

SOCIAL MEDIA AND FILMS AS DRIVERS OF PUBLIC AWARENESS ON HUMAN TRAFFICKING IN SOUTHWEST NIGERIA

ADEKUNLE EMMANUEL MAKANJUOLA

Federal College of Education, Abeokuta, Ogun State, Nigeria

MARY MOJIRADE AYANTUNJI

Emmanuel Alayande University of Education, Oyo, Oyo State, Nigeria

Abstract

Human trafficking is still a big problem in Nigeria; thus, we need to find good ways to raise public awareness. This study looks into how films and social media might help people in Southwest Nigeria learn more about human trafficking. The study used correlation and paired sample t-test analysis on a quantitative survey of 400 people. The results showed a weak link ($r = -0.069$, $p = 0.168$) between media exposure and consciousness, which means that passively consuming media doesn't have much of an effect. There is a big gap ($t = -73.420$, $p < 0.001$) between how people think they are exposed to media and how they actually are, which shows that people know how powerful media can be. The study illustrates that we need better media literacy, fact-checking mechanisms, participatory content, and policy-backed efforts to close this gap. Using films and social media in awareness campaigns can help people become more informed and involved in their communities. The paper stresses that education changes how people think about social issues into informed advocacy. For the media to be most useful in the fight against trafficking, it needs to work with teachers, politicians, and people from civil society. In the end, the study adds to the conversation about media literacy and social studies by calling for smart media use that gives people the tools they need to recognize, question, and fight human trafficking.

Keywords: social media, films, human trafficking, public awareness, media influence

Introduction

With sub-Saharan Africa, with Nigeria in particular, suffering extreme forms of exploitation through forced labour, sexual assault, and organ trafficking, human trafficking continues to be a worldwide epidemic affecting more than 40 million people (Koranne, 2022). Poverty, inadequate institutions, gender inequality, and systematic corruption aggravate Nigeria's role as a source, transit, and destination for trafficking people (Elechi et al., 2007). Although legislation and enforcement systems are essential in combating trafficking, this paper underlines the complementing power of public education—especially via digital platforms and film media—to raise awareness, mobilize citizens, and promote civic involvement. Makanjuola and Ayantunji (2024) also support new ways of teaching that use multimedia resources like movies and AI-based simulations to get students and teachers to think more about trafficking and other social concerns.

Drawing on Paulo Freire's (1970) idea of critical pedagogy, which sees education as a practice of freedom, this paper argues that media consumption can be more than passive reception; it can be a venue for public pedagogy where people question their social reality and as a result create critical awareness. This study investigates the twofold function of media as both educational and civic tools by means of an examination of how people interact with anti-trafficking stories in films and social media. Wali-Essien et al. (2025) say that community-driven storytelling through film and digital participation has become a powerful way to fight trafficking narratives, especially in places with few resources. It bets on the changing power of education and at the same time tries to implement public pedagogy by presenting media interaction as a civic learning tool. Recent studies on educational innovation in Nigeria fit this focus on digital technologies and inclusive civic education. For instance, Ayantunji et al. (2024a) underline the need of digital transformation in improving inclusive learning contexts, hence proving the power of technology to democratize access and foster critical involvement.

Public awareness of trafficking stays patchy even with government-led programs like those of the National Agency for the Prohibition of Trafficking in Persons (NAPTIP). Bello and Okonjo (2025) note that legal changes by themselves are not enough to break down deep-seated exploitation networks; focused awareness and education are absolutely vital. This fits UNESCO's (2017) campaign for education that enables human rights and sustainable development by means of informed actions.

Focusing on civic responsibility, human rights, and media literacy, the social studies curriculum offers a perfect venue for introducing students to the reality of trafficking. Social sciences, according to Fukushima et al. (2021), have the ability to question systemic inequities and encourage democratic participation goals closely related to anti-trafficking education. This study places its inquiry at the crossroads of education, media, and civic engagement particularly in Southwest Nigeria, where urbanization and a thriving film industry—see Nollywood—create a dynamic environment for media-driven public pedagogy

One must consider that media exposure does not always lead to awareness or advocacy. Assumptions regarding media power, critics astutely point out, have to consider algorithmic filtering, false information, and unequal digital access. According to Elechi et al. (2007), the impact of awareness efforts may be undermined when audiences are uninformed or unable to access correct reflecting material. Therefore, this paper questions not only whether people

consume pertinent material but also how they emotionally, intellectually, and critically interact with it; therefore, criticizing both the substance and consumption of anti-trafficking media.

