



## Press Coverage of Senator Ike Ekweremmadu's Kidney Harvest Saga: A Study of Select Nigerian Newspapers

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### ABSTRACT

**Background:** On Friday, 5<sup>th</sup> May 2023, a Nigerian Senator and Former Deputy Senate President, Senator Ike Ekweremadu, was jailed for nine years by the United Kingdom's Central Criminal Court, known as the Old Bailey (Nimi and Allegra 2023). Senator Ike Ekweremadu, along with his wife, Beatrice, and a Medical Doctor, Dr. Obinna Obeta, were sentenced to nine years and eight months, four years and six months, and ten years in prison, respectively, in the first conviction of its kind under British Modern Slavery laws 2015 of the UK. The incidence of the Senator Ike Ekweremadu's kidney harvest saga in UK provided opportunity of press coverage for the Nigerian media.

**Objective:** The general objective of the study was to evaluate the press coverage of Senator Ike Ekweremadu's Kidney harvesting saga in three select daily Nigerian newspapers.

**Method:** This study adopted the quantitative and qualitative content analysis research approach in answering the research questions posed for the study.

**Result:** Findings revealed that the prominence given to the reportage on Senator Ike Ekweremadu's kidney harvesting saga by *Daily Sun*, *The Guardian* and *Vanguard* Newspapers had a significant relationship with frequency of coverage; headlines portrayed some of the directions (slants) of the reportage on Senator Ike Ekweremadu's organ harvesting plot.

**Conclusion:** study concluded that Nigerian Press gave prominence to the coverage of Senator Ike Ekweremadu's kidney harvesting saga. This was demonstrated in the number of editorial contents which appeared on the front pages of the newspapers under review compare to the contents which appeared on the inside and back pages of the studied newspapers. Thus prominence as a critical genre in newspapers' content analyses, reveals how important and topical an issue is considered by the newspapers and the public sphere.

**Unique contribution:** The study contributes to the discourse on social responsibility function of the press as the watchdog of society, and the relationship between the government and the mass media. The researchers also highlighted that understanding how multimedia tools and audience engagement shape news narratives will contribute to a more comprehensive grasp of contemporary journalism in Nigeria.

**Key recommendation:** Based on the findings, the study recommends that Nigerian press should uphold the virtue of giving prominence to important topical national/international issues.

**Key Words:** Press Coverage, Senator Ike Ekweremmadu's Kidney Harvest Saga, Nigerian Newspapers, Digital Generative Multimedia Tool Theory (DGMTT)



## **INTRODUCTION**

On Friday, 5<sup>th</sup> May 2023, a Nigerian Senator and Former Deputy Senate President, Senator Ike Ekweremadu, was jailed for nine years by the United Kingdom's Central Criminal Court, known as the Old Bailey (Nimi and Allegra 2023). Senator Ike Ekweremadu, along with his wife, Beatrice, and a Medical Doctor, Dr. Obinna Obeta, were sentenced to nine years and eight months, four years and six months, and ten years in prison, respectively, in the first conviction of its kind under British Modern Slavery laws 2015 of the UK (Nimi, 2023). Reports from the Britain's Crown Prosecution Services (CPS) inform that the trio were found guilty in March, 2023 of trafficking a 21 year old. Lagos street trader to the United Kingdom to provide a kidney for the Ekweremadu's daughter, Sonia, who was suffering from deteriorating kidneys and thus needed regular dialysis (British Broadcasting Corporation BBC, 2023). According to the prosecutors, the victim who was oblivious that he was expected to provide a kidney in return, was brought to the UK after being offered a reward of up to £7,000 (\$8,810) and the promise to work in the country.

Arrested by the London Metropolitan Police in June 2022, the Ekweremadu's were alleged to have attempted to convince doctors at the Royal Free Hospital in London, to perform an £80,000 harvest on the donor, who was presented as the cousin of their daughter, Sonia (Bolanle, 2023). According to Bolanle (2023), the kidney donor, David Ukpo Nwamini, was recruited in Lagos, Nigeria, by Dr. Obinna Obeta, at the time he (the donor) was selling telephone accessories in public markets. Transported to London in February, 2022, the victim who was kept under the direction and financial control of the conspirators, was to provide kidney for Sonia in exchange for 7,000 and the promise work in the UK (CPS, 2023). CPS (2023) also reveals that the case came to light on May 5<sup>th</sup> 2022, when the victim entered Staines Police Station and reported that he had been trafficked from Nigeria into the UK and that someone was trying to harvest his kidney. The victim further revealed that he had undergone kidney screening at the Royal Free Hospital in London, with a consultant, pointing out that the consultant decided that the harvest could not go ahead when he (the consultant) concluded the donor was unstable after hearing he has no counseling became suspicious of the circumstances surrounding the proposed harvest (CPS, 2023).

BBC (2023) reports that an inquiry was set after the young donor ran from London and slept rough for days before walking into a police station in Surrey, crying and in distress. Narrating his saga to the police, the young donor informed the police that the doctor said he was too young for the harvest. The donor, who was afraid of being sent back to Nigeria, cried that his body was not for sale.

Senator Ike Ekweremadu, his wife, Beatrice, and the medical doctor, Obeta, were arrested on 23<sup>rd</sup> June, 2022 by the UK Metropolitan Police, for bringing a "child" to the country for organ harvesting (Oluwafemi, 2023). Charged before the Uxbridge Magistrate Court, UK, for his trial, the Prosecutor, Hugh Davies KC told the court that the trio had treated the young donor as a "disposable asset-spare part -for reward", adding that they entered an emotionally cold commercial transaction with the man (Weaver, 2023). According to Weaver (2023), Davies likened the behavior of Ekweremadu – a successful Lawyer and Founder of an anti-poverty charity, who helped draw up Nigerian's Law against organ trafficking – to entitlement, dishonesty and hypocrisy. Appalled on how Ekweremadu, who owns several properties and had a staff of 80, had agreed to reward someone, in the circumstances of poverty, and from who he distanced himself and made no inquires, and with whom, for his own political protection he wanted no direct contact, for a kidney, Davies avers that what Ekweremadu did was



exploitation, criminality, and that it was no defense to say that he acted out of love for his daughter (Weaver, 2023).

