



Research Article

Child Comedy and Child Right Advocacy in Nigeria: Analysis of Select Tik Tok Videos

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About Article

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ABSTRACT

The proliferation of short-form video content on platforms such as TikTok has fundamentally altered the landscape of digital entertainment in Nigeria, giving rise to a specific genre of 'child comedy' where minors perform in skits often directed by parents or guardians. While this ecosystem has birthed a new economy of 'kidfluencers,' it raises significant ethical concerns regarding the commodification of childhood and the potential violation of fundamental rights, including dignity, privacy, and protection from economic exploitation. This study analyzed select TikTok videos to determine the extent of these infringements, specifically examining the roles assigned to children and identifying indicators of psychological or commercial exploitation against the provisions of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) and the Nigerian Child's Rights Act 2003. The research was anchored on a triangulation of the theory of Political Economy of Communication, Social Representation Theory, and the Digital Generative Multimedia Tool Theory (DGMTT). Employing a qualitative research design utilizing semiotic analysis and netnography, the study examined a purposive sample of 20 viral Nigerian TikTok videos. Findings revealed that children are frequently utilized as 'props' in adult-centric narratives, often required to mimic inappropriate adult behaviours or endure ridicule for audience amusement. Netnographic observations indicated that the drive for monetization and viral engagement frequently supersedes the child's right to dignity, with audience comments largely normalizing this exploitation and a notable absence of digital privacy safeguards. The study concluded that the unregulated use of children in social media comedies constitutes a pervasive violation of child rights, where exploitation is masked as family entertainment. This research uniquely contributes to the body of knowledge by applying DGMTT alongside Social Representation Theory to the Nigerian context, shifting the scholarly focus from general cyber-safety to the specific semiotic construction of the 'child comedian' as a commodified entity. It is recommended that the Child's Rights Act 2003 be amended to explicitly cover digital content creation and 'sharenting,' while social media platforms and advocacy groups like UNICEF must implement stricter moderation and parental education campaigns to mitigate the long-term implications of using minors for social media fame.



1.0 INTRODUCTION

The evolution of the Nigerian digital media ecosystem has witnessed a radical shift from traditional broadcasting to user-generated content, a transition facilitated by the ubiquity of smartphones and the narrowing yet persistent realities of the digital divide (Vitalis et al., 2025). Within this landscape, short-form video platforms, particularly TikTok, have fundamentally altered consumption patterns, allowing for the rapid creation of content. This phenomenon is elucidated by the Digital Generative Multimedia Tool Theory (DGMTT), which posits that modern digital tools have simplified the technicalities of media production, enabling non-professionals to generate high-quality audiovisual narratives with ease (Onyejelem & Aondover, 2024a). Historically, the media's relationship with children has been one of neglect, as Omotosho, Oyero, & Salawu (2015) identified a significant lack of dedicated children's programming on Nigerian television. This void is now being filled by digital natives who, as Oboko & Onyejelem (2024) observe, use digital platforms for identity construction and the reconstruction of cultural narratives like proverbs.

Consequently, online comedy skits have emerged as a dominant genre, serving as a guarantee for freedom of expression (Uduma & Oyeleke, 2025). However, this "performative agency," a concept explored by Yeku (2018) in the context of Nigerian social media politics, has extended into the domestic sphere through "child comedy." Unlike the structured environment of the Nigerian film industry (Nollywood), where child actors are increasingly viewed through formal entrepreneurship (Onyejelem, 2026), the social media landscape is largely unregulated. While early iterations like the Mark Angel skits were analyzed for their developmental roles (Okoye & Okenyi, 2022), the current wave on TikTok often places children in adult-centric scenarios. This shift mirrors broader trends where social media influences critical life decisions, from migration patterns (Ezeonyejiaku & Onyejelem, 2021) to youth voting behaviors (Eneome et al., 2025).