Particularly when integrated with social studies, media literacy education helps students to analyze, examine, and respond to digital and visual narratives. Both Hobbs (2010) and Crawford et al. (2025) highlight how media education helps students to be ethical participants in public debate and meaning-makers. While social media sites like Instagram and X (previously Twitter) allow real-time activism and public debate (Mahiwal et al. 2024), films and documentaries elicit emotional reactions that intensify empathy and moral reflection (Chapin et al., 2019; Strydom, 2021). Makanjuola et al. (2021) show how well documentaries teach in non-formal environments like market communities to improve environmental literacy—an approach that may be modified for civic education and trafficking awareness. Among young people, these platforms are especially potent since they provide ways to tell stories, organize friends, and obtain civic material typically left off official courses.

Especially in Nigeria, existing studies hardly connect people's lived experiences of media with their formal education despite this potential. Recent studies have shown that media material and digital technologies are becoming more important for raising awareness about trafficking and getting people involved in their communities (Olisah et al., 2024; Okeyere et al., 2024; Reeves et al., 2024). These studies show that social media and films can both teach people about human trafficking and change the way people think about and respond to it. One must investigate how media material, whether from Nollywood movies or digital campaigns, interacts with what people learn (or do not learn) in schools. Among other civic projects, social studies education stands out as a key entry point for media-based anti-trafficking awareness. This paper aims to add to the body of work on human trafficking prevention as well as to inform curriculum change in Nigerian education by investigating how social media and film support or question civic knowledge and involvement.

Research Questions

The study is guided by the following questions:

1. To what extent do social media influence public awareness of human trafficking in Southwest Nigeria?
2. How do films contribute to public awareness of human trafficking in Southwest Nigeria?
3. What are the comparative impacts of social media and films in raising awareness of human trafficking?

Methodology

This study adopts a descriptive survey research design, which is suitable for understanding the relationship between social media, films, and public awareness of human trafficking in Southwest Nigeria. The target population for this study is comprised of residents of Southwest Nigeria (27,722,432), which includes Lagos, Ogun, Oyo, Osun, Ondo, and Ekiti states. Several important factors that make Southwest Nigeria suitable for this research guided selection: the area's great exposure to digital and film media, its dense and varied population, the reported incidents of human trafficking and cybercrime, and its strategic sociocultural and economic relevance inside Nigeria. These elements taken together create a rich environment for

investigating how social media and films shape public awareness, perception, and reaction to problems connected to human trafficking. To determine the sample size for this study, the researchers employed Taro Yamane's formula to arrive at 400 participants.

$$n = \frac{N}{1 + N(e)^2}$$

Where:

n = Sample size

N = Total Population (27,722,432)

e = Margin of error (Commonly 5% or 0.05)

Since the researchers are using a stratified random sampling technique, the sample shall be distributed proportionally based on the population of each state. The formula for proportional allocation is:

$$ni = \frac{Ni}{N} \times n$$

Where:

ni = Sample size for each state

Ni = Population of each state

N = Total population (27,722,432)

n = Total sample size (400)

Table 1. Proportional Sampling of Selected States in Southwest Nigeria

States	Population (<i>N i</i>)	Proportional Sample (<i>n i</i>)
Lagos	9,113,605	$\frac{9,113,605}{27,722,432} \times 400 \approx 131$
Oyo	3,751,1	$\frac{9,113,605}{27,722,432} \times 400 \approx 81$
Ogun	3,751,140	$\frac{9,113,605}{27,722,432} \times 400 \approx 54$
Ondo	3,460,877	$\frac{9,113,605}{27,722,432} \times 400 \approx 50$
Osun	3,416,959	$\frac{9,113,605}{27,722,432} \times 400 \approx 49$
Ekiti	2,398,957	$\frac{9,113,605}{27,722,432} \times 400 \approx 35$
Total	27,722,432	400