In his defense, Senator Ike Ekweremadu denied the charge, and told the court he was the victim of a scam (Orjinmo, 2023). Dr. Obeta, also, denied the charge against him and upheld that the donor was not offered a reward for his kidney and was acting altruistically (Orjinms, 2023). On her part, Beatrice denied any knowledge of the alleged conspiracy.

The London's Old Bailey Court, found Senator Ike Ekweremadu guilty of conspiracy to traffic the young street trader into Britain for his body part (Punch, 2023). Also found guilty were the wife of Senator Ekweremadu, Beatrice, and a middle-aged medical doctor, Dr. ObinnaObeta who acted as middle man in the plot. They were convicted in British court of conspiracy to exploit the man from Lagos. According to the Chief Crown Prosecutor Joanne-Jakymech, this was a horrific plot to exploit a vulnerable victim by trafficking him to the UK for the purpose of his kidney (Oluwafemi, 2023). Joanne-Jakymech, also, posits that the trio demonstrated a total disregard for the welfare, health and well being of the victim, and used their considerable influences to a high degree of control throughout, with the victim having limited understanding of what was really going (Oluwafemi, 2023).

In a related development, the Deputy Crown Prosecutor and National Modern Slavery lead at the CPS, LynetheWoodraw, avers that although it is lawful to donate a kidney yet it becomes criminal if there is a reward or other material advantage (Orjinmo, 2023). Woodraw describes the case of Ekweremadu as the first conviction for trafficking for the purpose of organ removal in England and Wales (Orjinmo, 2023; Aondover, Okuneye, & Onyejelem, T. E. 2024).

Considering the worrisome situation of the above scenario, it is obvious that there is an urgent need for aggressive media coverage. This can be done by engaging in health-related investigation aimed at interrogating the reasons. for seeking medical services abroad by Nigerian political office holders. According to Amedari and Ejidike (2021), the newspapers have exerted significant impact in playing complementary roles in an effort to advance improvement in the health sector in order to secure good health for the greatest number of the citizens in the society. The newspapers also provide enlightening function where in the people are enlightened on issues, events and developments within and outside their environment which in turn influence their lives directly or indirectly. In its power, the media have been credited with guiding and directing public and government attention to policy change initiatives towards certain issues of national importance. While considering the role of the newspapers in this regard, Gever & Ezeah, (2020) concluded that newspapers are veritable tool for advocacy on the need for better health facilities and personnel to serve the general health interests. To get sound health system with trained health workers and reduce medical tourism, the media in Nigeria need to see and take responsibility. The media need to rise up to the current health realities of frequent migration of health workers and poor health facilities in the country's health sector.

The incidence of the Senator Ike Ekweremadu's kidney harvestsaga in UK is an ample opportunity for the Nigerian media to explore these options. Since the arrest, trial and imprisonment of the embattled Deputy President of Nigeria, how have the press covered the incidence is a matter of national importance worthy of scholarly investigation. It was against this backdrop, that this study examined how the *Daily Sun*, *the Guardian*, and *Vanguard* newspapers covered the arrest, trial and imprisonment of the longest serving Deputy Senate President of Nigeria over alleged kidney harvest.



## **The Problem**

The involvement of former Deputy Senate President of the Federal Republic in a kidney harvestsaga in UK is an ample opportunity for the press to interrogate the nature of the press coverage, as well as the reason for the decay in the health sector and opportunities left for the poor Nigerians for survival. Thus, the dominant nature of the reportage on the incident, the prominence given to the reportage, and the direction of the reportage are yet not known to the researcher. If it is true as found in Alecks, (2005, p. 15) cited in Agudosy, Ikegbunam and Obiakor, (2018) that good journalism encourages good governance, what then is the take of the Nigerian press in the face of this scandal? It is in the light of the above scholarly position that this study investigates how the *Daily Sun, the Guardian, and Vanguard* newspapers covered the Senate Leader's kidney saga paying attention to details of the state of health sector in Nigeria.

## **Research Objectives**

The general objective of this study is to evaluate the press coverage of Senator Ike Ekweremadu's Kidney harvesting saga in three selected daily Nigerian newspapers. This study was guided by the following specific research objectives.

- a) To ascertain whether Nigerian newspapers gave prominent coverage to Senator Ike Ekweremadu's kidney harvest saga.
- b) To find out the frequency of coverage of Senator Ike Ekweremadu's kidney harvest saga among the select newspapers.
- c) To ascertain the media frames used in the coverage of senator Ike Ekweremadu's kidney harvest saga.
- d) To ascertain the slant of the coverage of Senator Ike Ekweremadu's kidney harvest saga.

## **Research Hypotheses**

The under-listed null hypotheses were tested by the study.

Ho1. The prominence given to the reportage on Senator Ike Ekweremadu's kidney harvesting saga has no significant relationship with the frequency of the coverage.

Ho2. The direction of the coverage of Senator Ike Ekweremadu's Kidney harvesting saga by Nigerian newspapers has no correlation with the dominant frames of the reportage.

**Theoretical Framework:** Three theories, the Social Responsibility Theory, Framing theory and Digital Generative Multimedia Tool Theory (DGMTT) were the theoretical frameworks for this study.

