

Awka South Residents' Response to Media Coverage of Paternity Fraud

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Abstract

This study examined the response of residents of Awka South Local Government Area (LGA) in Anambra State, Nigeria, to media coverage of paternity fraud. The objectives were to determine the extent of exposure to media coverage, identify the channels of exposure, assess belief in the media reports, and investigate how residents used these reports. A survey research method was employed, and a multi-stage sampling procedure was used to select 300 participants from a population of 271,342. Data were collected through a structured questionnaire and analyzed using simple percentages. Findings revealed high exposure to media coverage of paternity fraud, with social media and online news websites being the predominant channels. Residents demonstrated high believability in media reports on paternity fraud and primarily used these reports for informational and enlightenment purposes, with entertainment being a secondary motivation. The study highlighted the critical role of media in shaping public attitudes toward family and societal issues, underscoring the importance of accurate and balanced media coverage. The study recommends that media outlets continue to focus on presenting fact-based, informative reports on paternity fraud to better inform public understanding.

Keywords: paternity fraud, media exposure, social media, public belief, informational use

Introduction

In February 2021, social media was thrown into a frenzy when a judge of the Delta State High Court, Justice Anthony Okorodas, revealed that he was not the biological father of the three children from his marriage with his former wife, Celia. A statement signed by the jurist, which was widely reported in the media, claimed that Celia left the union when the youngest child (a 17-year-old at the time of this revelation) was just six. Okorodas, who said he was traumatized by the discovery, alleged that he first got information from an anonymous source during the COVID-19 lockdown in April 2020 that the three children were not his. This, according to him, led him to seek a DNA test which confirmed the claim in August 2020. In the words of the judicial officer, "I have taken the decision to address the press in respect of certain traumatic developments that have arisen between me and my ex-wife, Celia (surname withheld) of the Yenagoa Local Government Area in Bayelsa State.

The DNA test result, which came out in September 2020, confirmed that I was not the biological father of the child... Although... [my wife] initially strongly insisted that I was the biological father, she has since confessed to having the child with another man during our marriage. Okorodas added that following the development, his current wife “had to agree to have DNA tests on the four children of our marriage” (George, 2023).

Stories like the above have become common in recent years in Nigeria as alleged and proven cases of paternity fraud tear families apart. Interest in paternity testing has been growing as concern about paternity fraud increases in the country (Kareem, 2023; Ogundipe et al., 2021; Efut & Chiagoziem, 2021; Ajonumah & Dublin-Green, 2019). According to Kareem (2023), paternity fraud happens when a woman falsely claims that a man is the biological father of her child thus leading him to believe he has fathered a child when, in fact, he has not. This deception often stems from various motivations including financial gain, social status or concealment of infidelity.

Evidence in recent years reveals a high rate of paternity fraud in Nigeria (Kareem, 2023; Efut & Chiagoziem, 2021 and Ogundipe et al., 2021). Ogundipe et al. (2021) report that Nigeria ranks second highest in paternity fraud in the world as data show that three out of ten Nigerian men are not biological fathers of their children. Also, a study conducted by the Nigerian Institute of Medical Research (NIMR) found that 27 per cent of paternity tests conducted in Lagos State revealed cases of paternity fraud (Kareem (2023). Similarly, a report published in 2016 indicates that about 30 per cent of men who took DNA tests in Nigeria to determine paternity discovered they were not the biological fathers of their children (Simwa, 2023).

The crisis of trust bedeviling the matrimonial institution is evident in the fact that majority of DNA tests performed in Nigeria is for determination of paternity. Data from a leading test centre in Lagos state show that over 89 percent of tests were for purpose of determining real biological father. Secondly, majority of this number obtained this test not for legal or immigration purpose but for personal reasons (Kareem, 2023).

In Nigeria, as in many parts of the world, family structures are deeply rooted in traditional values and cultural expectations. Paternity is an essential component of family identity, and the legitimacy of paternity is often intertwined with issues of inheritance, social status, and

individual honour (Onyekwelu, 2021; Madu, 2020). Consequently, when the subject of paternity fraud surfaces in public discourse, it can elicit strong emotions and polarized responses. While some view the issue as a breach of trust that undermines family integrity, others may perceive it as a problem exacerbated by systemic societal flaws, such as gender inequality or economic hardship (Abubakar, 2022; Muanya & Ezea, 2018).

