



PROMOTING HUMAN RIGHTS AWARENESS INITIATIVES: PERSPECTIVES ON MEDIA FRAMING AND COMMUNITY ACTIONS TO ERADICATE CULTURAL PRACTICES AGAINST WOMEN IN SOUTH EAST NIGERIA

Innocent Paschal Ihechu (Ph.D)¹, Don Christian Afulike²

and Udochukwu Emmanuel Ndukwe³

¹Department of Mass Communication, Abia State University, PMB 2000, Uturu, Nigeria
ipi@abiastateuniversity.edu.ng; madinopas@yahoo.com; +2347065138607

²Department of Mass Communication, Abia State University, PMB 2000, Uturu, Nigeria
Afulike2000@gmail.com; +2347037574703

³Department of Mass Communication, Abia State University, PMB 2000, Uturu, Nigeria
Udochukwu.emmanuel@yahoo.com; +2348035725417

Cite this article:

Ihechu I.P., Afulike D.C., Ndukwe U.E. (2023), Promoting Human Rights Awareness Initiatives: Perspectives on Media Framing and Community Actions to Eradicate Cultural Practices against Women in South East Nigeria. African Journal of Culture, History, Religion and Traditions 6(1), 105-124. DOI: 10.52589/AJCHRT-YAFBAUJE

Manuscript History

Received: 11 Feb 2023

Accepted: 2 April 2023

Published: 27 April 2023

Copyright © 2022 The Author(s). This is an Open Access article distributed under the terms of Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivatives 4.0 International (CC BY-NC-ND 4.0), which permits anyone to share, use, reproduce and redistribute in any medium, provided the original author and source are credited.

ABSTRACT: *This study set out to investigate the perspectives of journalists in south-east Nigeria on the framing and community actions towards promoting human rights awareness initiatives for eradicating cultural practices against women. Relying on the above problem, objectives were set to determine journalists' awareness of the cultural practices against women in south-east Nigeria, ascertain the level of audience exposure to framed stories in the media about cultural practices against women; and thus evaluate journalists' perspectives on promoting human rights awareness initiatives through framing of the practices. Using the survey method, a sample of 276 journalists and a sample of 384 members of the media audiences were studied using the questionnaire as an instrument for data collection. In the end, it was found that the journalists were adequately aware of the practices under study. It was also found that the audiences were well exposed to media frames on the practices. Finally, findings revealed two perspectives on the subject matter which included approaches to framing the practices including (highlighting the negative implications of practices, co-opting NGOs, interpreting contents, among others) and community actions to eradicate the actions (employing innovative methods to shift share beliefs about the practices, enthroning educated leaders, infusing enlightenment into school curricula, and so on). It was therefore recommended that the media, policy makers, NGOs, community leaders, among others should make efforts to sustain the present advocacy to change all cultures that demean the dignity of women and other members of the society.*

KEYWORDS: Human rights, Awareness initiatives, Media framing, Community actions, Cultural practices, Women.



INTRODUCTION

One of the key issues addressed at the 1995 Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing was the elimination of cultural practices against women (United Nations, 1996). Such practices affect the lives of millions of women worldwide, irrespective of their socio-economic status. It cuts across ethnic, cultural and religious barriers, impeding the rights of women to participate fully in the society (De Bruyn, 2012). The urgency of addressing this global problem is tragically illustrated by the treatment of women in conflict or crisis situations, where various forms of harassment, intimidation, rape and forced pregnancies are being used as instruments of war, especially by the opposing forces or the supposed peacekeepers (Adaja & Talabi, 2016).

These practices of discrimination, cultural violence and annihilation meted out to women in Nigerian culture have been ever increasing, despite civilisation and modernisation. The recent debate on the amendment of the 1999 constitution raised many interesting and controversial questions on the position and treatment of women under the law in Nigeria. Many people expressed shock and disappointment over the unequal treatment of women by the constitution, particularly Section 29 (4)(b), which technically supports child marriage. This is by its provision that any woman who is married shall be deemed to be of full age. However, Section 29 (4)(b) is not the only provision of the Nigerian constitution and Nigerian law that overtly or covertly discriminates against women. Obviously, the Nigerian law does not treat men and women equally.

The present wave of enlightenment among the populace suggests an increase in awareness creation, advocacy and outright indoctrination of the masses about their human rights statuses. Many studies exist about cultural practices in Africa, and the way they affect women and girls (Nsereka & Enyinda, 2018; Ihechu, Okugo, Amah & Afulike, 2017; Nwammuo, 2015; Arisi, & Oromareghake, 2011; Aduh, 2003), but these studies neither paid attention to approaches to framing the practices nor recommended community actions that should be supported by the media to review, amend or eradicate such harmful practices. The above lacuna brings to the fore the need to investigate the journalists' perspectives on the approaches for the media to frame cultural practices against women in addition to prescribed community actions. This inquiry hinges on the consideration of these factors as human rights awareness initiatives.

Statement of the Problem

Despite the fact that cultural practices against women are daily occurrences, both in the public and private spheres, it is often rendered invisible, unrecognized and at best trivialized. For many years in Nigeria, cultural practices against women received very little or no attention, with the silence engulfing it being used as a weapon to further perpetrate the act. Despite the provisions of the protocol recognising and guaranteeing rights and the obligation of the Nigerian government, lives of Nigerian women are yet to attain a commensurate level of improvement. Women rank lower than men in most indices of development in the country as women's well-being are rather faring worse. However, in some aspects, like the economy, people like Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala have made great contributions. In most cases, legislation is yet to be promulgated and schemes put in place to enhance women's rights and equal opportunities, even if it means the entrenchment of an affirmative action. The rich provisions of the protocol recognising and guaranteeing women's human rights in Nigeria promise a beautiful future for women in principle but practice spells doom for women in most cultures of Nigeria. The problem of this study rests on ascertaining the perspectives of journalists in south-



east Nigeria about the remedial approaches to media framing of the practices as well as the community actions to promulgate the negative practices and promote awareness as human rights initiatives.

