b>	65	70	84	219	40%
<b>Back Page</b>	37	16	23	76	14%
<b>Total</b>	<b>162</b>	<b>178</b>	<b>209</b>	<b>549</b>	<b>100%</b>

Source: Survey, 2024.

Table 2 above shows that a total of two hundred fifty-four (254) photographs appeared on the front page of the selected newspapers from October 2023 to March 2024, representing forty-six (46%) percent. It further shows that a total of two hundred nineteen (219) photographs appeared on the inside page of the papers in the period under review, representing forty (40%) per cent. In comparison, seventy-six (76) photographs appeared on the back page of the papers, which was described by fourteen {14%} per cent in the period under review.

**Table 3: The Tone of the Photographs on Banditry-related issues**

POSITION	PUNCH	GUARDIAN	LEADERSHIP	TOTAL	PERCENTAGE
<b>Positive</b>	42	38	67	147	27%
<b>Negative</b>	77	64	125	266	48%
<b>Neutral</b>	48	33	55	136	25%
<b>Total</b>	<b>167</b>	<b>134</b>	<b>247</b>	<b>549</b>	<b>100%</b>

Source: Survey, 2024.

Table 3 above shows that one hundred and forty-seven (147) photographs of banditry-related issues were displayed as favourable or favourable reports in the selected newspapers,



representing twenty-seven (27%) per cent in the period under review. In comparison, two hundred sixty-six (266) photographs, representing forty-eight (48%) per cent, are unfavourable or unfavourable to the populace. Therefore, one hundred and thirty-six (136) photographs were neutral; that is, they are neither favourable nor unfavourable to the masses; this is represented by twenty-five (25%) per cent of the population.

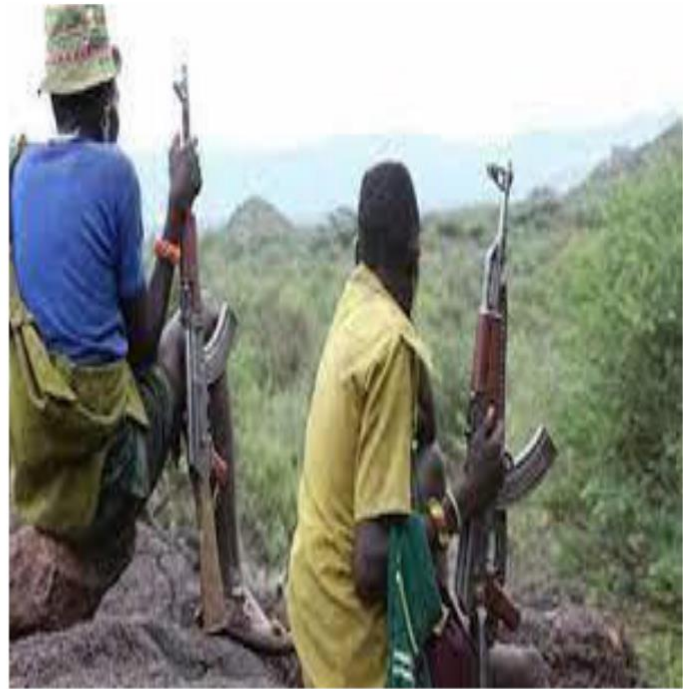
### Some photographs depicting banditry in the selected newspapers



The Guardian (March 5, 2024).



The Punch (February 21, 2024).



The Guardian (January 18, 2024)



Leadership Newspaper (March 14, 2024)

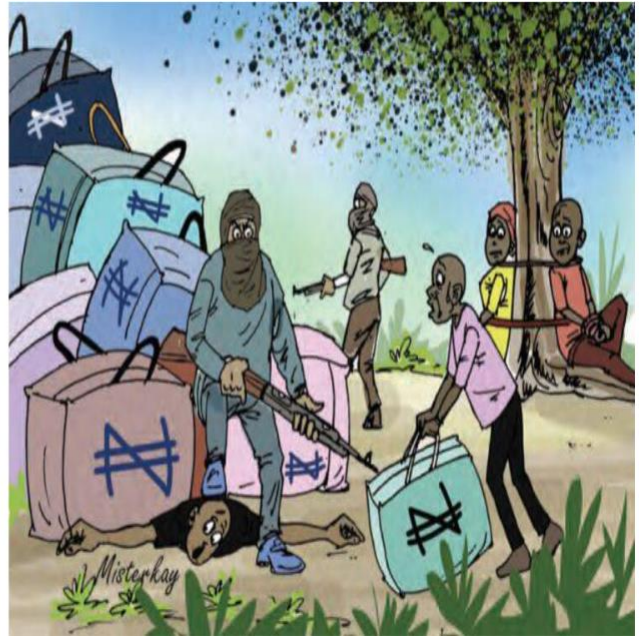


The Punch (October 27, 2023).





**The Punch (December 17, 2023).**



**The Punch (November 19, 2023).**



**Leadership Newspaper (March 17, 2024).**



**The Guardian (December 1, 2024).**



**Leadership Newspaper (March 4, 2024).**

## VI. DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

The study covered a period of six months, that is, from October 2023 to March 2024. Punch, The Guardian, and Leadership newspapers were critically analysed along the lines of the frequency, prominence, and tone of photographs and news frames to ascertain how well media coverage helped stem the tide of insecurity in Nigeria. It was observed that all the newspapers exercised professionalism in using photographs or images to report events such as banditry and other vices in Nigeria. The study also shows that the selected newspapers prominently feature banditry and insecurity-related issues in their publications' pages. The photographs used projected harsh tones.

The results of this study show that even the editorial staff of selected newspapers do not possess editorial documents or handbooks outlining the scope, type, and quality of photography in their knowledge of newspaper traditions. They have unwritten rules from publications that support photojournalism in their editorial philosophies. This supports

the prior observation made by Okwechime (2006) that photojournalism is one of the critical components of newspaper layout. In this study, the fundamental newspaper publishing tradition endured because editorial staff members were directed by it when there was no editorial support for photojournalism in handbooks or other materials.

## VII. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

This study demonstrates that the photograph is probably the first item a reader will glance at on any newspaper page (Garcia, 1991). The decision-makers who participated in this study's interviews were persuaded of the value of images in newspapers. They felt that pictures could quickly convey information to readers, that they could capture the dramatic nature of an event in a way that words cannot, that pictures attracted what they perceived to be an increasingly visually oriented readership, and that pictures served as a hook to entice readers to look at the news stories. They used their background in the news industry to determine which photos would best meet all of these criteria.

Readers can learn a lot from photographs in newspaper reporting, but care must be taken when using them. This is to protect against issues related to photojournalism in the era of digital photography, where it is relatively easy to manipulate images.

Furthermore, incorrect captioning of photos confuses readers, which is a significant challenge for photojournalism.

In this regard, the study makes the following recommendations:

When capturing and producing photos for news reporting, photojournalists must adhere to the journalism principles of impartiality and fairness. Avoiding any deception in photography, including cropping and manipulating images, is essential. When captioning photos, photojournalists and editorial staff must be cautious. Steer clear of ambiguous or misleading captions.

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