**Social Responsibility Theory:** The origin of the Social Responsibility theory according Uzochukwu & Ikegbunam, (2022) can be traced to the inventive thoughts and ideas of Political free thinkers and the proponents of the libertarian ideology who introduced and provided principles for the sustenance democratic leadership spirit in human society. These thoughts were made popular in Milton (1644) as cited in Uzochukwu & Ikegbunam, (2022) where the connection between the libertarian theory and social responsibility were established. This theory was further introduced into academic use by Siebert, Peterson and Schramm in 1956. What the proponents of theory have in mind was to advocate for total press freedom that can be accompanied with little or no censorship (Kobiruzaman, 2021; Ezeonyejaku, & Onyejelem, 2021).



In the views of Ikegbunam & Agudosy (2021) the backbone of the social responsibility theory is improvement in objectivity in news coverage and display of sincere responsibility in *interpretation* of events to the people in the society. This implies that the media owe it as a debt to provide sincere and objective interpretation of events and issues happening in the society to the audience. Ikegbunam & Agudosy (2021) further argued that the theory places the media on the side of humanitarianism with high sense of public accountability from the government. Significantly, in making attempts to secure accountability, the media is under obligation to ensure that efforts made by them in the interest of securing accountability for the people do not translate into acting in a way that incites the public against the government. Reporting the incidence of the Ike Ekweremmadu's kidney saga in London draws attention to the service to humanity which is one of the major functions of the press. In doing this job diligently, the media hold the government responsible and accountable over what is needed to be done to secure good health for all (Ikegbunam & Ezekwelu, (2023). While acknowledging the above responsibility of the press, Agudosy, Ikegbunam & Obiakor, 2018; Onyejelem, 2018) while citing Ekeli, 2008, p. 338) argued that the social responsibility theory has its origin from the moral principle that believes in the total defense and protection of the poor, the helpless and the underprivileged against all forms of danger.

In Social Responsibility Theory, the press is taken to be for the people and society. The tasks of the press is to make a code of conduct and follow it, to develop a standard in journalism, to make journalism better, to protect journalists and to have penalties if any journalist violates the code of conduct. This way, the facts provided by the press are analyzed and interpreted so that the people get true information and understandable news. This helps maintain social harmony by revealing social evils like corruption and discouraging other bad conducts. The media is taken as a place for the voiceless to have a voice and develop public opinions where each and every person has the right to speak, express and publish. . It is considered not an end but a tool for social development. Therefore, the objectives of media are stated to inform, document, analyze, interpret, mediate and mobilize by creating and finding solutions

**Framing Theory:** This study also finds expression in the framing theory of media effect. The theory which was put forward in 1974 by Goffman, according to Druckman, (2001) maintained that media frame is more important than the volume of coverage given to specific issue in a newspaper or any news medium. Journalists who are the news makers use interpretational strategies often known as frames to create the environment they want the people to see through their choice of words in reporting events in the societies (Chinedu-Okeke, Agbasimelo, Obi & Onyejelem, 2021). In other words, what is the news are that which the news makers decided to show to the people as the events that took place in their environment (Adeeko, 2023). These choices of words are their means of making sense of their experiences as it relates to the event that took place or the issue being reported in the media. In the views of the proponents of the theory, a story is said to be framed when it is slanted in a given direction. According to Bryant and Miron (2004) cited in Agudosy, Ikegbunam & Obiakor, (2018) the most widely used research theory in the field of communications science is framing theory which is gradually replacing the agenda setting and cultivation theories of media effect.

Asemah, Nwammuo & Nkwam-Uwaoma, (2017) posits that this theory is essential to the current study because it provides perspectives on how newspapers can project some angles about the arrest, trial and imprisonment of Senator Ike Ekweremmadu in London. Among scholars, framing of health promotion



has gained prominence in literature. However, most of the studies are conducted by people from other fields rather than that of communication and the newspaper.

The Nigeria mass media have been said to report the health tourism and related issues with different frames that tilts towards the favour of the tourists. This in turn kills exposure to the decay in the health sector as reports are mainly framed to attract pity. Mass media framing of medical tourism related issues also affect the way the media audience feel about societal health issues, how they perceive the decay in the health sector and act on related issues. All these impacts can be attributed to the fact that frames elicit the public's emotional reactions towards the health issue as reported in the media. Media framing permits the mass media to emphasize on one dimension of a health-related challenge as in the case of Ekweremmadu's kidney harvest saga. In doing so, the preference placed on one side or dimension of the matter draws public attention to the emphasized side of the matter (Nisbet, 2012). It is not less significant to not at this point that the slant of media framing of any health issue has the ability to shape the public and political attitudes towards policy interventions to improve societal health.

The major target in the use of this theory for the current study cannot be divorced from the need to understand what the media did in their framing of the Ekweremmadu's kidney saga in London with a view to exposing the dangers of medical tourism to the nation and the implication to the decay in the country's health sector. The theory was considered appropriate for the study based on the fact that the manner in which the media frame their messages influence the views held about an issue by the audience. This is to say that should the media frame their stories on Ekweremmadu's kidney saga from the perspective of negligence of public health by leaders, the people will see the action of medical tourism as a national challenge that should be discouraged. Same will happen if the stories are framed in pity perspective for the embattled Deputy Senate President.

**Digital Generative Multimedia Tool Theory (DGMTT):** The Digital Generative Multimedia Tool Theory (DGMTT) proposed by Onyejelem and Aondover (2024) provides a comprehensive framework for understanding the evolving landscape of journalism in the digital age. DGMTT posits that digital media tools significantly transform the processes of news generation, dissemination, and consumption, thereby reshaping the relationship between media producers and audiences. This theory is particularly relevant in analyzing the press coverage of significant events, such as Senator Ike Ekweremmadu's kidney harvest saga, as it emphasizes the role of multimedia in framing narratives and engaging audiences.