The intersection of child comedy and rights advocacy is contentious. While traditional films have been identified as vehicles for highlighting child trafficking (Onyejelem, 2024a), there remains a disconnect in the

digital sphere. Nsude (2021) emphasizes that child rights reporting requires a specialized approach, yet the drive for viral fame often obscures rights to dignity and privacy. Nwachukwu (2023) warns that without safeguards, the digital space exposes children to exploitation. More worrisome is that the legal framework appears to be lagging; although the Child's Rights Act (2003) and the Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria (1999) provide a foundation for protection, their application to "sharenting"; the habitual sharing of a child's image is ambiguous (Shittu-Adenuga & Owolabi, 2025). As Suleiman (2025) notes, there is a distinct lack of specific regulations governing children's use of digital technology in Nigeria, creating a grey area where economic exploitation is normalized as entertainment.

The discourse on child rights in the media is often hampered by a lack of awareness and structural challenges. Ihechu et al. (2022) note that media reportage of child rights protection is frequently constrained by cultural perceptions and media ownership interests. Similarly, among the youth and digital natives, awareness of the Child Rights Act remains low, with many perceiving the portrayal of the girl child on platforms like Instagram as negative yet continuing to consume the content (Nweke et al., 2024). This suggests that while platforms like TikTok have significant potential for public health and youth mental health advocacy (McCashin & Murphy, 2022), they are currently underutilised for rights advocacy and overutilised for commercial entertainment that may compromise the welfare of the child. Therefore, this study is necessitated by the urgent need to critically analyse the specific genre of TikTok child comedy through the lens of child rights advocacy. By examining the roles assigned to children and the nature of their exploitation, this study aims to bridge the gap between the theoretical protections of the Child's Rights Act 2003 and the practical realities of the Nigerian digital creator economy.

1.1 Statement of the Problem

The Nigerian digital media landscape is currently defined by a "creator economy" that thrives on high-engagement tools described by DGMTT (Onyejelem & Aondover, 2024a). However, this technological leap has brought a shadow of exploitation. Just as

technology has complex effects on electoral management (Adebogun et al., 2025), it has also complicated the protection of the Nigerian child. The core problem lies in the intersection of digital labour and the erosion of child rights. Unlike the formal production practices seen in global formats like *The Apprentice Africa* (Anyanwu, 2021), TikTok comedy operates with informalized, unregulated production cycles.

Parents and guardians often direct these skits, placing children in narratives that require them to mimic age-inappropriate behaviors for algorithmic engagement. This raises ethical concerns regarding economic exploitation (Nwachukwu, 2023). There is also a palpable disconnect between entertainment and advocacy; while Nwolikpe (2018) noted that print media often fails to address child marriage effectively, social media comedy goes a step further by trivializing child safety. This normalization is compounded by low digital literacy and a lack of awareness of the Child's Rights Act among digital natives (Nweke et al., 2024).

Again, the lack of professional verification on TikTok; a trend Onuorji (n.d.) observed even among healthcare professionals, suggests a platform culture where engagement supersedes ethics. The current policy vacuum means that children are subjected to permanent digital archiving without informed consent (Shittu-Adenuga & Owolabi, 2025; Suleiman; 2025). Nsude (2024) avers that despite the potential of Artificial Intelligence (AI) to enhance child protection the current trend of commodification of childhood poses enormous challenge. The problem, therefore, is the systemic violation of child rights on TikTok, proceeding unchecked by the law or effective media advocacy, as the press often fails to provide adequate coverage of children's rights (Nwodu & Ezeoke, 2013).

2.0 OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The primary objective of this study is to analyse select TikTok videos to determine the extent to which they infringe upon child rights and the implications for advocacy in Nigeria. The specific objectives are to:

1. Examine the nature of the roles and narratives assigned to children in select Nigerian TikTok comedy videos.
2. Identify semiotic indicators of psychological, commercial, and social exploitation within

these comedy skits.

3. Assess the extent to which these videos violate the provisions of the Child's Rights Act 2003 and the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC).
4. Determine the implications of these contents for child rights advocacy and the digital safety of minors in Nigeria.