The researchers carefully observed that to guarantee subgroups with different media consumption patterns across states were sufficiently represented in the sample, the study used a stratified random sampling approach. The sampling method gave significant insights on general perceptions of media impact on human trafficking awareness and allowed wide demographic coverage. The study, however, neither pre-selected participants based on previous involvement with anti-trafficking education or civic projects nor included a qualitative evaluation of the kind or quality of media material ingested. Therefore, the results mostly show public views on media influence rather than calculated reactions to particular trafficking-related material. A systematic questionnaire meant to assess respondents' exposure to social media and films, their knowledge of human trafficking, and their views of media influence gathered primary data. To allow efficient quantification of views and experiences, the questionnaire was made up of closed-ended questions based on a 4-point Likert scale (from Strongly Agree to Strongly Disagree). Digital teaching methods including virtual team teaching, as researched by Ayantunji et al. (2024b), offers fascinating fresh insights on how pre-service teachers engage with digital platforms to foster civic learning and collaboration. This emphasizes the importance of including digital media literacy in social studies education teacher training. Still, the lack of qualitative data such as open-ended answers, focus group discussions, or classroom observations limited the depth of analysis on how participants interact with and internalize anti-trafficking narratives. Future research should include qualitative elements to reflect the richness, subtlety, and diversity of media engagement. Such strategies would provide more in-depth analysis of how people read, challenge, or emotionally react to anti-trafficking messaging. In social studies education environments, where critical reflection, media literacy, and personal experiences interact with curriculum objectives, this is especially pertinent. Adding qualitative aspects would not only increase the interpretative validity of future results but also make the suggestions for media policy and civic education more significant.

Results and Discussion

RQ1: To what extent do social media influence public awareness of human trafficking in Southwest Nigeria?

Table 2: Correlation Table Showing Relationships Between Awareness of Human Trafficking and Social Media and Film Exposure

		Exposure to social media and films	Awareness of human trafficking
Exposure to social media and films	Pearson Correlation	1	-.069
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.168
	N	400	400
Awareness of human trafficking	Pearson Correlation	-.069	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.168	
	N	400	400

Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed)

The findings in Table 2 indicate a weak negative correlation ($r = -0.069$, $p = 0.168$) between awareness of human trafficking and exposure to social media and films. This suggests that passive media consumption alone does not significantly contribute to public awareness of human trafficking in Southwest Nigeria. These findings support Reeves et al. (2024), who

underline that the degree of awareness is significantly influenced by the quality of interaction with media, including content credibility and active participation versus passive media exposure. Olisah et al. (2024) bolster this perspective even further by contending that active participation with educational campaigns and advocacy initiatives rather than passive consumption of media material produces a genuine knowledge of human trafficking. Consistent with these points of view, Okyere et al. (2021) contend that increasing awareness is more successful with educational policies emphasizing media literacy and active involvement. This emphasizes the need of including interactive and participatory educational approaches such as digital literacy campaigns and government-backed initiatives to create a more knowledgeable society able to fight human trafficking.

RQ2: How do films contribute to public awareness of human trafficking in Southwest Nigeria?

Table 3: *A descriptive Statistics Table Showing films contribute Awareness of Human Trafficking.*

		Exposure to social media and films	Awareness of human trafficking	Perception of media influence on human trafficking awareness	Challenges in Using social media and Films for Awareness
N	Valid	400	400	400	400
	Missing	0	0	0	0
Mean		10.45	27.85	85.64	85.53
Std. Deviation		2.360	13.445	8.687	8.563
Percentiles	100	33.00	87.00	87.00	87.00

In Table 3, though respondents said they had rather little exposure to trafficking-related media (Mean = 10.45), their knowledge of human trafficking stayed fairly high (Mean = 27.85), and their view of media's impact was quite favourable (Mean = 85.64). A major drawback of this result, therefore, is the statistical measurement of media exposure, which ignores the quality, credibility, or framing of the media material consumed. Media environments are being influenced more and more by algorithmic filters, platform censorship, and access inequity, which can restrict what people see and how they understand it.

Elechi et al. (2007) share this worry, contending that incorrect information, media bias, and restricted access to reliable sources can greatly compromise the effectiveness of media in generating awareness. Ensuring digital safety and critical involvement is vital as media ecosystems get increasingly complicated. Emphasizing the need of a complete cybersecurity framework in Nigeria's digital education system, Makanjuola and Ayantunji (2024) underline the vulnerabilities pupils experience when accessing online material, especially trafficking-related content. Thus, although attendees might view media as powerful, the real awareness produced might differ greatly depending on the purity and depth of the content received. This finding underlines the importance of media literacy education and content curation initiatives to guarantee that awareness efforts are not just visible but also honest, inclusive, and representative of the multifaceted reality of human trafficking.

RQ3: What are the comparative impacts of public awareness of human trafficking and perception of media influence on Human Trafficking Awareness?