According to Onyejelem and Aondover (2024), the integration of various media formats—such as text, images, audio, and video—enhances storytelling by providing a richer context and deeper engagement for the audience. In the case of Ekweremmadu's saga, newspapers that utilized multimedia tools may have been able to present a more nuanced narrative that captures the complexities of the issue.

DGMTT highlights the importance of audience interaction in the news process. With the rise of digital platforms, audiences are no longer passive consumers; they actively engage with content through comments, shares, and discussions (Onyejelem & Aondover, 2024). This interaction can influence how stories are perceived and can even shape the narrative itself, making it crucial to analyze how reader engagement affected the coverage of the kidney harvest saga.



The theory emphasizes that news content is generated through a collaborative process involving both media producers and audiences (Onyejelem & Aondover, 2024a). In the context of the kidney harvest saga, the interplay between traditional reporting and user-generated content on social media platforms may have altered public discourse, raised ethical questions and highlighted societal concerns regarding organ trafficking and political accountability.

The DGMFTT framework guided the analysis of how selected Nigerian newspapers covered Senator Ekweremadu's kidney harvest saga. The study focused on the following aspects:

*Framing and Narrative Construction:* The research will examine how multimedia elements in newspaper articles influenced the framing of the saga. It will analyze the use of images, videos, and infographics to determine their impact on audience perception and understanding of the event.

*Impact of Audience Engagement:* The study investigated the extent to which audience interactions on digital platforms influenced the coverage and public perception of the saga. This includes examining comments, shares, and the overall sentiment expressed by readers.

*Influence on Public Discourse:* The research assessed how the coverage of the kidney harvest saga contributed to broader discussions about organ trafficking, ethical practices in politics, and the role of media in societal issues, as emphasized by DGMFTT (Onyejelem & Aondover, 2024b).

By applying the Digital Generative Multimedia Tool Theory, this study sought to provide insights into the dynamics of press coverage in the digital age, particularly regarding high-profile cases like Senator Ekweremadu's kidney harvest saga. Understanding how multimedia tools and audience engagement shape news narratives will contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of contemporary journalism in Nigeria.

## **The Review**

Conceptual variables relating to this Ekweremadu's kidney saga and its media coverage are reviewed in this section. In this regard, a critical review of the media reportage of health issues in Nigeria is undertaken. In every human society, the mass media have played significant roles in reflecting various aspects of the society. Importantly, the reflection of the activities and happenings in the society as it concerns the function of the media is never uniform. While some areas are mainly reflected in the media others are kept out of public domain. As its function in human society, the mass media efforts in reflecting the events in the society have been adjudged by earlier media scholars such as McQuail, (2010); Mujtaba, (2011), Onyejelem, (2024) to have the capacity to impact on individual members of society and the policy making at large. In general, the three key functions of information, education and entertainment placed onerous tasks on the media. To properly execute these functions, the mass media usually engage in the reporting of a wide range of both human activities and natural events in all areas of life. Among these subject areas are health, politics, education, sports, science and technology, environment, arts and culture, business and economy, life and style and religion, fashion, entertainment etc. In performing these functions, mass media provide information and act as a teacher in some cases by educating their audience on important topical issues that affect their live directly or indirectly. Through their roles in framing issues and setting up agenda for the people, the mass media prioritize some of the events in the society over others by frequently making reports on such events



while leaving others unreported (Nwafor, Onwe, Onyejelem, Ujebe, Omojunikanbi, Chime-Nganya, Oshibe, 2024). In this regard, they give priority to one event over others and therefore, make those events reported in their pages the talk of the town as they are being discussed by the media audience (Nwbueze, 2014; Agbanu, 2013).

A look at the events frequently covered by the Nigerian media demonstrate that the media's commitment in the coverage of different events in the society differs from one event to the other. Many scholars (Ekeanyanwu & Obianigwe, 2012) have argued that media's reports on environment are mainly neglected by reporters and media organization while politics and economy are prominently projected in the media. Further, media scholars have as well argued that events in urban areas are more heavily reported than rural events. In their study on newspaper coverage of President Buhari' ill health and medical tourism in 2018, Agudoso, Ikegbunam & Obiakor, (2018) argued that media reports on medical tourism have failed to expose the decay that bedevils the Nigerian health sector. Significantly, by paying less attention to the decay in the health sector, the people are kept out of information on the happenings in the health sector. This attitude of the media and their personnel covering the society supports the negligence of the health sector because it never gave room for an informed policy formulation towards the recovery of the dying health sector in the country.

If in their function of setting public agenda, the Nigerian media have exposed the decay in the health sector which is the major cause of medical tourism, by now, this Ekweremmadu's case would have been averted. In other words, agenda setting theory holds that mass media emphasize certain issues in such a way that media audiences or members of the public also attribute importance to such issues. This may consequently influence or shape their opinions. This can only happen when the media have interest in the matter. Considering the onus placed on the media by the social responsibility theory of the press, it is expected that the media as a profession should strive at all time to service public interest (Uzochukwu & Ikegbunam, 2023a; Nwafor, Onwe, Nweze, Onyejelem, Apeh, Oshibe, & Taiwo, 2024).

The protection of the lives of the citizens through functional medical equipment and skilled personnel is a responsibility of the government which the media should not fail to emphasize. Unfortunately, the Nigerian media celebrate government officers rather expose their lapses in executing just and fair public health policies. This is why many government officers find favour in using public fund to secure medical tourism abroad (Agudoso, et al, 2018). One major importance of making the public to see what is happening in their society is to help them know what is happening and the next step in the safety of their lives. As a public concern, reporting health matters in the society should be a matter of severe commitment on the part of the media especially on issues concerning medical tourism which is milking the country dry all time.