The role of the media in framing such issues has been pivotal in guiding public attitudes. Media outlets can either sensationalize these issues or provide a nuanced exploration of the underlying causes and consequences of paternity fraud (Hall & Stevens, 2018; Lacy & Benoit, 2015). By performing the above role, the media potentially contributes in shaping public opinion on paternity fraud just as it does in regard to other social issues. Traditional media, including radio, television, and newspapers, along with the rapid rise of digital media platforms, have become key channels through which information and narratives on paternity fraud are disseminated (Lichter & Qiu, 2016). The portrayal of paternity fraud in the media, particularly through sensationalized or investigative reporting, has the potential to stir public reaction, leading to shifts in how society views the concept of fatherhood, the role of mothers, and the rights of children (Hall & Stevens, 2018).

Awka South local government area of Anambra State, with its dynamic mix of urban and traditional influences, offered an ideal setting for this study. The city is home to a diverse population, including university students, civil servants, traders, and the population is predominantly of the Igbo ethnic group, known for their distinct cultural practices and societal norms (Ofoegbu, 2019). The exposure to national and international media, alongside local news outlets, plays a crucial role in shaping public discourse (Ezeani & Okey, 2017; Nwosu, 2016). With the rise of social media platforms and the growing reach of broadcast media (Okafor, 2018), the manner in which paternity fraud is portrayed is very likely to have an impact on how individuals within Awka South LGA perceive and respond to such incidents.

Statement of the Problem

Paternity fraud is a growing social issue that has significant emotional, psychological, and financial consequences for individuals involved. However, the extent to which the public is aware of this issue and how they respond to media coverage appears inadequately explored. Media plays a crucial role in shaping public perceptions and attitudes toward various societal issues, including paternity fraud (Hall & Stevens, 2018). Given the widespread dissemination of information through various media channels, it is important to understand how audiences engage with, believe, and use media reports on paternity fraud. In Awka South LGA, residents are exposed to diverse media platforms, including traditional outlets such as radio, television, and newspapers, as well as digital media like social media and online news. However, the degree of exposure to paternity fraud stories and the credibility with which these reports are regarded seem unclear. Additionally, the ways in which residents use media coverage of paternity fraud in their daily lives – whether to inform personal beliefs, influence opinions about family dynamics, or guide social behavior – are apparently under-researched.

Objectives of the Study

This work aimed at examining response to media coverage of paternity fraud among residents Awka South local government area of Anambra state. The following were the specific objectives:

1. To determine the extent to which residents of Awka South were exposed to media coverage of paternity fraud.
2. To find out the channels through which residents of Awka South were exposed to media coverage of paternity fraud.
3. To ascertain the extent to which residents of Awka South believed media reports on paternity fraud.
4. To find out what use residents of Awka South made of media reports on paternity fraud.

Literature Review

The study of media's role in shaping public opinion and behaviour is well-established, with numerous studies indicating that media coverage influences how audiences perceive societal issues. In the context of paternity fraud, media representations have the potential to significantly affect public awareness, beliefs, and social practices (Hall & Stevens, 2018; Lacy & Benoit, 2015). Paternity fraud refers to a situation where a mother knowingly misrepresents the biological father of her child, leading to legal, financial, and emotional consequences for the falsely identified father (Kareem, 2023; Ogundipe et al., 2021). While paternity fraud is a growing issue, its representation in the media and the way audiences respond to it have received limited scholarly attention, especially in African contexts like Nigeria.

Previous research has shown that exposure to media coverage influences public understanding of various social issues. For instance, a study by Nwabueze (2018) found that Nigerians who frequently consumed media coverage on social issues like domestic violence were more likely to recognize the seriousness of these issues. Media plays a role in both informing and framing public discourse about societal challenges, often highlighting the most sensational aspects of a story to attract attention. While there are few studies specifically addressing exposure to media coverage of paternity fraud in Nigeria, literature on the role of media in Africa suggests that exposure to various social issues, including crime, corruption, and family dynamics, has a notable impact on public awareness (Tufté & Hovden, 2017; Mba, 2015; Adelaja, 2015). In Nigeria, radio and television remain dominant platforms for news dissemination, with social media increasingly gaining traction, especially among the younger generation (Oladele, 2020). Given the growing prominence of paternity fraud as a social issue in Nigeria, it is reasonable to assume that media coverage is shaping public perceptions, though the extent of this exposure remains largely unquantified.