Objectives of the Study

The objectives of this study were to:

- i. ascertain the level of awareness of cultural practices against women among journalists in Nigeria;
- ii. ascertain the level of exposure of Nigerian audience to framed stories on cultural practices against women; and to
- iii. determine journalists' perspectives on promoting human right awareness by framing cultural practices against women.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The Cultural Practices and the Nigerian Woman

Ihechu et al. (2017) list and describe the cultural practices against women in Nigeria and which include: early and forced marriage, female circumcision, wife inherited by husband's relatives, divorce, widowhood rites, domestic violence, payment and refund of bride price, marginalization of women's rights in dissolution of customary law marriage, male preference syndrome. It is pertinent to state here that these customs or practices in Nigeria most negatively affect the womenfolk who form a large part of the entire population of the rural communities as well as urban centers. According to UNDP (2007) in Nwammuo (2015), women in Nigeria represent the majority of the rural poor up to 70% and they play a major role in the survival strategies of rural households. But surprisingly, these women are not even consulted and considered in taking decisions that affect them. They are, usually, only informed about decisions taken. Most cultural practices and traditional beliefs of some ethnic groups in Nigeria do not promote the empowerment of women; rather, they tend to oppress them and some of these customs simply violate the rights of women and relegate them to the background in relation to societal, family and community issues. According to Ihechu et al. (2017), these problems manifest in very different forms in various societies with extensive implications and they are very prevalent in Nigerian society. The problems hinge on various factors which include economic, social and cultural. It is accompanied by adverse consequences to the woman, family and society.

Human Right Implications of the Cultural Practices against Women

In most societies, physical abuse is often considered acceptable behavior and where it is frowned at, women are often blamed for inciting men to engage in it. For instance, among the Tiv people in Benue State, wife beating is even regarded as a sign of love, which women have been socialized to accept and sometimes encourage it (Arisi & Oromareghake, 2011). The authors further stressed that violence is one of the most obvious illustrations of the low positions and status that women are accorded in many cultures in Nigeria. The international community has become aware of the need to achieve equality between the sexes and of the fact



that an equitable society cannot be attained if fundamental human rights of half of human society i.e. women continue to be denied and violated.

As early as the 1950s, the United Nations specialized agencies and human rights bodies began considering the question of harmful traditional practices affecting the health of women in particular, but these issues have not received consistent broader consideration and action to bring about any substantial change. In this case, the media, especially radio, tend to be the better solution to these cultural menaces. Despite the apparent slowness of action to challenge and eliminate harmful traditional practices, the activities of human rights bodies in this field in recent years resulted in noticeable progress. The United Nations human rights believe that no one should be discriminated against regarding ownership of property. According to the Universal Declaration on Human Rights (UDHR), Article 17(1) and (2) establish “the rights of everyone to property regardless of sex.” This states the fact that no one should be excluded in the ownership of family property. Section 42(1) and (2) of the Nigeria constitution also support the right of anyone to own, and acquire immovable property anywhere in Nigeria. Everyone is equal, no one should be inferior to the other on the basis of culture and tradition, as it is an abuse of the inalienable rights of such a person. Such persons can be sued for a breach under the constitution (Obaji, 2018).

Furthermore, according to the United Nations Children Funds (UNICEF), “a marriage before the age of 18 is a fundamental violation of human rights.” UNICEF declares that child marriage decreases a girl child development by resulting to early pregnancy and social isolation. This really implies that some of these our cultural beliefs and faith fall short of the rights of a child. Some are betrothed at birth and they grow up in the house of their would-be husband without having the right to make decisions on such delicate issues. This is very bad for the development of our society. The debate on human rights implication of cultural practices against women extends to female genital mutilation/circumcision which act is not just degrading to the girl child, but it is also a painful process. It exposes the girl child to a lot of harms like infections. This is indeed a serious violation of human rights. Section 34(1) (a) of the 1999 Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria stipulates that: “Every individual is entitled to respect for the dignity of his person, and accordingly; no person shall be subject to torture or to inhuman or degrading treatment.” This really implies that everyone irrespective of age, race, or religion deserves some level of respect. No one is expected to subject him to any form of inhuman action that might inflict pain on him. The essence of this section is to protect the girl child or anyone from harm that might affect his/her integrity as a human being (Ihechu et al., 2017).

This clearly states that no one should be rejected from practicing a particular tradition or religion as the case maybe in any community, everyone is free to practice any religion he so desires provided he/she does this within the confines of the law. So an exclusion of anyone in any form, whether gender or race is not acceptable under the human right law. The practice of excluding a particular set of people from traditional rites and decision making is indeed a serious breach of the human rights of such individuals. Humiliating women during burial ceremonies should be punishable under the law because it is a gross violation to the human rights law. The fundamental human right law states in section 34(1)(a) of the 1999 Constitution on the Federal Republic of Nigeria that: “Every individual is entitled to respect for the dignity of his person, and accordingly, no person shall be subject to torture or to inhuman or degrading treatment.” The act is not just degrading; it is also an abuse of human dignity which should not be allowed to thrive in our society. The woman or the girl-child should not be subjected to any form of torture that will affect her from giving her best to the society. Therefore the law frowns



against any form of culture that does not respect human dignity, or any culture that promotes inhuman treatments in the name of cultural or customary practice (Egbuo, 2005).

The Media and Human Rights Awareness to Eradicate Negative Practices

The media have the potential of discouraging harmful cultural practices that prevent rapid empowerment of women. The media seem to be the only option to perform this magic considering their basic characteristics of defeating many barriers – ranging from poverty, illiteracy, poor road networks, lack of regular supply of electricity to other social amenities. Many projects for rural-based communication were experimented when state owned broadcasting systems ventured into setting up media transmission services from particular geographical localities (Egbuo, 2005), to reach the rural audience.

The mass media are indeed critical components of society. Their primary functions are to educate, inform and entertain the audience on salient issues such as acquisition and ownership of property by the girl-child or the widow who lost her husband. In this regard, the media carry out educational and interactive programmes through invitation of guests who come to the studio to speak on some of the issues so as to provide enlightenment to the people. The media also employ the agenda setting, media framing, through newspaper editorials and other contents to drive home the need to place value on the girl-child (Ihechu et al., 2017). Also, the media should carry out different forms of sensitisation in the rural areas, so as to let the people see the need to allow the girl child to grow and also see herself as an equal stakeholder in the society. One of the ways the media plays a pivotal role in enhancing the girl-child is through carrying out certain programmes like beauty pageants, town hall meetings, among others (Ihechu, Afulike & Ubani, 2017). All these processes when employed by the media will improve the standard of the girl-child, in addition to the use of documentary, commentary, editorials in the various media platforms to educate the public on the need to reject early and forced marriage.

