



Research Article

Audience Perception of Online Newspaper Reportage of The Alleged Natasha-Akpabio Sexual Harassment Case

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About Article

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ABSTRACT

The media is replete with stories and investigations into the prevalence of sexual harassment in Nigeria, both in the academia and the workplace environment, with the story on the alleged Natasha-Akpabio sexual harassment case making rounds online and generating reactions from within Nigeria and beyond. In view of this, the study aimed to find out the perception of online (*Vanguard* and *Punch*) newspaper reportage of the alleged case among select Mass Communication students of Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka. To achieve this objective, the study was anchored on the framing and perception theories and conducted using the descriptive survey design. With this research design, pre-tested close-ended questionnaire were administered to the students. Students in levels 200, 300 and 400 are 520 (224, 110 and 186, respectively), were selected and formed the population of this study. The students in 100 level were excluded from this study because the researcher was reliably informed that they were “unbundled”. With this being stated, the Taro Yamane formula was used to get the sample size of 226 that were studied. The samples were randomly selected before the onward distribution of pre-tested close-ended questionnaires to them. The data that were collected from the students, were analyzed using frequency tables and simple percentages. The outcome of the study, revealed, among others, that the students believe that the online reportage of the Natasha-Akpabio sexual harassment case by the selected national dailies triggers gender war online. Consequently, it was recommended, among others, that the selected national dailies should always gauge the reactions of their online readers whenever they put out their reports on the alleged case online. This will help them in structuring and presenting their online reports on the alleged case in ways they will not generate unintended reactions from their online readers.

1.0 INTRODUCTION

The Nigerian society is undergoing rapid social transition, making more and more women enter the work environment than before (Pojwan & Osoki, 2021). According to them, the bulk of discussion on diverse inequalities in the work place, including low pay, lower job status, restriction from certain jobs as well as confinement to sex-type jobs, have been done severally. Unfortunately, the issue of sexual harassment at work seems to attract less attention (Yusuf, 2008) leading to stress vis-a-vis gender in a patriarchal society such as the Nigerian work environment (Pojwan & Osoki, 2021). Sexual harassment is degrading and it is a massive problem in Nigerian institutions and workplaces; it is now a public social problem which depends on the gender, context and perceived ideology (Pojwan & Osoki, 2021). This is because victims' perceptions and experiences are often poorly understood in low and middle income societies like Nigeria (Worke, Koricha & Debelew, 2021). Studies have buttressed that female workers in most work environments are particularly affected by this menace due to sociocultural undertones and gender stereotypical perception of women. Everyday, thousands of women (and men, a few times) are predominantly harassed by their employers, colleagues or teachers (Pojwan & Osoki, 2021).

The past decade has witnessed the pervasiveness and the high cost of sexual harassment, which is a manifestation of sex-based discrimination and it has become a national and even a global issue of concern in many work environments (International Labour Organization [ILO], 2012). Sexual harassment is a widespread phenomenon that undermines equality at work and it can have a negative impact on victims, salaries, career

progression, working conditions and can even drive some individuals out of the world of work completely (ILO, 2012).

There has been a serious debate on what sexual harassment is. While some people see it as just misinterpretation of intention and friendliness and/or clumsy and insensitive expression of attraction, others are of the opinion that it is a deliberate and repeated sexual behavior that is unwelcome to its recipient, as well as other sex related behaviours that are hostile, offensive or degrading (Fitzgerald, 1993).

The above descriptions of sexual harassment are what are alleged to have happened between Nigeria's current Senate President, Senator Godswill Akpabio and Senator Natasha Akpoti-Uduaghan which has not only exposed Nigeria to global and public ridicule but has also made it online through online newspaper reports concerning the alleged case. In 2025, *Vanguard* newspaper's Umoru reported that the rift between the current President of the Senate, Senator Godswill Akpabio, and the then chairman of the Senate Committee on Diaspora and NGOs, Senator Natasha Akpoti-Uduaghan, has escalated, with Senator Akpoti-Uduaghan accusing Akpabio of sexual harassment and political victimization. According to Umoru (2025), Senator Akpoti-Uduaghan, in an interview with Arise Television, recounted an incident on December 8, 2023, when she and her husband attended Akpabio's birthday celebration in his house in Uyo, Akwa Ibom State and alleged that Akpabio held her hand and made an unsettling remark which goes thus: "Now that you're a Senator, I will create time for us to spend quality moments here (Akpabio's house). You will enjoy it." Umoru (2025) equally reported that Senator Akpoti-