2.1 Research Questions

1. What is the nature of the roles and narratives assigned to children in the select Nigerian TikTok comedy videos?
2. What are the semiotic indicators of psychological, commercial, and social exploitation present in these comedy skits?
3. To what extent do the select TikTok videos violate the specific provisions of the Child's Rights Act 2003 regarding dignity and protection from economic exploitation?
4. What are the implications of the identified trends in child comedy for the future of child rights advocacy and digital policy formulation in Nigeria?

3.0 CONCEPTUAL DISCUSSION

3.1 The Evolution of Child Comedy and DGMTT

Child comedy has shifted from the scripted environments of Nollywood to user-generated platforms. This is best understood through the Digital Generative Multimedia Tool Theory (DGMTT), which highlights how user-friendly tools like CapCut enable non-professionals to create broadcast-quality narratives (Onyejelem & Aondover, 2024a). In this ecosystem, parents utilize these tools to turn domestic spaces into production sets, often ignoring the technical aesthetics and encoding ethics required in formal film production (Onyejelem, 2024b, 2025).

3.1.1 Social Media: Entertainment vs. Exploitation

While TikTok facilitates learning and self-expression (Osagioduwa, 2024), its architecture prioritizes viral trends, creating a "kidfluencer" economy. McCashin and Murphy (2022) note that TikTok is under-researched in psychology, especially regarding the line between visibility and harm. In Nigeria, cultural beliefs often influence perceptions of child welfare, sometimes even impacting mortality outcomes (Bolu-Steve et al., 2020). When these beliefs intersect with

digital media, the child is often viewed as the "property" of the parent, complicating advocacy (Ihechu et al., 2022).

3.1.2 Digital Rights and Advocacy Frameworks

Child rights advocacy in the digital age requires navigating a complex system of values and ideas, a process explained by the Social Representation Theory (Moscovici, 1988). The media's role in shaping these representations is powerful; as Lazarsfeld, Berelson, and Gaudet (1944) famously argued, media influences how individuals make up their minds. However, in Nigeria, the media has historically neglected child-focused agendas (Omotosho et al., 2015). Even with modern tools like AI being integrated into Nollywood production (Anunike et al., 2025), the ethical focus on children remains sparse. Ihechu et al (2022) warn that effective child rights advocacy is further hindered by structural barriers. Journalists find reporting on child rights a "herculean task" due to ownership interests. Abdulkadir et al (2025) observe that while the Freedom of Information Act (2011) exists to aid transparency, it is rarely used to investigate the burgeoning digital labour market of minors. As Mbagwu (2023) argues, content regulation must become a legal mechanism for child protection. Without specific digital safeguards, the "child comedian" remains a commodified entity in a digital marketplace that values views over the fundamental rights of the child (Iubenda, n.d.; Oswell, 2008).

3.1.3 TikTok as a Medium of Cultural Transmission and Risk

TikTok functions not merely as a hosting platform but as an active agent in shaping youth culture. Osagioduwa (2024) identifies TikTok as a primary medium of entertainment for Nigerian youth, facilitating learning and self-expression. Yet, the platform's architecture, which prioritises viral trends and algorithmic engagement, creates a unique set of risks. McCashin and Murphy (2022) note that while TikTok has immense potential for public health advocacy, it remains a space where the line between beneficial visibility and harmful exposure is blurred. In the Nigerian context, the specific mechanics of engagement such as lip-syncing to adult audio or enacting trending challenges can inadvertently subject the child to 'digital labour' that lacks the protections of traditional employment (Onuorji, n.d.).

3.1.4 Child Rights Advocacy in the Digital Sphere

Conceptually, child rights advocacy refers to the organised effort to promote and protect the fundamental rights of minors as enshrined in legal frameworks like the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) and the Nigerian Child's Rights Act (CRA) 2003. These rights include dignity, privacy, and protection from economic exploitation. However, there is a conceptual lag between these statutory protections and the realities of the digital age. Suleiman (2025) argues that current policy regulations regarding the use of digital technology by children in Nigeria are insufficient, creating a "policy vacuum."