Furthermore, the media as a vehicle of education, information and entertainment must utilize this privilege to educate the public through certain programmes that can help send the messages to those in the rural areas and also provide discussion programmes on radio where issues affecting the need to educate the girl child will be encouraged. Women groups such as the federation of women lawyers, pressure groups, and NGOs should also collaborate with the media to provide sound arguments that will help to improve the capacity of the girl child and women in general.

Theoretical Framework

Agenda-setting theory was formally developed by McCombs and Shaw in 1968. The mass media are credited with the power to set the agenda of the topics for discussion (Ekeanyanwu 2015; Ozuru & Ekeanyanwn, 2013). The media therefore project to the public as important those issues they want them to think about discuss and treat as important. In setting agenda, the media succeed in according importance and relevance to issues in the following ways: by generating and appreciable degree of conflict in the report; by giving the issue prominence through banner headlines, photographs, graphics, cartoons, etc; by increasing the frequency or quantity of such reports; and by accumulating specific media effects over time.

Agenda setting theory is considered apt for this study because the case of fighting against harmful cultural practices against women in Nigeria depends on how to effectively use media



to set the right agenda. The roles which the media perform in society are not limited to information, education, entertainment, socialization and surveillance. The mass and other media can be used to set the right agenda that can bring drastic change in various communities in the case of fighting for the elimination of the cited harmful cultural practices against women in Nigeria.

METHODOLOGY

The study adopted the survey design. There were two populations for this study. The first population was 974 and was made up of reporters, editors and journalists in the five south-eastern states of Abia (205), Anambra (158), Ebonyi (144), Enugu (227) and Imo (240). These figures were obtained from the Nigerian Union of Journalists in each of the states. Here, the sample size was 276; calculated using the online sample size calculator at surveysystem.com (at 0.05 confidence interval and 95% confidence level). The systematic random sampling technique was used to select the sample units from the state NUJ registers which presented the sampling frames after proportionately allocating sample units to each state chapter of NUJ.

The second population, according to United Nations (2020), was 3,522,000 and comprised the entire inhabitants (considered as media audiences) of the capital cities of the five southeastern states; namely, Abia: Umuahia (774,000); Anambra: Awka (530,000); Ebonyi: Abakaliki (572,000); Enugu: Enugu (773,000) and Imo: Owerri (873,000). The sample size here was 384 calculated with the online sample size calculator available at surveysystem.com (at 0.05 confidence interval and 95% confidence level). The available sampling technique was used to select the sample units on the major streets of the cities under study, after proportionately allocating units to each city according to their populations.

Data Presentation and Analysis

For the rating scales, the modified 5-point Likert scale was used as follows: Strongly Agreed: SD = 5; Agreed: A = 4; Fairly Agreed: FA = 3; Disagreed: D = 2; strongly Disagreed: SD = 1. To determine the mean scores, the formula, $xi = \sum fx / \sum f$ employed where: xi = mean score; f = frequency of the scores and x = scores on the scale. In the end, mean scores that are 3.0 and above (i.e. ≥ 3.0) were considered significant and therefore accepted for generalization while scores below 3.0 were considered insignificant and thus, were rejected. Out of 276 copies of questionnaires administered to journalists, 265 copies were valid for analysis; while out of 384 copies of questionnaires administered to the audiences, 372 copies were valid for analysis. For the contents, simple percentage determination was used to ascertain the presence/absence of the units of analysis in the media contents studied which involved descriptive analysis.

Research Question One: To what extent are journalists in south-east Nigeria aware of cultural practices against women?

To determine journalists' level awareness of cultural practices against women in South East Nigeria, the respondents were subjected to rate five indices of awareness on a 5-point scale. The data are as presented and analyzed below.

**Table 1: Journalists' Level of Awareness of Cultural Practices against Women**

Indices	Ratin g	SA	A	FA	D	SD	Total	Xi
	x	5	4	3	2	1	N=5	
Journalists are aware of different practices against women in south-east Nigeria.	f	85	82	58	29	11	265	3.75>3.0 Significant 75%
	fx	425	328	174	58	11	996	
	%	32	31	22	11	4	100	
Journalists know that some of the practices deter development of women and girls.	f	106	77	66	11	5	265	4.01>3.0 significant 80%
	fx	530	308	198	22	5	1,063	
	%	40	29	25	4	2	100	
Journalists are constantly enlightened to realize the negative impact of those practices on the society.	f	111	69	80	5	0	265	4.07>3.0 Significant 81%
	fx	555	276	240	10	0	1,081	
	%	42	26	30	2	0	100	
Journalists are conversant with the cultural differences amongst communities that exhibit such practices	f	140	48	40	32	5	265	4.07>3.0 Significant 81%
	fx	700	192	120	64	5	1,081	
	%	53	18	15	12	2	100	
Journalists are aware of the need to reject or amend the practices that are against the right of women	f	122	74	45	16	8	265	4.07>3.0 Significant 81%
	fx	610	296	135	32	8	1,081	
	%	46	28	17	6	3	100	
Cumulative Average Score, $xii = (3.75+4.01+4.07+4.07+4.07)/5 = 19.97/5 = 3.99>3.0$: Significant: 79%								

The data in Table 1 as analyzed show a mean score (x_i) of $3.75>3.0$ ([sig.@75%](#)). This result implied that the assumption of the first index was accepted and indicated that the journalists were highly aware of different cultural practices against women. The result for the second index (x_i $4.01>3.0$; [sig.@80%](#)) showed that journalists had knowledge about how some of the cultural practices deterred the development of girls and women. For the third index, the result ($x_i = 4.07>3.0$; [sig.@81%](#)) sustained the assumption that journalists were well enlightened to realize the negative impacts of the practices in society. Further, the result for the fourth index ($x_i = 4.07>3.0$; [sig.@81%](#)) led to the assumption that the journalists were conversant with the cultural difference amongst the communities that exhibit cultural practices against women. Finally, the result for the fifth index ($x_i = 4.07>3.0$; [sig@81%](#)) indicated that journalists were aware of the need to reject or amend the cultural practices that are against the rights of women in south-east Nigeria. Cumulatively, all the indices recorded an average score of $x_{ii} = 3.99>3.0$ ([sig.@79%](#)). By implication, all the indices were considered significant and showed, in respect of the first research question, that: the journalists in South East Nigeria were highly aware of the cultural practices against women. This submission was based on the summary of the results that:

- i. The different practices were well known;
- ii. It is obvious that the cultural practices against women impinged on overall development of women;



- iii. Enlightenment helped to expose the different cultural practices against women;
- iv. There was ample knowledge about the cultural differences amongst the communities that exhibit the practices against women; and
- v. There was agreement that there is a need to amend or reject the cultural practices against women in Nigeria.