Uduaghan also alleged that Akpabio once said thus: Natasha, I am the Chief Presiding Officer of the Senate. You can enjoy a whole lot if you take care of me and make me happy.” In an editorial, the *Punch* Editorial Board (2025) stated that since February of 2025, when senator Natasha Akpoti-Uduaghan accused the Senate President, Godswill Akpabio, of sexual harassment, the Senate has channeled its energies into bringing down one of the few female senators in the 109-member assembly. The Board also stated that no one is speaking up for her probably because of concerns that dissenting voices are punished, adding that this must change as bullying and suppressing a female senator could discourage other women from coming forward. These respective report and position of the newspapers and others, can shape the perception of people. Since Nwaoboli and Asemah (2023) stated that perception is the process through which people construct judgments about the characteristics and personalities of other individuals while the opinions which people make about other people or things rely on the amount of information that is available to them and how effectively they are able to understand the information that they have, it means that the form which the perception of select Mass Communication students of Nnamdi Azikiwe University (UNIZIK) will take concerning the alleged Natasha-Akpabio sexual harassment case, will depend on the information available to them and how they understand it. Since this is the case and the form which the students' perception will take is largely unknown, this study sought to ascertain the students' perception of online newspaper reportage of the alleged case.

Given the above objective and the need to achieve it, this study aimed at:

1. Finding out UNIZIK Mass Communication students' level of awareness of online (*Vanguard* and *Punch*) newspaper reportage of the alleged Natasha-Akpabio sexual harassment case.
2. Finding out the students' perception of online (*Vanguard* and *Punch*) newspaper reportage of the alleged Natasha-Akpabio sexual harassment case.
3. Discovering the factors that shape the students' perception of the online (*Vanguard* and *Punch*) newspaper reportage of the alleged Natasha-Akpabio sexual harassment case.

2.0 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This study was hinged on two theories which are the framing theory and the perception theory. This was done to support, direct and help interpret the study.

2.1 Framing Theory

Framing theory was developed between the 1950s and 1970s by Gregory Bateson (1955/1972) and Erving Goffman (1974). The theory proposes that media audience sees the world based on how the media portrays it to them (Harmon, 2021 cited in Oritsegbemi, 2025; Mwai, 2016). The word “frame” depicts a window created by the media (Oritsegbemi, 2025). Framing theory is also referred to as second-level agenda setting (Ajetunmobi, 2023). While agenda-setting focuses on how issues become salient, framing examines how the issues are presented. Entman describes framing as the selection of certain elements of perceived reality to make them more important in a communicating text (Koga, 2014, Mwai, 2016). It involves “selection” and “emphasis” (Muroyi, 2016). As a media effect theory, it

suggests that the media shapes audience interpretation and actions (Carlyle, Scarduzio & Slater, 2014; Koga, 2014; Mwai, 2016) by focusing on selected issues whilst ignoring the others (Muroyi, 2016). This can be achieved through the selection of keywords, labels, stereotypes and metaphors (Ajetunmobi, 2023). However, Koga (2014) argues that though the media may distort reality, it does not mean the public will always adopt its perspective. In other words, framing effect is not absolute.

Since framing theory is about how issues are presented by the media and can shape the interpretation and actions of people, it means that the perception of the alleged Natasha-Akpabio sexual harassment case among select Mass Communication students of Nnamdi Azikiwe University, could be shaped by how the students see the alleged case from the ways they were presented online by the *Vanguard* and *Punch* newspapers.

2.2 Perception Theory

The perception theory was propounded by Berelson and Steiner in 1964. According to them, perception is a complex process by which individuals select, organize and interpret sensory stimulation into a meaningful picture of the world (Ezeh, Odishika & Dike, 2024; Ikems, 2020). Aladi and Okoro (2021) describe perception as the interpretation of messages. They noted that perception may differ from reality; and most times, decisions are made based on human interpretation (perception) rather than reality. Perception can be influenced by one's experiences, emotions, motivational state (Aladi & Okoro, 2021), societal and family values. This may vary among individuals. Therefore, perception is subjective.