Furthermore, studies in other contexts have highlighted how exposure to media coverage on issues of family and personal identity can shape societal views. For instance, American studies by Lichter and Qiu (2016) found that media coverage of family-related issues such

as custody battles and paternity disputes increased public awareness and altered perceptions of family dynamics. This suggests that media coverage of paternity fraud may similarly influence how Nigerians understand and respond to family-related issues. Media channels through which audience may be exposed to media coverage of paternity fraud can range from traditional outlets like newspapers, radio, and television, to newer platforms such as social media, blogs, and online news outlets. Studies show that exposure to news through different media channels is associated with differing levels of impact (Soola & Ojebode, 2013; Mwaura, 2012). Traditional media, like radio and television, have a broad reach in Africa, especially among older generations and rural populations. In contrast, younger audiences tend to rely more heavily on digital media, including social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram (Ojebode, 2018).

Nigerians are increasingly turning to social media for news and social discourse. A report by the Nigerian Communications Commission (2019) highlighted the rapid growth of internet penetration in Nigeria, with millions of Nigerians gaining access to mobile phones and internet services. This has created a more connected and digitally literate society, which increasingly interacts with media coverage of social issues, including paternity fraud. As such, social media serves as an essential platform for the dissemination and discussion of paternity fraud stories. The framing of paternity fraud stories across different channels may also differ. Traditional media often adhere to more structured journalistic standards, focusing on the facts and legal aspects of paternity fraud cases. In contrast, social media platforms tend to amplify personal narratives and opinions, sometimes sensationalizing or emotionalizing issues (Civila & Lugo-Ocando, 2024; Ahmed, Cho & Jaidka, 2019; Guggenheim, Jang, Bae & Neuman, 2015). Studies by Lacy and Benoit (2015) have shown that media coverage on social media is often more sensationalistic and opinion-driven compared to traditional news sources, which may impact how individuals perceive the issue of paternity fraud.

Understanding the channels through which audiences are exposed to media coverage of paternity fraud is crucial for this study, as it will reveal the different levels of engagement and influence each platform has on shaping public opinion. Different channels may play

varying roles in how the public is informed, persuaded, or emotionally impacted by coverage of paternity fraud. Trust in the media is a significant factor in determining how information is accepted and acted upon by the public. The credibility of media sources greatly influences audience attitudes toward issues presented in the media (Molyneux, 2019). In Nigeria, media credibility is often questioned due to concerns over sensationalism, bias, and misinformation. A study by Ogunleye (2021) found that a significant proportion of Nigerians view media reports with skepticism, particularly regarding sensational stories that focus on criminal or family-related matters.

Furthermore, research on belief in media reports suggests that the way paternity fraud is framed in the media – whether as an isolated incident, a widespread issue, or a systemic problem – can shape how individuals interpret the information presented. Media representations that emphasize the emotional and moral dimensions of paternity fraud may evoke stronger emotional reactions and lead audiences to either support or condemn the parties involved. On the other hand, more neutral, fact-based reporting might lead audiences to assess the issue in a more measured way. The level of belief in media reports on paternity fraud may also depend on the individual's prior knowledge or experiences with family-related issues. Studies show that individuals with personal experiences related to a particular issue are more likely to believe media reports on that issue. For instance, a study by Johnson and Williams (2017) on media trust found that people who had been victims of family-related fraud or legal disputes were more likely to trust media coverage on similar issues.

Media reports on paternity fraud may serve different purposes for different individuals: some may use these reports to inform their understanding of family issues, while others may turn to them for entertainment, social discourse, or to reaffirm existing beliefs about gender, family, and morality. In the Nigerian context, media reports on paternity fraud might inform public discourse and influence attitudes toward fatherhood, gender roles, and social justice (Ogunleye, 2021). For instance, reports that highlight the emotional and legal consequences of paternity fraud could encourage discussions on the need for legal reforms or raise awareness about the importance of genetic testing in determining paternity

(Nwabueze, 2018). Additionally, media reports may influence attitudes toward gender relations and trust within relationships, contributing to broader discussions about the rights and responsibilities of fathers, mothers, and children in Nigerian society (Ojebode, 2018; Adegoke, 2017). Studies have shown that individuals often make personal decisions based on media content. For instance, a study by Hall and Stevens (2018) found that media portrayals of family law cases influenced people's views on marriage and child custody. Similarly, media reports on paternity fraud could lead audiences to reflect on their own relationships and possibly take preventive actions, such as engaging in paternity testing or re-evaluating their trust in partners (Hall & Stevens, 2018; Johnson & Williams, 2017).