Research Question Two: To what extent are south-east Nigeria audiences exposed to framed stories on cultural practices against women?

To determine the level of exposure to framed stories on cultural practices against women, the audiences were asked to rate five indices of exposure to such contents in the media. Their responses were as presented in Table 2 below.

Table 2: Audience Exposure to Framed Stories on Cultural Practices Against Women

Indices	Rating	SA	A	FA	D	S D	Total	Xi
The audience are regularly see stories that framed cultural practices against women	X	5	4	3	2	1	N=5	3.65>3.0 significant 73%
	F	97	126	89	45	15	372	
	Fx	485	504	267	90	15	1,361	
	%	26	34	24	12	4	100	
The broadcast media frame most aspects of cultural practices against women	F	112	67	48	52	93	372	3.14>3.0 significant 63%
	Fx	560	144	336	104	93	1,169	
	%	30	18	13	14	25	100	
The newspapers frame most aspects of cultural practices against women	F	60	78	100	67	67	372	4.06>3.0 significant 81%
	Fx	300	712	300	134	67	1,513	
	%	16	21	27	18	18	100	
The audience always understand the motive behind the frames about cultural practices against women	F	160	123	56	26	7	372	4.08>3.0 significant 82%
	Fx	800	492	168	52	7	1,519	
	%	43	33	15	7	2	100	
The audience are now able to take informed decisions concerning cultural practices against women	F	141	130	52	30	19	372	C significant 78%
	Fx	705	520	156	60	19	1,460	
	%	38	35	14	8	5	100	
Cumulative Average Score, $x_{ii} = (3.65+3.14+4.06+4.08+3.92)/5 = 18.50/5 = 3.77 > 3.0$; Significant: 75%								

The data in Table 2 show that all the indices of measurement recorded significant results. Thus, with the mean score, x_i of $3.65 > 3.0$ (sig@73%) led to acceptance of the first index and indicated that the respondents agreed that the audience regularly see stories that framed cultural practices against women. Further, there was agreement that the broadcast media frame most aspects of the cultural practices against women as recorded by the mean score of the second index ($x_i = 3.14 > 3.0$; sig @63%). Also, the third index that measured newspaper framing of



the most aspects of the practices was accepted with an average score, \bar{x}_i of $4.06 > 3.0$ ([sig.@81%](#)). There was agreement to the statement that the audiences understand the motive behind frames about cultural practices. Thus, with a mean score, \bar{x}_i of $4.08 > 3.0$ ([sig.@82%](#)), the result of the fourth index was accepted. Finally, the fifth index recorded a mean score, \bar{x}_i of $4.08 > 3.0$ ([sig.@78%](#)); which signified an agreement with the assumption that the audience are able to make informed decisions concerning cultural practices against women.

Generally, with a cumulative average score, \bar{x}_{ii} of $3.77 > 3.0$ ([sig.@75%](#)), the results from all the indices show that the audience are well exposed to the frames on cultural practices against women. Therefore, for the second research question, the audiences are highly exposed to the frames on cultural practices against women because:

- i. The audience regularly see stories that framed cultural practices against women;
- ii. The broadcast media framed most of the practices
- iii. The newspapers framed most of the practices
- iv. The audience understood the motive behind the frames
- v. The audience are now prepared, through the frames, to make informed decisions about cultural practices against women.

Research Question Three: What are the journalists' perspectives on promoting human rights awareness by framing cultural practices against women?

Two perspectives were identified for promoting human rights awareness through framing cultural practices against women in Nigeria. One of the perspectives according to journalists has to do with the approaches to framing the practices which are as presented in Table 3 below.

Table 3: Approaches to Framing Cultural Practices against Women as Human Rights Awareness Initiatives

Indices	Rating	SA	A	FA	D	SD	Total	Xi
The media should always report cases of cultural practices as news highlighting the negative implication on development	X	5	4	3	2	1	N=5	3.99 > 3.0 significant 79%
	F	109	74	58	19	5	265	
	fx	545	296	174	38	5	1,058	
	%	41	28	22	7	2	100	
The media should co-opt NGO and Human Rights Organisations for regular sponsorship of feature contents about the practices	f	101	87	37	27	93	372	3.89 > 3.0 significant 77%
	fx	505	348	111	54	93	1,041	
	%	38	33	14	10	25	100	
Media owners should dedicate time and space for the framing of cultural practices and their impacts as corporate social responsibility	f	114	71	48	16	67	372	3.94 > 3.0 significant 78%
	fx	570	284	144	134	67	1,513	
	%	43	27	218	18	18	100	



There should be interpretation and analysis of media presentations such as drama, film, etc so as to avoid misunderstanding of intended message	<i>F</i>	122	66	53	26	7	372	4.04>3.0 significant 80%
	<i>F_x</i>	610	264	159	52	7	1,519	
	%	46	25	20	7	2	100	
Social media networks of communication should be employed to enhance reach and impact of awareness communication	<i>F</i>	98	90	45	30	19	372	3.91>3.0 significant 78%
	<i>F_x</i>	490	360	135	60	19	1,460	
	%	37	34	17	8	5	100	
Cumulative Average Score, $x_{ii} = (3.99+3.89+3.94+4.04+3.91)/5 = 19.77/5 = 3.95>3.0$; Significant: 79%								

From Table 3 above, the respondents were subjected to rate five indices that capture approaches to framing cultural practices against women as human rights awareness initiatives. Thus, analysis of the data for the first measurement index resulted to an average score, x_i of $3.99>3.0$ ([sig.@79%](#)). This result indicated that the journalists under study agreed that the media should always report cultural practices against women as news events; and through such an approach, highlight the negative implications for societal and national development. From the second index, there was an average score, x_i of $3.89>3.0$ ([sig.@77%](#)); thus showing a high level agreement to adopt the approach for the media to co-opt NGOs and human rights organizations for the sponsorship of feature contents in both newspapers and broadcast channels to create human rights awareness.