Perception involves three processes which are:

1. Selective exposure: This is the inclination to seek information that are consistent with existing beliefs;
2. Selective attention: This refers to attentiveness to certain aspects of a message that reinforces strongly-held beliefs, and
3. Selective retention: This is the tendency to recall information based on needs or values (Ikems 2020; Nyitse, Odeba & Agaku, 2021).

The theory explains how individuals' pre-existing beliefs and values influence their selection, believability and interpretation of media messages. It posits that media audience tend to expose themselves to content that align with their existing beliefs, attitudes and interests, consciously or unconsciously, and sieve those of opposite hue (Ezeh *et al.*, 2018). As a result, people are more likely to remember and internalise media messages that suit the world view they are conversant with (Ikems, 2020) and overlook those that counter their views/beliefs (Ayo-Obiremi & Adelabu, 2020).

Since perception theory involves three processes of selective exposure, selective attention and selective retention, it means that how select Mass Communication students of Nnamdi Azikiwe University will perceive the online (*Vanguard* and *Punch*) newspaper reportage of the alleged Natasha-Akpabio sexual harassment case could be determined by their inclination to seek the reports when/if they are consistent with their pre-existing beliefs (selective exposure), the extent they pay attention to the reports, especially if they

reinforce their strongly-held beliefs (selective attention) and their tendency to recall the reports based on their needs and values (selective retention).

3.0 LITERATURE REVIEW

Conceptual Review

In this section of the study, the following were looked at from the positions of other scholars and researchers.

3.1 Concept of Sexual Harassment

A wide variety of behaviour has been described as harassment, hence the need for concise definition of sexual harassment. Makaita, Mapira and Muzvidziwa (2015) defines sexual harassment as an undesired conducts of a sexual nature that affects the dignity of men and women at work which can be either physical or verbal in nature. Mackinnon (1979) described it as any action occurring with the workplace whereby women are treated as objective of the male sexual prerogative. Sexual harassment is an immoral act that has serious implication not only for the harassers but also for perpetrators, manager, organizations and Government at large (Nwokocha, Ayewumi & Okolie, 2024). Considering its effects on victim, they stated that it undermines his/her physical and psychological state of mind.

Sexual harassment is perceived as unwelcome sexual advances and invitation to activities which take the power of choice and free will from the victim while infringing on their fundamental human right (Burn, 2019). For instance, if someone that is seen as a superior throws the weight of the high position to take sexual advantage of the subordinates in order to release benefits that is officially due to the victim, such scenario

could be seen as a clear instance of sexual coercion. In other words, sexual harassment occurs when an individual experiences sexual advances and other forms of sexual behaviours without given one's consent (Anierobi, Etodike, Nwogbo, Okeke & Nwikpo, 2021). It was observed that the males are usually perpetrators of sexual harassment while the females are mostly the victims (Akinfala & Tunde, 2017). Although, any person can be perpetrator or victim, one can assert that sexual harassment is a form of gender-based violence mostly against the female folk (Bondestam & Lundqvist, 2020).

Sexual harassment could take many forms ranging from physical forms, verbal forms and non-verbal forms (Kahsay, Negarandeh, Nayeri & Hasanpour, 2020). Physical form of sexual harassment occurs when there is an unwanted and unwelcomed bodily contact with the victim such as embarrassing touch, kissing, cuddling, deeds, and actions, to behaviours of sexual nature. Verbal form of sexual harassment is experienced through utterances, discussions, cracking of jokes of a sexual nature that make the target feel uncomfortable and harassed. Non-verbal form of sexual harassment results from gestures, sending of symbols and nudes, staring to seduce and exposing one's nude to the target individual.

Sexually harassing behaviours are specified into three categories namely: gender harassment, unwanted sexual attention and sexual coercion (National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine [NASEM], 2018). Gender harassment includes verbal and nonverbal behaviours that are targeted at making the victim feel inferior based on one's gender. Unwanted sexual

attention includes verbal or non-verbal unsolicited sexual advances, directed at the victim as a person. Sexual coercion occurs when professional or educational treatment one is entitled to is conditioned in such a way that the person might not get them except by yielding to unwelcomed sexual activity. This becomes worrisome and problematic as sexual harassment denies the victim the right to choice and free will.