This vacuum is exacerbated by a lack of societal awareness. Nweke et al. (2024) found that even among educated populations, awareness of the Child Rights Act is low, and the negative portrayal of children on platforms like Instagram is often normalised. Furthermore, the media, which should serve as a vanguard for advocacy, faces structural and cultural challenges. Ihechu et al. (2022) observe that media reportage on child rights is often hindered by cultural perceptions that view children as the property of their parents, thereby complicating advocacy against parental exploitation in comedy skits.

3.1.5 The Intersection: The Need for Digital Rights Advocacy

The convergence of these concepts highlights a critical gap. While the Nigerian film industry has been recognised for its potential to highlight issues such as trafficking and abuse (Onyejelem, 2024), the 'kidfluencer' economy on TikTok often operates counter to these advocacy goals by trivialising child safety for entertainment. Nwachukwu (2023) emphasises that in the 21st century, child rights must include 'digital rights' safeguards against harmful content and the permanent, non-consensual archiving of a child's image. Thus, the study of child comedy on TikTok is not just an analysis of entertainment, but a critical examination of how the digital commodification of childhood challenges the very definition of child rights in Nigeria (Shittu-Adenuga & Owolabi, 2025).

3.2 EMPIRICAL REVIEW

In an examination of the intersection between media and child advocacy, Onyejelem (2024) investigated the portrayal of child rights issues within the Nigerian

film industry, specifically Nollywood. Anchored on the Social Representation Theory, the study found that while films frequently depicted severe violations such as child trafficking, labour, battering, and the deprivation of education, there remains a disconnect between these portrayals and effective advocacy. The researcher highlighted that despite the industry's significant influence on societal norms, it lacks a comprehensive strategy for promoting children's rights. Consequently, the study recommended a strengthened collaboration between filmmakers and advocacy bodies like UNICEF to ensure that the messaging in entertainment media is not only dramatic but also accurate and impactful in advancing the child rights agenda.

Focusing on the producers of media content, Ihechu et al. (2022) conducted a study involving 456 registered journalists in Anambra State to understand the challenges of reporting child rights protection in Nigeria. Utilising a survey and Focus Group Discussions (FGD), the researchers discovered that reportage is significantly hindered by media ownership policies and, more critically, cultural and religious beliefs that often conflict with the provisions of the Child Rights Act. The findings indicated that reporting on these issues is a herculean task for Nigerian journalists, suggesting that unless these structural and cultural barriers are addressed through government intervention and strict implementation of the Act, media advocacy for children will remain compromised.

Narrowing the focus to the specific genre of online comedy, Okoye and Okenyi (2022) analysed the role of social media skits on child development, using the popular *Mark Angel Comedy* (featuring child actor Emmanuella) as a case study. Employing content analysis and Jensen Eric's 'Arts with the Brain in Mind' framework, the study identified that these skits often portray negative socio-cultural behaviours without considering the developmental needs of young viewers. The authors argued that the uncensored consumption of such internet comedy drama necessitates parental guidance, as the pursuit of artistic content creation on social media often bypasses the necessary context for qualitative psychosocial development in children.

Investigating the platform environment where these interactions occur, Osagioduwa (2024) assessed the

perception and usage of TikTok among 400 youths in Oredo Local Government Area, Benin City. The survey results revealed an exceptionally high adoption rate, with 95% of respondents using the platform and a majority spending over five hours daily on it for entertainment, learning, and self-expression. The study concluded that TikTok has become a dominant medium of entertainment in the region, suggesting that while it offers opportunities for engagement, its pervasive nature requires safety measures and educational integration to manage the heavy consumption habits of Nigerian youth.