Further, Table 3 contains data that shows the third index was accepted as an approach to create human rights awareness through framing of cultural practices against women in Nigeria. With a mean score, x_i of $3.94>3.0$ ([sig.@78%](#)), there was a high level of agreement among journalists that media outlets should adopt the approach of performing social responsibilities by dedicating time and space to frame the cultural practices against women. Also, the fourth index received a favorable consideration ($x_i = 4.04>3.0$; [sig.@80%](#)). Thus, interpreting contents of media presentations such as film, drama, etc. was considered a good approach to frame cultural practices as human rights initiatives. In so doing, the intentions of such presentations would not be misunderstood by the audience.

Finally, the mean score, x_i of $3.91>3.0$ ([sig.@78%](#)) showed that the respondents agreed to the proposition of fifth index that social media networks should be employed to expand reach of awareness communication about cultural practices against women. This approach would ensure the reach of a greater number of people, especially, the younger generation that should imbibe the human rights awareness messages as they concern cultural practices against women.

With a cumulative average score, x_{ii} of $3.95>3.0$ ([sig.@79%](#)), the identified approaches to framing cultural practices against women in Nigeria accepted by the journalists as productive human rights initiatives when adopted. In summary, therefore, the approaches to frame the practices are:



- i. Highlighting the negative implications of the practices through news reports;
- ii. Co-opting NGOs and human rights organizations to sponsor feature programmes and write-ups about the practices in the media;
- iii. Being socially responsible by dedicating time and space to frame the practices;
- iv. Interpreting the contents of media presentations to avoid misunderstanding of messages; and
- v. Employing social media networks to enhance wider reception of awareness communication.

The second perspective for promoting awareness of human rights initiatives for framing cultural practices against women in Nigeria has to do with community actions for eradicating the practices which are as presented in Table 4 below.

Table 4: Community Actions as Human Rights Initiatives for Eradicating Cultural Practices against Women

Indices	Rating	SA	A	FA	D	S D	Total	Xi
Communities should employ innovative methods to change and shift socially shared definitions of the negative cultural practices	X	5	4	3	2	1	N=5	4.0>3.0 significant 80%
	F	96	98	53	13	5	265	
	<i>fx</i>	480	392	159	26	5	1,062	
	%	36	37	20	5	2	100	
Educated members of the communities should be made leaders so as to enable enlightened approaches to issues surrounding culture	<i>f</i>	106	85	48	18	8	265	3.99>3.0 significant 79%
	<i>fx</i>	530	340	144	36	8	1,058	
	%	40	32	18	67	43	100	
Policy makers and NGOs should pursue laws that protect women from such cultural practices that ignore human rights	<i>f</i>	109	69	66	13	8	265	3.97>3.0 significant 79%
	<i>fx</i>	545	276	198	26	8	1,053	
	%	41	26	25	5	3	100	
The educational institutions should engage pupils and students to shift mindsets about discriminatory cultural holds in the communities	<i>f</i>	101	74	58	19	13	265	3.87>3.0 significant 77%
	<i>fx</i>	505	296	174	38	13	1,026	
	%	38	28	22	7	5	100	
The indigenous media should be employed during all community activities to sensitize the people about the negative practices	<i>f</i>	90	111	42	11	11	265	3.97>3.0 significant 79%
	<i>fx</i>	450	444	126	22	11	1,053	
	%	34	42	16	4	4	100	
Cumulative Average Score, <i>xii</i> = (3.40+3.99+3.97+3.87+3.97)/5 = 19.8/5 = 3.96>3.0; Significant: 79%								



The respondents were made to rate five different measurement indices of community actions as human rights initiatives to eradicate cultural practices against women in Nigeria. For the first index, the Table above shows a mean score, \bar{x}_i of $4.0 > 3.0$; [sig. @80%](#); indicating a general agreement to the statement that communities should devise means of shifting from shared definitions of cultural practices against women. In other words, civilized methods should be adopted to look at and change from such practices. The second index recorded a mean score, \bar{x}_i of $3.99 > 3.0$; [sig. @79%](#); meaning that the journalists are in support of the community action that compels educated members of the communities to become community leaders so as to enshrine civilized approaches to cultural issues.

Further, there was a mean score, \bar{x}_i of $3.97 > 3.0$; [sig. @79%](#) for the third index; thereby indicating journalists' agreement with the community action that policy makers and NGOs should pursue laws that protect women from such practices that ignore human rights. For the fourth index, there was an average score, \bar{x}_i of $3.87 > 3.0$; [sig. @77%](#). This result supported the community action for educational institutions to engage pupils and students to shift their minds from discriminatory cultural practices. Finally, the result from the fifth index ($\bar{x}_i = 3.97 > 3.0$; [sig. @79%](#)) shows a general agreement with the community action that indigenous media should be employed to sensitize the people about the implications of the practices. This is apt because the people are conversant with local modes of communication and as such, messages would easily be understood through them.

With a cumulative average score, \bar{x}_{ii} of $3.96 > 3.0$; [sig. @79%](#), there is a high level agreement with the identified community actions as human rights initiatives for eradicating cultural practices against women in Nigeria. In summary, these actions are:

- i. Employing innovative methods to change and shift community shared definitions of negative cultural practices;
- ii. Enthroning educated community members as leaders so as to have enlightened approaches to cultural issues;
- iii. Pursuing laws that protect women and other members of the public from cultural practices that ignore human rights
- iv. Engaging pupils and students to change their mindsets about discriminatory cultural cultures; and
- v. Employing indigenous media to share information at all times to sensitize the people about the implications of the negative practices.



DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

The findings from this study are discussed in relation to the research questions as well as in consideration of the scholarly positions in the reviewed literature.

Research Question One: To what extent are journalists in south-east Nigeria aware of the cultural practices against women?