3.1.1 Concept of Online Newspaper

The development of online newspapers in Nigeria shows a big change in how news is shared and consumed, driven by new technology and how people now want to get their information (Guanah, Edewor & Ophori, 2025). According to Guanah *et al.*, (2025), moving from traditional print media to digital platforms, has changed the way news is made, shared, and read. They stated that online newspapers started appearing in Nigeria during the late 1990s and early 2000s, as the Internet became more popular among people in the country. Early adopters were well-known print media companies that wanted to increase their audience by making online versions of their newspapers. Some important early leaders in this area were *The Guardian*, *Vanguard*, and *Punch*. They started their websites to meet the needs of the increasing number of people using the Internet (Okorie & Salawu, 2016).

The rise of online newspapers in Nigeria was greatly supported by improvements in Internet technology and higher levels of Internet access (Guanah *et al.*, 2025). The spread of cheap smartphones and the growth of mobile broadband networks made it simpler for Nigerians to get news online. By the mid-2000s, the number of people using the

Internet in Nigeria increased a lot, which made it easier for online newspaper websites to start growing quickly (Nwabueze, 2017). It is important to understand that online newspapers have many different aspects. They include different digital formats like news websites, mobile apps, and e-paper versions, giving users a lively and engaging experience (Adeyemi, 2019).

The development of online newspapers in Nigeria follows the country's progress in technology, showing how more people are becoming skilled in using digital tools and staying connected online (Guanah *et al.*, 2025). Online newspapers in Nigeria are known for features like real-time updates, use of multimedia, ability to reach people worldwide, interactive content, and having searchable archives (Yusuf, 2021). These platforms offer up-to-date news coverage, instant alerts for breaking stories, and live updates about events, making sure information is timely and relevant in today's fast-moving information environment (Odusote, 2018).

Online newspapers in Nigeria have a big effect on traditional media. According to Ogunleye (2020), these platforms have caused audience fragmentation because readers are moving more towards consuming news digitally. This change affects how adverts are funded, who watches the content, and how different media types come together (Guanah *et al.*, 2025). Even though there are issues like spread of false information, illegal copying of digital content, security risks, and difficulties in making money, online newspapers are still important in the Nigerian media scene (Adewale, 2022). They give people different viewpoints, help spread

important information quickly during emergencies, connect with younger people, and make Nigeria more known around the world (Guanah *et al.*, 2025). Online newspapers help support a variety of media, democracy, and active participation in society by giving more people a chance to share their views and making it easier for the public to see clear and honest discussions (Guanah *et al.*, 2025).

3.1.2 Media Coverage and Framing of Issues

Media framing of issues is gradually dominating media discourse due to perceived powerful influence of the media to set agenda and the negation of the ethics that guides media practice worldwide (Ngonso & Uchenunu, 2021). Egere and Egere (2020, p. 19) see media news framing as a recent concept used “widely among communication scholars in relations to media effects, politics, sociology and other disciplines. It could be described as shaping of ideas/opinions for news content which creates a perspective and stimulates the issue through the use of selection, stress, exclusion and amplification”. Media framing is the construction and presentation of issues to the public by the media (Ngonso & Uchenunu, 2021). According to Okoro, Ezea, Agbana and Agbana (2018, p. 74) framing is “one major way, which news media form perceptions of the key events in the society. It expands the agenda setting research by putting a lot of emphasis on trending issues as a replacement for topical matters”, with framing issues presented and placed within a certain context with a certain meaning (Ngonso & Uchenunu, 2021). According to Ngonso and Uchenunu (2021), framing is a key component in the selection, understanding and interpretation of

news. Fairhurst and Star (1996, p. 2) cited in Ndinojuo, Ihejirika and Okon (2018) assert that —a frame refers to the way media and media gatekeepers organize and present the events and issues they cover, and the way audience interprets what they are provided. McQuail (2010) adds that framing is a way of giving some overall interpretation to isolated items of fact thereby linking isolated events to a situation with shared meanings to buttress a viewpoint. Media news framing can place a news story in a particular news hole, it can narrow the story or broaden the subject matter thereby focusing attention on the key variables within the story line (Ngonso & Uchenunu, 2021). They stated that news information can be framed to suit a particular ideology thereby exploiting the propagandist power of the media, adding that it could be framed metaphorically or simply hype a situation out of normal proportion to achieve a certain aim. For instance, Ngonso and Uchenunu (2021) stated that news can be framed to promote disaster, disunity, victimization, agitation, negative labeling, number game, legitimacy, and depersonalization while media news framing can be categorized as positive, negative and neutral frames.