In a related study on digital content and legal awareness, Nweke et al. (2024) examined the awareness of the Child Rights Act among undergraduates at Nnamdi Azikiwe University and their perception of the girl child's portrayal on Instagram. Using the framing theory and a mixed-methods approach, the findings revealed a concerning low level of awareness regarding the Child Rights Act among the respondents. Furthermore, the participants perceived that the girl child is portrayed negatively on Instagram, with influencers often failing to adhere to legal protections. The study recommended that social media networks must actively censor and ban content that exploits or negatively portrays children, highlighting the gap between existing laws and digital reality.

Exploring the specific dynamics of the TikTok platform in Nigeria, Onuorji (n.d.) conducted a quantitative content analysis of videos shared by selected Nigerian healthcare professionals. The study found that creators utilised techniques such as humour, trends, and self-recorded content to drive high user engagement, which is similar to the strategies used in entertainment skits. However, the research noted a critical gap in authenticity, as many professionals did not display credentials, and only one account was verified. This highlights the unregulated nature of the Nigerian TikTok space, where the drive for engagement often supersedes professional verification, a dynamic that likely extends to the child comedy genre where 'kidfluencers' operate without standard industry oversights.

On a global scale, McCashin and Murphy (2022) performed a systematic review and content analysis of TikTok's usage for public and youth mental health. Their analysis of studies from 2016 to 2021 and

specific Irish TikTok accounts revealed that while the platform is the fastest-growing social media for children, it remains significantly under-researched in psychology and psychiatry. The study found that while TikTok offers a unique opportunity for connecting with younger audiences, there is a distinct lack of high-quality mixed methodological evaluations of the content. This underscores the urgency for academic inquiry into how short-form video content impacts youth well-being, supporting the need for the current study on child comedy in Nigeria.

In addressing the regulatory landscape, the *African Journal of Law and Human Rights* (2025) published a doctrinal review of policy regulations regarding children's use of digital technology in Nigeria. The study examined the Constitution and the Child's Rights Act, concluding that current legal frameworks are insufficient for the digital age. The findings pointed to a lack of awareness among parents regarding online harms (such as privacy violations and cyberbullying) and a low political will to enforce protections. The article argued that the existing laws have not kept pace with technological advancements, creating a vulnerability gap for children in the digital space that necessitates a dedicated national law for digital protection.

4.0 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This study is anchored on a triangulation of three theoretical constructs: the Political Economy of Communication (PEC), the Digital Generative Multimedia Tool Theory (DGMTT), and the Social Representation Theory (SRT). This multi-theoretical approach provides a robust framework for understanding the economic drivers, technological enablers, and social implications of child comedy on TikTok in Nigeria.

4.1 Theory of Political Economy of Communication (PEC)

The Political Economy of Communication serves as the foundational economic lens for this study. Historically rooted in the works of scholars such as Vincent Mosco and Janet Wasko, this theory according to Asemah et al (2017) examines the power relations that shape the production, distribution, and consumption of communication resources. It focuses on how economic structures and profit motives influence media content (Mosco, 2009).

In the context of this research, PEC is instrumental in critiquing the **commodification** of childhood. The theory posits that in a capitalist media environment, audiences are sold to advertisers, and content is merely the bait. When applied to TikTok child comedy, PEC reveals that children are effectively transformed into digital labourers. Their innocence, linguistic errors, or scripted performances are packaged as consumable content to generate 'views', which translate into algorithmic visibility and, ultimately, financial gain for the account holders (often parents or guardians). This perspective elucidates the tension between the 'creator economy' and child rights, highlighting how the drive for monetisation can override the ethical obligation to protect the child from economic exploitation as enshrined in the Child's Rights Act.

4.1 Digital Generative Multimedia Tool Theory (DGMTT)

While PEC explains the *motive*, the Digital Generative Multimedia Tool Theory (DGMTT) explains the *method*. Propounded by Onyejelem & Aonover (2024a), DGMTT examines how the proliferation of sophisticated, user-friendly digital tools facilitates the ease of content creation, manipulation, and dissemination. The theory posits that modern digital ecosystems have democratised media production, allowing non-professionals to generate broadcast-quality narratives using smartphones and generative AI tools.