The findings as represented in Table 1 indicated a high level of awareness amongst the journalists with respect to the cultural practices against women in Nigeria. This finding contradicts the findings of Ihechu et al. (2017) who submit that despite the increase in the cultural practices against women, the journalists' awareness level was low. Nevertheless, that study was conducted in a single state (Rivers); but the present study covered five south-eastern States. Thus, the proliferation of media outlets and channels, especially the social media, as well as citizen engagement in media content productions all contributed to popularize the practices amongst journalists and the general public.

This explains why this study found that the practices against women are well known; which confirms Nwamuo (2015) submission that the practices are prevalent in the society. The knowledge about the practices also extends to the awareness of their capability of deterring development of women in particular and the society in general (De Bruym, 2012). People are getting more educated, more civilized and more interested in development issues (Ihechu, Afulike & Ubani, 2017). As such, issues concerning cultural practices that negate human and societal development ignite the attention of observers (Asadu, 2011; Ihechu, 2019). In the same vein, enlightenment exposes the different cultural practices against women as recorded in this study. That is why many civil groups germinate almost on a daily basis to advocate for human rights, equity and justice in social and national engagements. For instance, the call against child and forced marriage has received enormous support by well meaning citizens of the world because people are aware of the emotional, psychological, and physical challenges that young girls who became victims of the practice go through (Obaji, 2018).

Furthermore, the awareness of the cultural practices is further enhanced by the recorded knowledge of the cultural differences amongst the communities that exhibit the practices against women. That is to say that the cultural diversities in a place like Nigeria are acknowledged with the attendance variations in approaches to the practices (Adaja & Talabi, 2016). A typical example of this scenario exists in the practice of forced marriage. While young girls could be abducted or coerced into marriage in the Northern part of the country, they are betrothed in the eastern part. However, in both situations, the girls according to the cultures do not have the right to reject or make other decisions concerning the marriage (Asadu, 2011). All these are known acts which the traditional institutions seem adamant towards changing the status quo (Nigerian Tribune, 2016).

Another issue that stemmed from the awareness of the cultural practices, as found in this study, has to do with the consensus among journalists about the need to amend or reject the cultural practices against women in Nigeria. This shows that the ability of the journalists to identify the detrimental arousals of the practices imbued the thoughts for remedial inklings. This supports the submission of Brown (2018) that women should not be treated as inferior beings; and be empowered to claim their rights and make better decisions in the society (Nwamuo, 2015). In relation to the theoretical framework, the recorded awareness of the cultural practices against



women and their negative implications to the development of women and the society creates the atmosphere for the journalists to frame the issues surrounding the practices. In doing so, the right agenda for public discussion would be set. Through this, public sensitisation would be ensured.

Research Question Two: To what extent are south-east Nigerian audiences exposed to framed stories on cultural practices against women?

The results as analyzed in Table 2 showed that the south-east audience were highly exposed to framed stories about cultural practices against women. This finding corresponds with the earlier finding, by this study, that there was ample coverage and framing of the cultural practices against women. The level of enlightenment about societal engagement is on the increase today based on the proliferation of media outlets (Ihechu, 2019). For instance, the south-east alone boasts of at least 50 radio stations and 30 TV stations (Lukmon, 2021). Thus, the variety of programming in addition to the stories in different print media in the region give the public the opportunity to get exposed to a variety of issues including issues about cultural practices against women in Nigeria. Also, the presence of numerous social media platforms has enabled the creation and sharing of contents even when such contents are not solicited for by users (Ihechu, Okugo & Onwukwe, 2015).

All these avenues for media exposure helped the audience to have access to contents that focused on cultural practices against women. In other words, they have the opportunity of seeing framed stories about all aspects of cultural practices in broadcast, newspapers, films and social media. With availability of different kinds of culturally imbued contents, it would not have been easy for the audience to escape exposure. However, exposure begets attention which in turn leads to understanding of the motives behind the frames. In the long run, the understanding garnered through media exposure molded perceptions about the practices. In other words, the audiences' exposure to frames on the different aspects of the practices engendered informed decisions and actions towards the practice in the society (Ugwu, 2020). That is to say, as the media play expected roles towards framing the cultural practices against women in the society, informed audiences are created to manipulate societal and community machinery for development (Ihechu et al., 2017; Obaji, 2018). This finding indicated that there is hope for a reformed society in terms of equity in the aspects of cultural practices. With the rise in the access to media presentations, it is possible that some of the practices are in the line of extinction; especially, if the enlightened populace become active players in decision making in the communities, culture-wise.

Research Question Three: What are the journalists' perspectives on promoting human rights awareness by framing cultural practices against women?

There were two perspectives emerging from the journalists to enhance human rights awareness through framing of the practices. First, Table 3 contains data on the suggested approaches to framing cultural practices against women as human rights initiatives. In other words, these approaches would enable the media to engage adequately in promoting human rights awareness vis a vis the practices that worked against the development of the female members of the society; and by extension, the communities. Therefore, the approaches would enhance the overall impact of the media in the area of socialization, sensitization and mobilization (Ugwu, 2020). The first approach to be adopted would be to always highlight, through news reports and other media presentations, the negative implications of the practices on development.



When people understand, vividly, the negative aspects of their cultures on individual and national development, they would be persuaded to avert belief systems that support retrogressive practices (Ihechu, 2019). Thus, emphasis would be placed on how to employ positive actions to enhance development at individual, community and national levels. As such, the only option that would be left would be to reject and eliminate the negative practices and in turn, adopt options that would promote positive practices (Nsereka & Enyinda, 2018).

Another approach is co-opting NGOs and human rights organizations to sponsor awareness and enlightenment programmes on radio and television station; as well as sponsor features in the print media focusing on the practices and their implications. Ihechu et al. (2017) say that media producers are preoccupied with issues around politics and economy which the audiences, to a great extent, beseech. But the contribution of the civil society organizations and development agencies would make a mark in the positive direction towards amending or possibly eradicating these practices that deter development in the society.

Further, media owners, including public and private media, have a lot to do with the third approach which revolves around corporate social responsibility. Therefore, by the time media houses devote time (broadcast) and space (print) to frame those practices in ways that condemn the negative aspects of the practices, suggest methods of improvement and promote positive aspects of cultural practices; there would be increased dissemination of information as well as increased access and reach. It is true that the media houses exist to make profit, but contributing once in a while to promote goodwill would enhance their acceptance in the society.