In furtherance of news framing, Tankard (2001) cited in Ndinojuo *et al.*, (2018) provides a list of framing devices that the media can apply in characterizing and evaluating new frames, they include: headlines, subheads, photos, logos, photo captions, leads, source selection, quotes selection, pull quotes, statistics and charts, and concluding statements. All feasible framing devices that portend at the same central idea make up the manifest part of a frame being projected while the frames are held together

under the heading of a central organizing theme that provides coherent structure for the narrative that the readers are meant to perceive either of positive or the negative frame as the case may be (Ndinojuo *et al.*, 2018).

Ultimately, the aim of framing news is to influence the media audience to perceive the news in the angle of the media or its sponsor (Ngonso & Uchenunu, 2021). Though in certain cases, the audience's perception may differ from the expectation of the media, particularly, if the audience know more about the event, perceived a media organization as being corrupt and not having the competency to report facts about the event (Ngonso & Uchenunu, 2021). The issue of passive and active audience may come to play in media consumption, making individual comprehension plausible while the other factor that could affect media audience perception of an issue is the fear on the part of the public that certain internal and external forces are manipulating the media (Ngonso & Uchenunu, 2021).

3.1.3 Empirical Review

In 2025, Shehu, Adamu, Umar, Adamu, Muhammad, Abdullahi, Shu'aibu and Azeez sought to ascertain the patterns, perpetrators and circumstances that lead to sexual harassment among female undergraduate students of Usmanu Danfodiyo University, Sokoto State, Nigeria. In the course of doing this, they utilized the descriptive cross-sectional design and selected the students that were studied using the multi-stage sampling procedure. A semi-structured questionnaire served as the data collection instrument of this study while the data that were collected were analyzed using descriptive statistics (frequency tables and simple percentages).

Results from this study, showed, among others, that unwanted touch, unwanted referring to as babe, doll or honey and unwanted sexually suggestive stares, were the common patterns of sexual harassment experienced by the students. It was therefore recommended, among others, that sexual harassment policies should be strengthened by the government/school authority to set severe punishments for perpetrators of sexual violence. Those that participated in Shehu *et al.*, (2025) survey research are Usmanu Danfodiyo University students whereas those that participated in this current survey study are Nnamdi Azikiwe University students.

In 2024, Nwokocha, Ayewumi and Okolie studied the impact of sexual harassment on work attitudes in tertiary educational institutions in Delta State, Nigeria. The study was conducted using descriptive survey design that allowed for the use of questionnaire to collect data from the academic and non-academic staff of Delta State Polytechnic, Ogwashi-Uku, Delta State Polytechnic, Ozoro and Delta State Polytechnic, Otefe. The questionnaire that were distributed were 1500 in number but only 1373 copies of the questionnaire were retrieved and used for analysis. Analysis was done using descriptive statistics (frequency tables and simple percentages) and inferential statistics (correlation and regression analysis). Results from the study, showed, among others, that sexual harassment has a significant negative effect on the work attitude of the workers from the three tertiary educational institutions. The study therefore recommended among others, that institutions should ensure that there are safe, confidential and accessible channels for employees to report incidents of harassment without fear of retaliation. Those that were surveyed by

Nwokocha *et al.*, (2024) are workers whereas those that were surveyed in this current study are students.