The three major functions of the mass media which are information, education and entertainment critically underscore the relationship between what has happened and what the media presented to the audience. The functions also explained the relationship between what the media publish and what the people make out of it. This means that what is published to a large extent determine what the audience discuss and what they think about the society. Impliedly, any decision to be taken either by the policy makers and or the masses is controlled by what the media have said about a particular area of human life covered in the media. This is so because of the ever presence media that the world has inherited. From generation to generation, people watch television, movies, listen to radio and read different print





media contents irrespective of climate and race. The level of media penetration especially in this internet age makes media an integral and constant part of human life that many cannot do without the media. In this respect, everything the people know and what they believe in is directly or indirectly being influenced by the media.

In other words, many of the beliefs that people share today about the society is what they have learnt over the years from the mass media which have been adjudged by scholars to have the ability to construct social realities (Kenix, 2011, p. 1, Asemah, 2011; Onyejelem, Ezeaka & Nwafor, 2021)).

The health of every nation reflects largely the well-being of the citizenry and partly its level of development (see Agbonifo, 1983). The importance of the health of the people in all societies was captured in Uzochukwu & Ikegbunam, (2023a) when they argued that the development of every nation is largely dependent on the health status of its population. The above views lend credence to those of Kruk, Gage, Arsenault, Jordan, Leslie, Roder-DeWan, Adeyi, Barker, Daelmans, Doubova, English, García-Elorrio, Guanais, Gureje, Hirschhorn, Jiang, Kelley, Lemango, Liljestrang, Malata, Marchant, Matsoso, Meara, Mohanan, Ndiaye, Norheim, Reddy, Rowe, Salomon, Thapa, Twum-Danso & Pate (2018); Nwafor, Amatu, Onyejelem & Eze (2021), where it was concluded that among the best ways to secure health safety of the people is through timely provision of health information to the people. The state of the health facilities and the personnel in those facilities cannot be excluded from the provision of the health information to the people. How well is the Nigerian media providing timely health information about the health facilities and skilled personnel in the country in the face of massive medical tourism among government functionaries?

## **REVIEW OF EMPIRICAL LITERATURE**

Aderibigbe and Adebayo (2022) investigated issues in organ donation and harvesting in the Nigerian health system. The target of the literature-based study is to verify the challenges of organ donation and harvest in the country. It was found that the scarcity of donors and facilities as well as medical experts in Nigeria makes such health services almost impossible in the country. The study established that Ike Ekweremmadu subscribed to taking his daughter to London as a result of lack of donor and poor health facilities in the country. This study recommended that more allocation from Nigerian Government Gross Domestic Products (GDP) should be channeled to the health sector. This study is related to the current study in the sense that it considered the health conditions in Nigeria that led to Ekweremmadu's case in London. However, the study differs from the current one in the sense that while it is a literature review that pays attention to conditions of the health sector in Nigeria and law, the current one is interested in the duties of the media as a voice to the poor masses. The gap created in the study is the fact that the health sector needed attention which this current study tries to see whether it was captured in the media reports.

In another related study, Ogbonne (2021) examined how newspapers in Nigeria reported the impact of COVID-19 on the Nigerian economy using the agenda setting theory and the content analysis research method. The study found that newspapers' dominant source of coverage is official sources whereas the straight news format leads the news genre of coverage. The study is related in the sense that they are both investigating media coverage of health-related issues but differ in target objectives and issue of concern.



Gever and Ezeah (2020) examined the media coverage of health issues with a focus on corona virus disease 2019 (COVID-19). The study used the contents analysis research method and social responsibility theory. It was found that in the midst of the pandemic, the media were busy seeking information on the control of the virus without paying attention to whether the health facilities in the country can sustain the virus. The study recommended that the media should pay attention to the public health need in a situation like that. This recommendation created a gap for this current study which seek to investigate how the media framed the kidney saga involving a serving senator who, instead of working for the improvement of the health sector in Nigeria subscribed to going to London for medical needs satisfaction.

Sanusi & Utulu, (2020) adopted content analysis research method is examining selected newspapers coverage of development news in Nigeria. The study adopted the agenda setting and social responsibility theories of mass communication. The 8 months long study found that the volume of coverage for development news was low when compared to other stories in the selected newspapers. It was also discovered that national interest dominates the coverage. The study concluded that the press should give adequate attention in the coverage of development news in the country, as well as provide human interest angle to stories in order to tackle the state of underdevelopment in the country. The study then recommended that newspapers should make it a point of duty to update the public on the strategies and measures adopted by the government to handle development projects in the country and significance should be given to coverage of development news by the selected newspapers. This study is closely related to the current one sharing the same method and related theories. however, the study is based on development generally while this one is centered on the media attention to health decay in the country in the light of the event leading to the arrest of serving senate leader of the federal republic of Nigeria.

In a closely related study, Agudoso, Ikegbunam & Obiakor (2018) examined the newspapers coverage of president Buhari's medical trip to this same London. The study adopted the content analysis research method and used the social responsibility and framing theories as its theoretical framework. In the study, it was found that the media did not pay attention to the decay in the health sector of the country but focused more on political and ethnic views of the trip irrespective of the economic waste accrual from such medical visit. It was then recommended that the media should as a matter of responsibility to the people pay attention to the public health need which has been neglected over the years by the same present that went to London. This study is mostly related to the current one but differs in the target. While the current work combined both qualitative and quantitative content analysis, the previous one is more of quantitative analysis.

## **METHODOLOGY**

This study adopted the quantitative and qualitative content analysis research approach in answering the research questions posed for the study. The choice of these approach was to enable the researcher explore both the numerical and non-numerical aspect of the job done by the select newspapers in the coverage of Senator Ike Ekweremmadu's kidney harvestsaga in London. Therefore, qualitative approach is also relevant to this study as the theme of the stories and their slants are investigated to help the researcher systematically and objectively describe and quantify phenomena, especially manifest communication content (Asemah, 2022).