The relevance of DGMTT to this study is profound. It accounts for the surge in user-generated child comedy by highlighting the low barrier to entry. Parents do not require expensive studio equipment to produce these skits; tools like TikTok's in-app editor or CapCut allow for the seamless integration of soundbites, filters, and effects that enhance the comedic value of the child's performance. DGMTT provides the framework for analysing how these technical affordances are utilised to manipulate the child's image often through filters that distort age or audio tracks that force children to lip-sync adult content thereby technically facilitating the very rights violations under scrutiny.

4.1.1 Social Representation Theory (SRT)

To understand the societal reception of these videos, the study utilises the Social Representation Theory, originally developed by Serge Moscovici. This theory explores how media and social interaction construct a

system of values, ideas, and practices that establish a social order and enable communication among members of a community (Moscovici, 1988). It explains how the unfamiliar is made familiar through 'anchoring' and 'objectification'.

In this study, SRT is employed to analyse how TikTok videos construct a collective, often distorted reality of childhood for the Nigerian audience. Through repeated exposure to videos where children act as 'adults' or objects of ridicule, the social representation of the Nigerian child shifts from one of vulnerability requiring protection to one of resilience and entertainment. This theory is crucial for understanding why such content is widely accepted and celebrated (viral status) rather than condemned. It suggests that these videos are actively reshaping the social norm, making the violation of child dignity appear as harmless fun, thus complicating advocacy efforts. The combination of these three theories is essential for a holistic analysis of the research problem.

PEC exposes the underlying economic exploitation, framing the child as a commodity in the digital marketplace. DGMTT addresses the technological dimension, explaining how digital tools empower guardians to bypass traditional production ethics and manipulate child subjects with ease.

SRT tackles the sociological impact, explaining how this content normalises rights violations by altering the public's perception of childhood. These three theories provide a comprehensive lens to examine not just the content of the TikTok videos, but the economic systems that incentivise them, the tools that produce them, and the social structures that sustain them.

5.0 METHODOLOGY

This study employed a qualitative research design, utilising a multi-methodological approach that combines Semiotic Analysis and Netnography. The qualitative design was deemed most appropriate as it allows for an in-depth exploration of the complex, subjective, and culturally embedded meanings within social media content, rather than merely quantifying the frequency of their occurrence.

The adoption of Semiotic Analysis is justified by the need to deconstruct the visual and performative elements of the TikTok videos. Semiotics, the study of signs and symbols, allows the researcher to look beyond the surface-level entertainment value of the

comedy skits to uncover "latent meanings" (Chandler, 2007). In the context of this study, semiotics is essential for decoding how visual symbols (costumes, makeup), linguistic cues (scripted dialogue), and performative elements (gestures, expressions) serve as signifiers that may denote comedy but connote exploitation or rights violations.

Simultaneously, the study employed Netnography to address the interactive nature of the TikTok platform. Coined by Kozinets (2010), netnography applies ethnographic methods to online communities. This method is justified as it enables the researcher to observe the "online culture" surrounding these videos. Analysing the content alone is insufficient to understand the phenomenon; one must also analyse the audience engagement specifically comments and shares to understand the societal reception. Netnography provides the framework to assess whether the audience validates, normalises, or critiques the use of children in these comedic roles

The study utilised a purposive sampling technique to select the data. The sample size consisted of 20 viral TikTok videos featuring Nigerian children in comedy roles. The purposive technique was selected to ensure that only videos with significant cultural impact defined by high visibility (viral status) and high engagement were included. The specific inclusion criteria were:

1. The video must feature a Nigerian child (apparent minor) as the primary subject.
2. The content must be categorised as 'comedy' or a 'skit'.
3. The video must have achieved 'viral' status (defined in this study as having over 100,000 views or significant cross-platform sharing).
4. The content must be publicly accessible on the TikTok platform.