Still in the same year 2024, Akpan, Ekoriko, Ekanem and Ottong examined the perception and attitude of secondary school girls in Abak Local Government Area of Akwa Ibom State to predict the possibility of their sexual harassment. In this study, the descriptive survey research design was utilized which resulted in the distribution of questionnaire to 338 secondary school students. The selection of the students was done using the multi-stage sampling procedure while the data collected from the study were analyzed using descriptive statistics (frequency tables and simple percentages) and inferential statistics (Chi-square). Results from the study, showed, among others, that the secondary school students have poor perception and negative attitude toward sexual harassment. The study therefore recommended, among others, that the students should develop and maintain a positive perception and attitude so as to help them to avoid being sexually harassed. Akpan *et al.*, (2024) study centered on the perception and attitude of secondary school girls in Abak Local Government Area of Akwa Ibom State to predict the possibility of their sexual harassment whereas the current study centered on the perception of online (*Vanguard* and *Punch*) newspaper reportage of the alleged Natasha-Akpabio sexual harassment case among select Mass Communication students of Nnamdi Azikiwe University.

In 2021, Anierobi, Etodike, Nwogbo, Okeke and Nwiko evaluated incidents of sexual harassment against female workers in three higher institutions (one university, one polytechnic and one college of education) in

Anambra State. The descriptive survey research design was used to conduct this study while the multi-stage sampling procedure was used to select the 312 workers that participated in the study. Structured questionnaire were distributed to the workers who filled them out. Thereafter, the data collected from them were analyzed using descriptive statistics (frequency tables, simple percentages and mean). Results from the study, showed, among others, that there is high prevalence of sexual harassment among the female workers with verbal sexual harassment being the most common type. The study therefore recommended, among others, that the organizational climate in the education sector should be protected by legislative enablement to create a gender free working environment for males and especially for females who are the common victims of sexual harassment in this part of the world while reported cases should be prosecuted. The selection of respondents was done in this study using the multi-stage sampling procedure whereas the simple random sampling technique was used in the selection of the respondents that participated in the current study.

In 2020, Obanor, Johnson and Johnson embarked on a study to find out the perceptions and experiences of sexual harassment among health care workers in a university teaching hospital located in a metropolitan city in the South South region of Nigeria. While the study was done using survey research design, questionnaires were distributed to health workers who were conveniently selected for this very study. The researchers distributed 115 questionnaire but only 110 copies were properly filled out by the selected health workers. Following the retrieval of the questionnaires, the data

therein were analyzed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS). Results from the study, showed, among others, that 20% of the health workers have been sexually harassed while majority of the health workers know persons who had been harassed and know a sexual harasser. The study therefore recommended, among others, that policies should be formulated to provide avenues for victims' redress and hold perpetrators accountable. Obanor *et al.*, (2020) conducted their study in the South South region of Nigeria whereas the current study was conducted in the South East region of Nigeria.

In 2019, Aina-Pelemo, Mehanathan, Kulshrestha and Aina investigated the prevalence of sexual harassment within the Nigerian legal profession using the descriptive survey research design. This resulted in their use of questionnaire to collect data from 561 Nigerian lawyers that reside in Abuja. The lawyers were selected using purposive and stratified sampling techniques while the data collected from them were analyzed using frequencies, charts, chi-square, regression and correlation analysis. Results from the study, showed, among others, that there is no social structure for addressing sexual harassment. The study therefore recommended, among others, that the President of the Nigerian Bar Association should address/communicate to all chambers, urging a zero-tolerance approach to sexual harassment within the profession. The findings made by Aina-Pelemo *et al.*, (2019) were analyzed using chi-square, regression and correlation analysis, among others, whereas only frequency tables and simple percentages were used in the current study.

In 2016, Muoghalu and Olaoye did a cross-sectional study of the perception of sexual harassment among students of Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile Ife, Nigeria. For the study, they selected 180 students using frequency tables, simple percentages and Chi-square. Results from the study, showed, among others, that that 46.7% of the respondents had experienced sexual harassment and that absence of deterrence, failure of victims to report, drug abuse and lack of respect for the opposite sex were some of the determining factors of sexual harassment. The study therefore recommended, among others, that gender and sexual harassment policies should be implemented by Obafemi Awolowo University. Muoghalu and Olaoye (2016) dwelled on the perception of sexual harassment whereas the current study dwelled on the perception of online (*Vanguard* and *Punch*) newspaper reportage of the alleged Natasha-Akpabio sexual harassment case among select Mass Communication students of Nnamdi Azikiwe University.