*Daily Sun, Guardian and Vanguard newspapers* were selected for this study. The choice of these newspapers was informed by their wider circulation, readership and regional base. Also, one of the reasons for the choices made was accessibility of the newspapers and the researcher's discretion in what to take. The population of these newspapers studied is all editions of the select newspapers published in the month *June 2022 to May, 2023*. The choice of this period was to cover the time of his arrest (June, 2022), trial and imprisonment (May, 2023). This is a period of twelve months covering 30 editions in June, 31 in July, 31 in August, 30 in September, 31 in October, 30 in November, 31 in December, 31 in January, 29 in February, 31 in March, 30 in April, and 31 in May. This gave a total of 366 newspaper editions each of the three newspapers under study for twelve months making a total of 1,098 editions of the three newspapers.

The study employed the composite week sampling technique which allows the researcher to systematically select the sample of the study based on random selection of the days of the week per month. The days of the months under study were systematically selected weekly in a manner that no day is intentionally screened out of the sample. From the composite week sampling seven (7) editions of each of the newspapers were selected every month, as shown below (using June, 2022). This means that each month has 7 editions of the three newspapers under study making a total of 84 editions of the three newspapers. This means that the sample size of the study is 252 editions of *Daily Sun, Guardian, and Vanguard* newspapers over a one-year study period.

The sampling period for this study covered the selected editions of the three newspapers published with the period of 12 months (*June, July, August, September, October, November, December, January, February, March, April and May*) covered in the study. These months were purposively and discretionally selected considering that it was the month within which the Senator was arrested, tried and imprisoned. So, it is expected that within these months, the media will make reports about the embattled Senator and his saga in the kidney trafficking case in London. The content categories in this work are Prominence, frequency of coverage, Frames used, the news slants, depth of stories and sources of stories.

In respect to the research design adopted by this study, the most appropriate instrument for the collection of data is the coding system. Therefore, the manifest contents of the selected newspapers were coded using coding sheet carefully constructed for this research. All data generated in this study will be presented in tables and simple percentages with the implications of the data explained under. All thematic data will be analysed descriptively against the research questions. The data generated will be used to supply answers to the research questions posed for the study through which the conclusion and recommendations will be drawn. The formulated hypotheses were tested, using the chi-square goodness of fit, considered suitable because of the ordinal and nominal nature of the data garnered.



Thematic Data

Table 1: Format of coverage used in presenting Senator Ike Ekweremadu’s kidney harvesting saga in the three selected newspapers

Newspapers	News	Editorials	Features/Articles	Letter/Opinions	Cartons	Total
Daily Sun	54	2	7	13	2	78
Guardian	52	2	5	20	0	79
Vanguard	46	1	6	15	1	69
<b>Total</b>	<b>152</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>18</b>	<b>48</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>226</b>

Source: Content Analysis, 2024

The data in table 1 above represented the total number of the various editorial contents on the Senator Ike Ekweremadu’s kidney trafficking saga in the three elected newspapers, over a twelve-month study period. There were a total of 226 editorial contents, with the Guardian having the highest numbers (35%), and followed by Daily Sun with 34.5%. The Vanguard had 30.5% of the total editorial contents on the subject matter of the 226 editorial contents on the subject matter. News had a total of 152 items (67%), while letters/opinion had 48 (21%), features/articles, 18(10%); Editorials, 5(2.2%); and cartons, 3(1.3%).

Table 2: Dominant News Frames in the coverage of Senator Ike Ekweremadu’s kidney harvesting saga by the three selected newspapers

Newspapers Frames	Newspapers			Total
	Daily Sun	The Guardian	Vanguard	
Criminality Frame	32	30	28	90 (40%)
Humanitarian Frame	18	17	20	55 (24%)
Corruption Frame	0	4	0	4 (2%)
Pity Frame	22	20	16	58 (26%)
Service Negligence	6	8	5	19 (8%)
<b>Total</b>	<b>78</b>	<b>79</b>	<b>69</b>	<b>226</b>

Source: content analysis, 2024

In table 2 above, criminality frame (40%) had the highest frequency among the five dominant frames of the reportage on Senator Ike Ekweremadu’s kidney harvesting saga in the three selected newspapers. This was followed by pity frame (26%), which accounted for 58 editorial contents. Humanitarian frames accounted for 24% (55) of the total editorial contents while corruption frame and service negligence accounted for 2% and 8% of the editorial contents respectively.



**Table 3: The depth (length) of the editorial contents in the coverage of Senator Ike Ekweremadu’s kidney harvesting sagas by the three selected newspapers.**

Editorial contents	Length of Stories			Total
	1-250 words	251 – 499 words	500 words and above	
News	60	70	22	152
Articles/Features	-	-	18	5
Editorial comments	-	-	5	5
Opinions/letters	22	18	8	48
Cartoons	3	-	-	3
<b>Total</b>	<b>86 (38%)</b>	<b>88 (39%)</b>	<b>53 (23%)</b>	<b>226</b>

Source: content Analysis, 2024

In table 3 above, the data revealed a total of 85 editorial contents, representing 38% had between 1-250 words while 88 contents on the subject matter (39%) had between 251 words to 499 words. Editorial contents, with 500 words and above appeared 53 times (23%). This represented a fairly incisive reportage of the Senator Ike Ekweremadu’s organ harvest coverage. The data on the table above are further represented as a histogram, as shown below:

**Table 4: Prominence (placement) of the reportage on Senator Ike Ekweremadu’s kidney harvesting saga by the three selected newspapers.**

Placement	Newspapers			Total
	Daily	Guardian	Vanguard	
Front Page	32	28	30	90 (40%)
Inside Page lead	20	17	15	52 (23%)
Inside Page	18	20	14	52 (23%)
Back Page	8	14	10	32 (14%)
<b>Total</b>	<b>78</b>	<b>79</b>	<b>69</b>	<b>226</b>