Another approach has to do with interpretation of media contents such as drama, film, documentary, etc. to clarify some misconceptions arising from depictions. For instance, the subtexts in filmic scenes that depict a widow whose hairs are being shaved should be clear for viewers to understand that such actions are dehumanizing (Akanle, 2012). In order to avoid misinterpretation of the scenes, there should be commentaries on the broadcast media as well as features in the print media to explain the impact of such portrayals. This is because the level of media literacy in Nigeria is still low (Ihechu, 2021); and most people are not able to digest the hidden messages from scenic communications. Thus, with efforts made to clarify some of these portrayals, the media producers and analysts would have taken a step toward enlightening the audience on the human rights implications of the cultural practices against women in Nigeria and other parts of Africa.

Finally, adopting social media affordances would be a powerful approach towards framing cultural practices against women. This perspective is paramount because there is enormous exposure to and use of social media platforms; especially among the young people (Ihechu, Okugo & Onwukwe, 2015; Ihechu, Ngene & Megwas, 2022). Therefore, channeling contents about cultural practices through social media would create the opportunity for many members of the society to come in contact with issues surrounding the practices. In the long run, even non-professional media users would have the opportunity to lend their views to discussions (Ihechu, Ngene & Megwas, 2022). It was on this note that Obaji (2018) suggests that to get the populace adequately enlightened on issues of public importance, different channels must be employed to reach different segments. With teaming patronage of social and other personal media, there is hope for messages about cultural practices to reach many people in the society. There is also hope for many people to be part of the efforts to change the negative cultural narratives so as to create a society that values the dignity of human beings.



The second perspective for promoting human rights awareness by framing cultural practices against women dwell on the expected actions by concerned communities as presented in Table 4. They are the community actions which are considered human rights initiatives for eradicating cultural practices against women. In the first instance, there are a lot of community shared definitions of the negative cultural practices (Odimegwu, 2001). The communities should devise means of changing and slighting from these shared beliefs because culture is prone to change (Adaja & Talabi, 2016). Therefore, communities in modern times should be in tune with the development needs of the modern societies and thus, identify the areas of culture that impinge on development. Thereafter, some of the cultural practices would have been analyzed, compared and contrasted vis a vis societal expectations. There should be think-tank groups that would engage in review of existing practices and innovatively amend or eradicate the ones that are not pro-development. By the time several communities amend the practices that offend the dignity of women, the society would have been cleansed of derogatory practices while embracing more encompassing cultural indignations.

The second action expected from the communities has to do with enthronement of educated members of the community as leaders so as to enhance enlightened approaches to issues and discussions concerning the communities. It has been observed that illiteracy is one of the factors that affect development in Nigeria and Africa (Ihechu, 2019). It has also been said that knowledge is the first index that unlocks the barriers of development (Salami, 2012). With learned members of the society occupying leadership positions, discussions and decisions would happen in enlightened manners and would, therefore, lead to actions that would guarantee human rights protection in all community engagement such as cultural practices.

Policy makers are members of different communities. In this regard, community actions geared towards pursuing laws that protect women from such practices that ignore human rights are pertinent at this time. For instance, the universalisation of the marriageable age of a girl should be looked into so that the interpretation of who a minor is would be generic. When a girl marries at the age of seven, and becomes a mother at the age of 13; who then is a child? Non-governmental organizations, advocacy groups, and government agencies should all gear toward criminalisation of some of these practices. To achieve this, bills should be generated and pursued until they become laws so as to coerce dormant communities to eschew the dehumanization of the women folk and entrench human rights enabled societies. Nevertheless the machinery for law enforcement must also be strengthened because one of the dampening aspects of law making is lack of implementation (Ugwu, 2020).

The pupils and students in the different categories of educational institutions are malleable. Thus, the maxim that says “catch them young” suffices here. Drawing from the above, community action should be geared toward infusing most of the elements of the practices in some of the educational curricula that capture culture. For instance, for several decades, UNICEF has encouraged and engaged in social and behavior change communication (SBCC) (UNICEF, 2022). It would be heartwarming to see institutions embody change in communication that accommodates enlightenment in the area of cultural practices against women. It would enable the young ones to be in touch with the bugging issues around the discourse at the early stage. Eventually, as they grow, their mindset would no longer be attached to the practices they would have believed could never be done away with (Ugwu, 2021).



Finally, another community-based action has to do with the application of indigenous media of communication. Indigenous communication tools are very powerful in Nigeria local community settings. Thus, employing these media in the localities would enable the non-literate members of the communities to have access to the information concerning negative aspects of the practices. For instance, after the traditional institutions and authorities have injected educated and learned members into their fold; and they take decisions geared towards amending and rejecting some of the practices, the new methods of practice that replaced old ones could be communicated to the people through the traditional means. For instance, Ihechu (2014) and Ihechu and Uchechukwu (2018) submit that the wooden drum is a veritable indigenous medium for information dissemination. Imagine when a community employs this tool, accompanied by an entertaining dance group, displaying and informing the people at the local market or the village square. It would enable the reception of messages concerning the new order by people who are from neighboring communities; but had come to the community's market. In the long run, such people would spread the news to their own communities who may decide to follow the good example of change because of developmental changes and injections (Nwaolikpe, 2018).

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

In this modern age, it becomes paramount to enlighten the public on human rights implications of these bizarre practices and the media come handy. Several communication approaches and community actions have been identified as human rights awareness initiatives for eradicating cultural practices against women. From the foregoing, the researchers conclude that the awareness and framing of cultural practices by the media in south-east Nigeria have projected human rights awareness in for the public; whom the awareness of the positive frames and community actions encourage to embrace a new order.

Similarly, based on the findings of this study, the researchers make the following recommendations:

- i. Journalists should continue to follow the trends in cultural practices against women in Nigeria so as to monitor the impact of the coverage and framing on the practices.
- ii. Members of the society should be encouraged to avail themselves access to the media and other information channels so as to stay abreast of the cultural trends and the implications to enable them be active in enhancing desired change in the system.
- iii. Efforts should be made to ensure that the perspectives on framing cultural practices against women as human rights initiatives are adhered to by journalists, the media, NGOs, policy makers and community leaders so as to have speedy amendment or eradication of such cultural practices that impinge on the rights of women as human beings.