3.1.4 Literature Gap

The related empirical studies which were reviewed above, touched some aspects of sexual harassment and indicated that it is a menace that occur in all the regions of the country. The studies also pointed out that the female gender in their teenage and adult years are mostly the victims of sexual harassment. Being that the studies condemned sexual harassment in its entirety, they suggested that the government and school authorities should formulate and implement policies that will protect students and female workers from sexual harassers and provide channels for victims of sexual harassment to report their harassers without fear. Despite focusing on sexual harassment and some tertiary

institutions in the country, however, the studies were not conducted to find out the perception of online (*Vanguard* and *Punch*) newspaper reportage of the alleged Natasha-Akpabio sexual harassment case among select Mass Communication students of Nnamdi Azikiwe University while university students in South East Nigeria and particularly in Anambra State, were not covered in the studies. It is therefore the need to fill this knowledge gap that necessitated this study.

4.0 METHODOLOGY

The researcher adopted the descriptive survey research design in the course of conducting this study. From Nnamdi Azikiwe University's

Mass Communication Department, students who are in levels 200, 300 and 400 are 520 (224, 110 and 186, respectively), were selected and formed the population of this study. The students in 100 level were left out of this study because the researcher was reliably informed that they were “unbundled”. With this being stated, the Taro Yamane formula ($n = 1 + N(e)^2$) was used to get the sample size of 226 that were studied. The samples were randomly selected before the onward distribution of pre-tested close-ended questionnaires to them and the analyses of the data which the students provided with their responses which were done using frequency tables and simple percentages.

4.1 Findings

Section A: Demographic data of the respondents

Table 1: Age of the respondents

Age	Frequency	Percentage (%)
18-23	152	67
24-29	69	31
30-35	5	2
Total	226	100

The table above shows the age bracket of the respondents. Out of the 226 respondents that were studied, 67% are between 18 and 23 years of age whereas 31% and 2% of the remaining respondents are respectively between 24 and 29 and 30 and 35.

Table 2: Gender of the respondents

Gender	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Male	82	36
Female	144	64
Total	226	100

The table above shows that 36% of the respondents are male students whereas 64% of the respondents are female students.

Table 3: Marital status of the respondents

Marital status	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Single	191	85
Married	35	15
Total	226	100

The table above shows that 85% of the respondents are single whereas 15% of the respondents are married.

Section B: Data on the objectives of the study as provided by the respondents

Table 4: Respondents’ level of awareness of online (*Vanguard* and *Punch*) newspaper reportage of the alleged Natasha-Akpabio sexual harassment case

Options	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Very high	91	40
High	119	53
Moderate	16	7
Low	0	0
Very low	0	0
Total	226	100

The table above shows that 40% of the respondents that were studied indicated that their level of awareness of the online reportage of the alleged Natasha-Akpabio sexual harassment case by the *Vanguard* and *Punch* newspapers is very high whereas 53% of the respondents indicated

that theirs is high. The rest of the respondents, however, indicated that theirs is moderate. This clearly shows that majority of the respondents are highly aware of the online reportage of the alleged Natasha-Akpabio sexual harassment case by the *Vanguard* and *Punch* newspapers.

Table 5: Respondents’ perception of online (*Vanguard* and *Punch*) newspaper reportage of the alleged Natasha-Akpabio sexual harassment case

Options	Frequency	Percentage (%)
It gives people informed knowledge of the alleged c	47	21
It calls for an end to sexual harassment in Niger	63	28
It triggers gender war onlir	75	33
It leads to the media trial of the senators involved	41	18
Total	226	100

The table above shows how the respondents see the online reportage of the alleged Natasha-Akpabio sexual harassment case by the *Vanguard* and *Punch* newspapers. The table clearly shows that 21% of the respondents that were studied believe that the online reportage of the alleged case gives people informed knowledge of the alleged case. The same cannot be said of 28% of the respondents as they believe that the online reportage of the alleged case by the selected newspapers calls for an end to sexual harassment in Nigeria. Additionally, 33% of

the respondents believe that the online reportage of the alleged case by the selected newspapers triggers gender war online while the rest of the respondents who are 18% of the total number of the respondents that were studied believe that the online reportage of the alleged case by the selected newspapers leads to the media trial of the senators involved in the case. In view of this finding, it is crystal clear that majority of the respondents believe that the online reportage of the alleged case by the selected newspapers triggers gender war online.