Table 4: A Paired Sample t-Test Analysis Comparing Public Awareness and Perception of Media Influence on Human Trafficking Awareness.

Exposure and Awareness of Human Trafficking	N	Mean	SD	df	t	Sig. (P)
Awareness of human trafficking	400	27.85	13.445	399	-73.420	.000
Perception of media influence on human trafficking awareness	400	85.64	8.687			

The findings in Table 4 reveal that although both social media and films are perceived as important tools in raising awareness of human trafficking, their comparative impacts diverge in meaningful ways. While participants expressed emotional connection and retained information better from films, social media offered immediacy and interactivity, though sometimes lacking depth. This contrast illustrates a potential educational tension—between passive reception and critical engagement—which calls for a more transformative approach to media education.

Wali-Essien et al. (2025) correctly assert that integrating media into social studies education promotes civic participation and fosters a deeper understanding of complex social issues. However, this assertion could be more robustly grounded in Paulo Freire’s (1970) critical pedagogy. Freire posits that education should empower learners to become *active meaning-makers*, capable of *naming their world*, critically interrogating reality, and engaging in transformational action. Applying this to media use, students should not merely consume content but learn to question its sources, narratives, and omissions.

This research suggests that the gap between perception and actual awareness, as shown by the weak correlation ($r = -0.069$, $p = 0.168$), is partially due to the lack of *critical literacy skills* among media consumers. While respondents perceive media as powerful, they may not possess the analytical tools to decode messages or link media portrayals to real-world trafficking systems. This gap indicates that media-based anti-trafficking education must go beyond information delivery to include reflexive practices, participatory analysis, and dialogic learning principles central to Freire’s pedagogy. Therefore, social studies curricula that incorporate films and social media should actively engage students in analyzing and critiquing these media forms. Instead of treating learners as passive recipients of advocacy messages, educators must rely on them as *co-creators of meaning*, facilitating classroom environments where students question, debate, and reinterpret media messages on human trafficking. This approach not only enhances media literacy but also situates learners as empowered agents of social transformation.

Recommendations

Based on what the study found, the following recommendations are made to raise public awareness, improve how the media covers the issue, and make it easier for different sectors to work together to fight human trafficking:

1. Educational institutions should include digital literacy courses in their curricula to provide students and communities the tools to critically evaluate media material and identify exploitative practices in trafficking-related media.
2. To raise direct involvement with human trafficking concerns, media producers should concentrate on producing culturally relevant and interesting films and social media campaigns that speak to local audiences, especially in educational settings.
3. Increasing the influence of media-driven trafficking awareness campaigns depends on government, media professionals, and civil society organizations working together to guarantee their coordination and broad distribution.
4. Media organizations should set strong verification systems and provide genuine, fact-based reporting on human trafficking as top priority to fight false information, hence supporting educational initiatives and stopping the dissemination of damaging misconceptions.
5. To engage consumers more deeply and build enduring relationships with the material, media companies should investigate creative and interactive forms such virtual reality, narrative apps, and gamification.
6. Governments could implement rules requiring media outlets to include material raising awareness of human trafficking, thus guaranteeing regular visibility and wider distribution of anti-trafficking messaging.
7. To augment media-based awareness campaigns and offer practical actions for advocacy and prevention in local settings, civil society organizations can encourage community-driven projects including workshops, film screenings, and debates.

Conclusion

This paper underlines how important media, especially films and social media, is in shaping public knowledge of human trafficking. The results show a significant difference between participants' actual exposure to trafficking-specific material and their view of media's possible impact. This difference emphasizes the importance of more deliberate and calculated media use in educational settings. Media can be a transformational tool only if it informs people and involves them in ongoing discussion and critical analysis. This study calls for educational initiatives combining media literacy with civic education to promote more knowledge and proactive opposition to exploitation. Although the research alludes to several educational projects generally, a more concentrated pedagogical perspective is crucial. Social studies education consistently stressed in this paper becomes a pertinent curricular area for integrating anti-trafficking conversation. It offers a systematic framework for developing ethical media involvement, civic duty, and critical thinking. Particularly in teacher education and secondary social studies classes, media narratives can be questioned, internet activism promoted, and students prepared to spot and oppose human trafficking. Future studies should investigate the junction between people's media consumption and their participation in social studies classes to better understand how formal education influences public awareness and advocacy on trafficking-related concerns.

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