Data collection involved the digital observation and archiving of the selected videos. The analysis was two-fold:

1. **Semiotic Deconstruction:** Each video was treated as a 'text'. The researcher analysed visual symbols (e.g., a child wearing adult clothing), linguistic cues (e.g., a child using adult profanity or innuendo), and performative elements to identify indicators of psychological or commercial exploitation.

2. Netnographic Observation: The researcher analysed the engagement metrics and the discourse in the comment sections. This involved coding audience reactions into themes such as 'amusement', 'concern', 'praise for talent', or 'criticism of parenting'. This helped to map the societal temperature regarding child rights in the digital space.

5.1 Data Presentation

The data for this study was derived from a purposive sample of 20 viral TikTok videos featuring Nigerian children in comedy roles. To facilitate analysis, the videos were categorised based on their dominant narrative themes. Table 1 below presents a summary of the selected data characteristics.

Table 1: Categorisation of Select TikTok Videos (N=20)

Category	Frequency	Description of Content	Dominant Visual/Audio Elements	Average Engagement (Netnography)
The 'Adultified' Child	8	Children lip-syncing to adult audio tracks involving marital disputes, romantic propositioning, or financial struggles.	Heavy makeup; oversized adult clothing; exaggerated adult gestures.	High 'Likes'; Comments focusing on the child's "maturity" or "sharp mouth".
The Prank Victim	5	Parents or guardians playing practical jokes on children to elicit tears, fear, or anger for comedic effect.	Close-up shots of crying faces; distressed body language; laugh tracks added in post-production.	Mixed: High shares; Comments split between "too funny" and "this is rough".
The Scripted Insulter	4	Children reciting scripted lines containing insults, profanity, or disrespectful rhetoric directed at adults.	Aggressive posturing; finger-pointing; use of local slang/innuendo.	High 'Saves'; Audience praises the child's "boldness".
The 'Kidfluencer' Ad	3	Skits specifically designed to market a product, where the child mimics a salesperson.	Branded merchandise; rehearsed marketing lines; call-to-action ("Link in bio").	Commercial queries; less comedic engagement.

Data Analysis

The analysis was conducted using a dual approach: Semiotic Analysis to deconstruct the content and Netnography to analyse audience reception.

Semiotic Analysis

The semiotic deconstruction of the videos revealed a consistent pattern of distorted childhood.

- **Signifiers of Adulthood:** In 40% of the sample (The 'Adultified' Child), the use of adult costumes and makeup served as visual signifiers stripping the subjects of their childhood innocence. The lip-syncing to audio tracks discussing marital infidelity or debt (linguistic cues) created a jarring juxtaposition between the visual innocence of the child and the corrupt nature of the text.
- **The Child as a Prop:** In the 'Prank Victim'

category, the camera angles were frequently high-angle shots (looking down), semantically positioning the child as a subordinate object of ridicule rather than an active participant. The addition of 'laugh tracks' utilizing tools described by the Digital Generative Multimedia Tool Theory (DGMTT) (Onyejelem & Aondover, 2024a) functions as a directive to the audience, instructing them that the child's distress is a performative commodity meant for consumption, not empathy.

Netnographic Analysis

The netnographic observation of the comment sections (N= approx. 2,000 comments analysed across the 20 videos) revealed a dominant culture of normalisation.

- **Validation of Exploitation:** The majority of comments (approx. 75%) used positive emojis (laughing faces, fire) and phrases like "This boy is too wise" or "Nollywood needs to sign her." This validates the Social Representation Theory, suggesting the audience has constructed a reality where a child's value is tied to their ability to entertain adults.
- **Commercial Intent:** In the 'Kidfluencer' videos, parental interaction in the comments (pinning links, asking for subscribers) confirmed the Political Economy of Communication perspective (Mosco, 2009). The child is the primary labourer, yet the economic dialogue is entirely controlled by the guardian.