Theoretical Framework

Awka residents' response to media coverage of paternity fraud can be understood through the lens of the Uses and Gratifications Theory (UGT), which posits that audiences actively seek out media to satisfy specific needs, such as information, entertainment, or social integration (Katz, Blumler, & Gurevitch, 1973). UGT emphasizes that individuals are not passive recipients of media messages but rather engage with media content based on their own motivations and desires. In the context of this study, the theory can help explain why Awka residents consume media coverage of paternity fraud, and how such coverage fulfills their informational, emotional, or social needs. Residents may turn to media reports on paternity fraud for various reasons: to stay informed about societal issues, to understand the legal and emotional ramifications of paternity fraud, or to reflect on personal relationships. UGT suggests that media exposure may lead individuals to re-evaluate their beliefs about fatherhood, trust in relationships, and the importance of legal reforms such as paternity testing. Furthermore, it can provide a platform for residents to engage in social discourse, discuss family issues, and influence attitudes toward gender roles and social justice. By examining the motivations behind media consumption and the gratifications derived from such exposure, this study aimed to uncover the broader impact of media coverage on public opinion and behavior in Awka.

Method

This study employed a survey research method to examine the responses of Awka South residents to media coverage of paternity fraud. The research area was Awka South Local Government Area of Anambra State, Nigeria, with the population consisting of residents within this area and numbering 271, 342 (National Population Commission, 2022). The sample for this study was 300 as determined based on the recommendation by Comrey and Lee (1992) that 300 is a good sample size for a population running into thousands. A multi-stage sampling procedure was employed in selecting participants for the study. The first stage involved selecting towns within Awka South, followed by the selection of villages within those towns. In the third stage, specific housing units were randomly selected, and in the final stage, individual respondents were chosen from the selected housing units.

Data were collected using a structured questionnaire, which was designed to gather both demographic information and responses related to the participants' exposure to and beliefs about media coverage of paternity fraud. The data collected were analyzed quantitatively using simple percentages.

Discussion of Results**Preliminary Data**

A total of 294 completed copies of the questionnaire were returned out of the 300 distributed, implying that the response rate was 98%. This high response rate indicated strong engagement from the participants, suggesting the reliability and representativeness of the sample, which enhances the validity of the findings and their generalizability to the target population. The demographic analysis of the sample showed a broad age distribution, with the majority (55%) of respondents aged between 18 and 35 years. Gender-wise, 60% of the participants were female, 39% were male, and 1% identified as other. Regarding educational attainment, 10% of respondents had no formal education, 30% completed primary education, 40% attended secondary school, and 20% had completed tertiary education. These findings indicated a predominance of young, mostly female respondents, with a varied level of educational backgrounds, which could provide valuable context for understanding the responses to media coverage of paternity fraud in the study area.

Exposure to Media Reports on Paternity Fraud

Data showed that 40% of respondents reported encountering media reports on paternity fraud "sometimes," while 35% reported "rarely" and 15% "often." Only 5% encountered it "very often." In the past month, 50% of respondents had seen 1–3 stories, 25% had seen 4–6, and 10% had seen 7 or more. When asked about attention, 45% said they gave "somewhat" of their attention, 25% gave "a lot," and 15% gave "very much." Regarding the adequacy of media coverage, 60% agreed that it adequately informed the public, while 20% disagreed. All this shows that there was high exposure to media reports on paternity fraud among residents of Awka South LGA.

The above finding aligns with several studies that highlight the growing influence of media in shaping public awareness about societal issues. Previous studies like Nwabueze (2018) and Adelaja (2015) found that frequent exposure to media coverage of social issues in Nigeria led to an increased recognition of their significance, much like paternity fraud in the current study. This indicates that when media coverage is widespread, it plays a critical role in raising awareness and framing public perceptions of social issues.

Similarly, this finding can be understood through the lens of the Uses and Gratifications Theory (UGT), which posits that individuals actively seek out media to fulfill specific needs, such as information, social interaction, or entertainment. In the case of paternity fraud, residents of Awka South may be using media to satisfy informational needs, seeking to understand the nature, legal implications, and emotional consequences of such cases. UGT suggests that people's active role in selecting media sources is guided by their desire for information that resonates with their personal concerns or societal interests.