REFERENCES

- Adaja, T. & Talabi, F. O. (2016). Investigative journalism and Nigeria's democratic challenges. *Journal of Media and Communication Review*; (2(1): 28-37.
- Aduh, E. (2003). Violence against women: Issues and remedies. *Society Quarterly*, 2(2):89-105.
- Akanle, O. (2012). The ligaments of culture and development in Nigeria. *International Journal of Applied Sociology*, 2(3), 16-21.
- Arisi, R.O & Oromareghake, P. (2011) Cultural violence and the Nigeria woman. *Africa Research Renew*; 5(4): 369-381.
- Asadu, P. (2011). Culture and gender as predictors of undergraduates' perception of gender roles. *Gender and Behaviour*; 8(1):47-57.
- Brown, N. J. (2018). The past, present and future of visual journalism in television news journalism in Nigeria. *The Nigerian Journal of Communication*; 15(2): 287-298..
- De Bruyn M. (2002). Violence related to pregnancy and abortion: a violation of human rights. *Sex Health Exch*; 3:14-15.
- Egbuo, N.G. (2005). Culture issues women's human rights; among the Igbos of Southern Nigeria: An appraisal of their implications to women development. *International Journal of Forum for African Women Educationalist in Nigeria*; 1(3):55-72.
- Ekeanyanwu, N. (2015). *International communication* (Third Edition). Ibadan: Stirling-Horden Publishers Ltd.
- Federal Republic of Nigeria (1999). *The Constitution of The Federal Republic of Nigeria*. Abuja: Federal Government Oress.
- Ihechu, I. P. & Uchechukwu, I. L. (2018). *African communication systems*. Enugu: Iyke-Litto Publishers.
- Ihechu, I. P. (2014). Interfacing the wooden drum and modern media in the age of modernity: A study of Mbano community. *Review of communication and media studies*. 1(1): 2-10.
- Ihechu, I. P. (2019). Broadcasting and promotion of development in Sub-Saharan Africa. *Journal of Development and Communication Studies*, 6(1): 48-60.
- Ihechu, I. P. (2021). Media literacy and the changing media world. In E. M. Mojaiye (Ed.) *Media systems of communication: Issues and perspectives*. Ilishan-Remo: Babcock University Press: Pp. 485-508.
- Ihechu, I. P., Afulike, D. C. & Ubani, E. I. (2017). *Mass media issues in Nigeria*. Enugu: Iyke-Litto Publishers.
- Ihechu, I. P., Ngene, F. C. & Megwas, N. U. (2022). Regulating social media contents for sustainable development and national security: Lessons from the April-May 2021 civil unrest in South-East Nigeria. *International Journal of Humanities Social Sciences and Education (IJHSSE)*, 9(3): 161-168.
- Ihechu, I. P., Okugo, C. U. & Onwukwe, C. D. (2015). Social media, instant messengers and the Nigerian student: Implications for productive tertiary learning. *Review of Communication and Media Studies*. 1(2):10-18.
- Ihechu, I. P., Okugo, C. U., Amah, F. & Afulike, D. C. (2017). Media coverage and framing of cultural practices that target Nigerian women. *Covenant Journal of Communication*. 4(2): 55-75.
- Lukmon, J. (2021). Full list of radio stations in Nigeria. Available at: <https://aboutnigerians.com/amp/full-list-of-radio-stations-in-nigeria/>
- Nigerian Tribune (2016, October 26) Marrying minors: The case of Habiba Isyaku. <https://tribuneonlineng.com/marrying-minors-case-habiba-isyaku/>



- Nsereka, B. G. & Enyinda, S. C. (2018). Perception of female movie audience on the portrayal of women in Nollywood movies. *The Nigerian Journal of Communication*; 15(2): 535-549.
- Nwammuo, A. N. (2015). Harmful cultural practices against women in Nigeria: A call to “set the right agenda” using community radio. *International Journal of Social Sciences and Humanities Review*; 5(1): 184-188.
- Nwaolikpe, O. N. (2018). Influence of three communication intervention programmes on attitude and perception of baby factory phenomenon amongst in-school adolescents in Abia state, Nigeria. *The Nigerian Journal of Communication*; 15(2): 445-468.
- Obaji, B. (2018). Victim of violence against women in Nigeria Retrieved from www.commonwealth.org.
- Odimegwu, C. O. (2001). Couple formation and domestic violence among the Tiv of Benue State, Nigeria. Paper presented at the International Colloquium on Gender, Population and Development in Africa organised by UAPS, INED, ENSEA, IFORD, Abidjan 16-21 July.
- Ozuru, E. & Ekeanyanwu, N. (2013). Audience Assessment of the influence of social media networks on the Global news flow controversy. In D. Wilson, communication and the new media in Nigeria: social engagements, political development and public discourse (pp. 85-132). Lagos: ACCE.
- Salami, A. (2012). Media and the challenges of Nigerian state: What roles to remedy? *Media Review*; 2:10-35.
- Ugwu, M. O. (2020). Traditional/cultural practices against women in Nigeria: The place of the law. *African Journal of Constitutional and Administrative Law*; 4(1):76-87.
- Ugwu, M. O. (2021). [Gender-based violence in situations of internal displacement: realities faced by women within the idp camps in Nigeria](#). *International Review Of Law And Jurisprudence (IRLJ)*; 3(1): 21-38.
- UNICEF (2022). Social and behaviour change: Helping families access the decisions that affect their lives. Available at: <https://www.unicef.org/social-and-behaviour-change>
- United Nations (1996). *The Beijing Declaration and the platform for action: Fourth World Conference on Women, Beijing, China*. New York: United Nations.
- [United Nations \(2020\). World population prospects](#) (2020) Available at <https://www.macrotrends.net/cities/21986/population>



Acknowledgements

This paper is a report of the research project conducted under the sponsorship of TETFund's Institution-Based Research (IBR) Grant for Abia State University, Uturu Nigeria. In the project, Dr. I. P. Ihechu was the Principal Researcher; while D. C. Afulike and U. E. Ndukwe were the Co-researchers. The researchers are from the Department of Mass Communication of the University. We use this opportunity to thank the Management of Abia State University and Tertiary Education Trust Fund for the opportunity to carry out this study as well as the efforts in encouraging quality research by academics.