Table 6: Factors that shape the respondents’ perception of the online (*Vanguard* and *Punch*) newspaper reportage of the alleged Natasha-Akpabio sexual harassment case

Options	Frequency	Percentage (%)
My trust in the media	51	22
My understanding of sexual harassment	59	26
My view of the causes of gender discrimination	71	31
The presentation of the alleged case by the selected newspapers	45	20
Total	226	100

The table above shows that there are actually factors that shape the perception of the online reportage of the alleged Natasha-Akpabio sexual harassment case among the 226 respondents that were studied. For 22% of the respondents, it is their trust in the media that shaped their perception of the online reportage of the alleged case while it is the way which 26% of the respondents understand sexual harassment that shaped their own perception of the online reportage of the alleged case. For 31% of the respondents, it is their view of the

causes of gender discrimination that shaped their perception while it is how the selected newspapers presented the alleged case that shaped the perception of the online reportage of the alleged case among 20% of the respondents. In view of this finding, the perception of the online reportage of the alleged Natasha-Akpabio sexual harassment case among the respondents, is shaped by their view of the causes of gender discrimination and their understanding of sexual harassment.

4.1.1 Discussion of Findings

The alleged Natasha-Akpabio sexual harassment case, is one that has continued to make headlines even to this day and has brought about fresh discussions on the plight of victims of sexual harassment and how people and the media respond to it. In this study of select university students' perception of online (newspaper reportage of the alleged case involving the current president of the Senate, senator Godswill Akpabio and senator Natasha Akpoti-Uduaghan, it was found that the select Mass Communication students of Nnamdi Azikiwe University are highly aware of the online reportage of the alleged case by the *Vanguard* and *Punch* newspapers. This shows how wide the story of the alleged case has traveled since its online report started. The fact that the students are aware of the case, therefore, makes it easy to see why Guanah, Edewor and Ophori (2025) believe that online newspapers connect with younger people.

Results from the study also showed that the students believe that the online reportage of the alleged case by the selected newspapers, triggers gender war online. With this being the case, it means that the students' perception may have been influenced by what Aladi and Okoro (2021) described as their experiences, emotions and motivational state. Since they are highly aware of the online reportage of the alleged case, they may have come across the reactions of both the male and female genders online which led to them having the perception they have. To retain its readership audience and not be referenced as the reason for any online bad behaviour, the *Vanguard* and *Punch* newspapers should be more neutral and factual in their online reportage of the alleged case going forward.

On the factors that shape the perception of the online reportage of the alleged case by the selected newspapers, lastly, results revealed that the respondents' view of the causes of gender discrimination and their understanding of sexual harassment are the dominant factors. In other words, it is not how the selected newspapers presented the alleged case that shaped or influenced their perception. This must be why Koga (2014) argues that though the media may distort reality, it does not mean that the public will always adopt its perspective.

5.0 CONCLUSION

Sexual harassment is an age-old phenomenon whose consequences have become recognized, acknowledged and legislated in many parts of the world especially in the more Technologically Advanced Countries (TAC). For Nigeria to become one of the countries that can be said to be in this category of countries, therefore, perpetrators of sexual harassment must always be made to face the consequences of their actions as specified in the laws of the country while victims of sexual harassment must always be protected and encouraged to come forward and lay their complains when need be.

6.0 RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the outcome of this research, the study recommends thus:

1. The *Vanguard* and *Punch* newspapers should always avoid being driven by profit-making even as they seek to draw the attention of the youths to their online reports on the alleged Natasha-Akpabio sexual harassment case. Doing this, will go a long way to ensure that the reports do not end up misleading unsuspecting youths,

including university undergraduates who read them.

2. The *Vanguard* and *Punch* newspapers should always gauge the reactions of their online readers whenever they put out their reports on the alleged case online. This will help them in structuring and presenting their online reports on the alleged case in ways that will not generate unintended reactions from their online readers.
3. Future studies should be conducted on newspaper framing of the alleged Natasha-Akpabio sexual harassment case. This will help in throwing more light on the positions of the country's national dailies regarding the alleged case beyond their online reports.

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