Source: Content Analysis 2024

In table 4 above, four (4) placement categories were devised (front page, inside page lead, inside page, and back page). The data revealed that 40% of the total editorial contents (90) on Senator Ike Ekweremadu, published by the three selected newspapers were on the front page. Also, the data revealed that a total of 52 items, (23%) appeared for each of the inside lead stories and inside stories in the three selected newspapers. A total of 32 items (14%) appeared at the back pages of the newspapers selected for the study. The data on this table implied that the selected newspapers gave



prominence to the coverage of Senator Ike Ekweremdu’s kidney harvestsaga. Expectedly, this is much so considering the status of the person involved and the novelty of the case in England, Wales and Nigeria. The data on this table were used to test our research hypothesis number one

**Table 5: Proportion of the reportage on the dominant direction (plant) of the coverage given to Senator Ike Ekweremadu’s kidney harvesting saga.**

Direction/Plant	Newspapers			Total
	Daily Sun	Guardian	Vanguard	
Favourable	18	23	20	61 (27%)
Neutral	22	24	20	66 (29%)
Unfavourable	38	32	29	99 (44%)
<b>Total</b>	<b>78</b>	<b>79</b>	<b>69</b>	<b>226</b>

Source: Content Analysis 2024

In table 5 above, the data revealed that the three selected newspapers gave unfavourable coverage to the Senator Ike Ekweremadu’s kidney harvesting sagas. A total of Ninety Nine (99) editorial contents, representing 44% or 158 on the subject matter was unfavourable. There was an almost an equal distribution of the editorial contents which were favourable and Neutral. While the favourable contents had 61 items (27%), the neutral contents had items (28%). The implication of this data is that the press is a critical institution in trail moments.

**Table 6: Proportion of the Reportage on Senator Ike Ekweremadu’s kidney Harvestsagas according to frequency category**

Frequency	Newspapers			Total
	Daily Sun	Guardian	Vanguard	
1 – 5 days	22	18	16	56 (25%)
6 – 10 days	20	21	20	61 (27%)
11 – 15 days	10	12	10	32 (14%)
16 – 20 days	12	10	8	30 (13%)
21 – 25 days	12	12	8	32 (14%)
26 – 30 days	2	6	7	15 (7%)
<b>Total</b>	<b>78</b>	<b>79</b>	<b>69</b>	<b>226</b>

Source: Researcher’s Content Analysis, 2024



In the table above, a total of 56 editorial contents (25%) published by the three selected newspapers on Senator Ike Ekweremadu’s saga appeared at least ones every five days. Sixty-one (61) contents (27%) appeared between 6 – 10 days while 32 contents (14%) appeared every 11- 15 days. Furthermore, the data revealed that 30 contents (13%) and 32 contents (14%) appeared between 16 – 20 days and between 21 – 25 days, respectively. Further still, the data indicated that for contents appearing at least every 26 – 30 days, there were 15 contents (7%). This implies a very good coverage in terms of frequency, which stems from the topical and critical nature of the issue involved.

### Test of Hypotheses

#### Test of Hypothesis One

H1: The prominence given to the reportage on Senator Ike Ekweremadu’s kidney harvest saga by the three selected daily national newspapers has a significant relationship with the frequency of coverage.

To test the above hypothesis, the data on table 4 were used. From the table, we construct a 3(2) contingency.

#### Operative Assumptions

- i. Level of significance = 0.05
- ii. Degree of freedom (df) = (R-1) (C-1) = (4-1) (3-1) – 6

∴ The critical value =  $\chi^2_{(0.05,4)} = \chi.7$

The test statistic =  $\chi^2 = \frac{\sum (O_i - e_i)^{e_i}}{e_i}$

Decision Rule

Reject  $H_0$  if  $\chi^2_{cal} > \chi^2_{(0.05,4)}$ , otherwise do not reject  $H_0$ .

#### Conclusion:

Since our  $\chi^2_{cal} = 3.0$   $\chi^2_{(0.05,4)} = 2.7$ , we therefore reject  $H_0$  and conclude that the prominence given to the reportage on Senator Ike Ekweremadu by *Daily Sun, the Guardian and Vanguard* Newspapers had a significant relationship with the frequency of the reportage.

#### Test of Hypothesis Two

H0: The direction of the reportage on Senator Ike Ekweremadu’s kidney harvesting saga by the *Daily Sun, The Guardian and Vanguard* newspapers has no correlation with the dominant frames of the coverage.

H2: The direction of the reportage on Senator Ike Ekweremadu’s kidney harvesting saga by the *Daily Sun, The Guardian and Vanguard* newspapers has a correlation with the dominant frames of the coverage.

To test the hypothesis above, the data on table 2 were used. Therefore we construct a 2(2) contingency table.

#### Operative Assumptions

- i. Level of significance = 0.05
- ii. Degree of freedom (df) = (R-1) (C-1) = 2 x 2 = 4

∴ The critical value =  $\chi^2_{(0.05,4)} = 1.24$

The test statistic =  $\chi^2 = \frac{\sum (O_i - e_i)^{e_i}}{e_i}$



We then compute the expected frequency as shown in appendix IV

Decision Rule: Reject  $H_0$  if  $\chi^2_{cal} > \chi^2_{(0.05,4)}$  otherwise do not reject  $H_0$ .

**Conclusion:**

Since our  $\chi^2_{cal} = 1.5 > \chi^2_{(0.05,4)} = 1.2$ , we therefore reject  $H_0$  and conclude that the direction of the reportage on Senator Ike Ekweremadu's kidney harvesting saga by *Daily Sun*, *The Guardian* and *Vanguard* newspapers has a correlation with the dominant frames of the coverage.

**FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS**

Our first finding revealed that the prominence given to the reportage on Senator Ike Ekweremadu's kidney harvesting saga by *Daily Sun*, *The Guardian* and *Vanguard* Newspapers had a significant relationship with frequency of coverage. At 4 degree of freedom and 0.05 level of significance, our critical value of 2.7 was less than our calculated chi-square of 3. We therefore rejected the null hypothesis, while we accepted the alternate hypothesis. This finding is in tandem with the Social Responsibility theory of the press, which requires the press to provide sincere and objective interpretations of events and issues happening in the society to the audience. Since the Social Responsibility theory places the press on the side of public sphere, with high sense of public accountability, the issue of prominence (placement) becomes germane in the principles of the Social Responsibility theory. Again, our first finding is in alliance with the Framing theory, one of the theoretical foundations for the study. As a news maker, the press uses interpretational strategies to create the environment that gives the news important space in public domain.

Nevertheless, our first finding is at variance with the study by Agudosy, Ikegbunam & Obiakor (2018) in their evaluation of the newspaper's coverage of President Muhammadu Buhari medical trip to London. Agudosy, Ikegbunam & Obiakor (2018), who anchored their study on social Responsibility Theory and Framing Theory failed to indicate if prominence was given to the reportage of president Buhari's medical trip to London. In a closely related study, "Coverage of corruption in the health system in Nigerian Print Media, Abba-Aji, Balabanova, Hutchinson and Mckee (2022), failed to highlight the issue of prominence in their study. Thus, this present study is at variance with the study by Abba-Aji, et al. Furthermore, our first finding varies with the study by Sanusi & Utulu (2020) in Newspaper coverage of development news in Nigeria. Sanusi and Utulu were silent on the issue of prominence in their study.

Our second hypothesis, which stated that the direction of the reportage on Senator Ike Ekweremadu's kidney harvesting saga by *Daily Sun*, *The Guardian* and *Vanguard* Newspapers has a correlation with the dominant frames of the coverage, was supported by our empirical test. Our  $\chi^2_{cal}$  of 1.5 was greater than our critical value of 1.24, at 0.05 level of significance and at 4 degree of freedom. We rejected the null hypothesis and concluded as stated above. This finding aligns with the framing theory of the press, which is described as the way interpretational strategies are used to slant a particular issue in a given direction. The framing theory is very critical to their study because the ways journalists couch their headlines on the subject matter are capable of slanting the matter in a given direction. Some of the headlines on the story read: "Nigeria: kidney plot, politician Ike Ekweremadu jailed," "From Parliament to Prison-UK Organ Harvesting Trial of Ekweremadu", "Senior Nigerian Politician jailed over illegal UK Organ Harvesting plot", "Nigerian Senator found Guilty of Trafficking man to UK for his Organ".





The foregoing headlines portrayed some of the directions (slants) of the reportage on Senator Ike Ekweremadu's organ harvesting plot. These, to a great extent have the capacity to sway public opinions and perceptions about topical issues. Nevertheless, studies by Sanusi & Utulu (2020), Agudosi, Ikegbunam & Obiakor (2018) did not reveal the outcome of the direction of coverage in their studies. Thus, our second hypothesis is at variance with the outcome of these studies.

## **CONCLUSION**

From the foregoing findings, this study concluded that Nigerian Press gave prominence to the coverage of Senator Ike Ekweremadu's kidney harvesting saga. This was demonstrated in the number of editorial contents which appeared on the front pages of the newspapers under review compare to the contents which appeared on the inside and back pages of the studied newspapers. Thus prominence as a critical genre in newspapers' content analyses, reveals how important and topical an issue is considered by the newspapers and the public sphere. It is, therefore, without doubts that between the time of his arrest in June 2022 and time of his incarceration in May, 2023, Nigerian citizens anxiously and ravenously read about the unfolding event in the pages of newspapers. Newspapers help to assuage the quest of Nigerian citizens on their matter by providing catchy and provocations headlines about the issue in their front pages, as lead stories or as inside lea stories.

It is also, concluded that the direction of the coverage given to Senator Ike Ekweremadu's kidney harvesting saga by Nigerian newspapers is unfavourable. This is portrayed in the dominant frame of the reportage on the issue, which titled towards criminal frame. From the perspective of criminality frame, Nigerian newspapers demonstrated unfavourable stance on the subject matter. This is germane, given the role of newspapers (media) as social crusader and voice of the voiceless. With this position, the newspapers did not project the incessant medical tourism among Nigerian leaders, as well as the deplorable state of the Nigerian health sector.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

In line with the foregoing findings and conclusion, it hereby recommended as follows:

1. Nigerian press should uphold the virtue of giving prominence to important topical national/international issues.
2. Nigerian press should apply the principle of framing to make the public understand the nature of the issues under review.
3. Nigerian press should use the opportunity of the incessant medial tourism among Nigerian leader to initiate comprehensive and systematic campaign for improved medical facilitates in Nigeria.

## **Ethical clearance**

Ethical consent was sought and obtained from the participants used in this study. They were made to understand that the exercise was purely for academic purposes, and their participation was voluntary.

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### **Conflict of interest**

There is no conflict of interest

### **Authors' Contributions**

Dr. Francis Obidike Nnaemeka and Nkiruka Patience Okoye conceived the study, including the design, and wrote the initial manuscript. Prof Chinedu Igboeli analysed and interpreted the data, while Dr. Timothy Ekeledirichukwu Onyejelem joined in collating the data and did the literature review including proof reading of the manuscript. All the authors read and approved the final manuscript for publication in its current form, and are responsible for the contents and similarity index.

### **Availability of data and materials.**

The datasets on which conclusions were made for this study are available on reasonable request.

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