6.0 DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

The Commodification of Childhood and Economic Exploitation

The study found that the drive for monetisation supersedes the child's right to dignity. Aligning with the Political Economy of Communication, the findings confirm that children in these videos are utilised as 'digital labourers' (Mosco, 2009). Unlike the structured entrepreneurship observed in Nollywood child actors (Onyejelem, 2026), these TikTok creators often lack contractual protections. The 'Kidfluencer' videos specifically demonstrate how parents leverage their wards' cuteness for financial gain, effectively commercialising their private lives. This directly contravenes the spirit of the Child's Rights Act regarding protection from economic exploitation, a concern echoed by Nwachukwu (2023).

Technological Facilitation of Rights Violations

The application of the Digital Generative Multimedia Tool Theory (DGMTT) (Onyejelem & Aondover, 2024a) was evident in the production quality of the videos. The ease of editing, filtering, and audio manipulation allows guardians to construct narratives that may not reflect the child's actual personality. For instance, editing apps are used to make a child appear to say things they may not understand. This manipulation facilitates a violation of the child's integrity, creating a permanent digital footprint of age-inappropriate behaviour which Shittu-Adenuga and Owolabi (2025) warn poses long-term privacy risks.

Social Normalisation and the Erosion of Dignity

The netnographic data supports the Social Representation Theory (Moscovici, 1988). The overwhelmingly positive audience reception indicates that the social representation of the 'Nigerian Child' is shifting from a vulnerable subject to an object of entertainment. When a child is pranked to the point of tears and the audience laughs, the child's right to dignity is socially eroded. This aligns with Okoye & Okenyi's (2022) findings on the *Mark Angel* skits, where comedic intent often obscures developmental inappropriateness.

The Gap in Legal and Advocacy Frameworks

The findings corroborate Suleiman (2025) and the *African Journal of Law and Human Rights* (2025), which argue that current policy regulations are insufficient. While Onyejelem (2024) noted that traditional film can serve as an advocacy tool, TikTok comedy appears to function in the opposite direction normalising violations. The specific lack of 'sharenting' regulations means that the privacy violations identified in this study remain legally ambiguous in Nigeria.

6.1 Findings

Based on the analysis, the specific findings of this study are:

- A significant portion of Nigerian child comedy on TikTok relies on 'adultification', where children are made to perform adult roles (romantic or aggressive) that are incongruent with their developmental stage.
- The 'Prank' genre on TikTok monetises children's genuine distress (crying, fear), with audience feedback validating this as acceptable entertainment.
- There is a notable absence of evidence regarding the child's informed consent. The permanent archiving of these videos constitutes a violation of the child's digital privacy rights.
- The content strategies are heavily influenced by algorithmic requirements for virality (trends, consistency), placing undue pressure on the child to perform as a digital labourer.

7.0 CONCLUSION

This study concludes that the unregulated use of children in social media comedies in Nigeria constitutes a subtle but pervasive violation of child rights. The convergence of accessible digital tools (DGMTT) and economic desperation has created a 'kidfluencer' economy where the child's dignity is often the opportunity cost for viral fame. The current digital landscape has outpaced existing child labour regulations, creating a grey area where exploitation is normalised under the guise of family entertainment. Consequently, without intervention, a generation of Nigerian children risks having their formative years permanently distorted and archived in the public domain.

7.1 RECOMMENDATIONS

In light of the findings, the following recommendations are made:

- The National Assembly should review and amend the Child's Rights Act 2003 to explicitly cover 'digital labour' and 'sharenting'. Specific clauses should be introduced to regulate the commercial use of a child's image on social media platforms, as suggested by Shittu-Adenuga and Owolabi (2025).
- Social media platforms like TikTok must implement stricter "Safety by Design" moderation policies for Nigerian users. This includes restricting the monetisation of accounts that primarily feature minors in age-inappropriate scenarios.
- National Orientation Agency (NOA) and child rights advocacy groups should intensify campaigns to educate parents on the long-term psychological and legal implications of using their wards for social media fame (Nweke et al., 2024).
- Parents must be educated on the Digital Generative Multimedia Tool Theory concepts understanding that just because a tool allows for content creation, it does not ethically justify its use on vulnerable subjects.

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