Moreover, the high exposure may reflect the increasing presence of paternity fraud in public discourse, spurred by media outlets emphasizing sensational stories or personal narratives. This aligns with earlier research by Lichter and Qiu (2016), who found that media coverage of family-related issues, such as custody battles or paternity disputes, significantly impacted public perceptions of family dynamics. It is likely that media coverage in Awka South, through various channels, has not only raised awareness about

paternity fraud but has also engaged residents with the topic, leading to their active consumption of information. Overall, the high exposure in this study supports the view that media coverage, driven by the public's need for information, significantly influences the understanding and response to social issues like paternity fraud.

Channel of Exposure to Media Reports on Paternity Fraud

Data revealed that many respondents (55%) reported using social media, while 30% preferred online news websites, and only 10% used television. Regarding the most comprehensive coverage of paternity fraud, 45% of respondents identified social media as the primary source, followed by online news websites at 35%. In terms of effectiveness, 70% of participants believed social media is an effective platform for discussing issues like paternity fraud. When asked about frequency, 40% of respondents indicated they use social media “often” or “very often” to engage with such topics. All these indicate that social media and online news websites were the predominant channels of exposure to reports on paternity fraud among residents of Awka South LGA.

This is consistent with recent trends in media consumption across Nigeria and other parts of the world ((Civila & Lugo-Ocando, 2024; Oladele, 2020; Guggenheim, Jang, Bae & Neuman, 2015). According to Oladele (2020), digital platforms such as social media and online news outlets have gained significant traction, particularly among younger audiences in Nigeria. These platforms offer more immediate and accessible news content compared to traditional media like radio, television, and newspapers. In Awka South, the preference for social media and online news websites highlights the growing reliance on digital media to access information about social issues such as paternity fraud.

This finding is also aligned with the Uses and Gratifications Theory (UGT), which suggests that individuals actively select media channels based on their needs and desires. According to UGT, people are motivated to engage with media that satisfies their informational, social, or entertainment needs. In the context of paternity fraud, residents of Awka South may turn to social media platforms (e.g., Facebook, Twitter) and online news sources for immediate, easily accessible updates and diverse viewpoints. These platforms not only

provide factual reports but also create spaces for discussion and interaction, satisfying the social and informational needs of users.

Moreover, as Ojebode (2018) emphasized, social media platforms often serve as both news sources and forums for public discourse, allowing users to engage with stories in real time. This interactive nature of social media allows individuals to participate in discussions, express opinions, and share personal experiences related to issues like paternity fraud, which might not be as prevalent in traditional media formats.

In summary, the finding that social media and online news are the dominant channels for exposure to paternity fraud coverage supports UGT by showing that residents actively seek out these platforms for both informational and social engagement. This preference for digital media reflects broader trends in media consumption in Nigeria, where convenience, interactivity, and immediacy are key factors (Oladele, 2020; Nwabueze, 2018).

Believability of Media Reports on Paternity Fraud

The analysis of belief in media reports on paternity fraud indicates a high level of trust in the information presented. A significant portion of respondents (45%) reported that they believe the information presented in media reports about paternity fraud “very much,” and 25% said they believe it “completely.” Only 5% indicated that they believe it “not at all,” suggesting overall high believability in the media coverage.

Regarding the accuracy of media reports, 70% of respondents agreed that the media accurately represents the realities of paternity fraud, while only 15% disagreed. This further supports the high level of trust placed in media reports on the subject. Additionally, when asked about sensationalism in media coverage, 60% of respondents felt that the information presented is not sensationalized for dramatic effect, whereas 25% were unsure, and 15% believed it to be sensationalized. This indicates that most respondents perceive media reports as factual rather than exaggerated.

Finally, 55% of respondents felt that media coverage of paternity fraud impacts public opinion “a lot,” and 30% felt it impacts the public “very much.” Only 5% indicated that media coverage has no impact on public opinion. This suggests that respondents believe media reports on paternity fraud play a significant role in shaping public perceptions and opinions about the issue. Overall, the data showed high trust and believability in media coverage of paternity fraud among respondents.

This finding aligns with studies on media trust, such as one by Molyneux (2019), who noted that trust in media is crucial in shaping how individuals accept and act upon information. In this study, the residents’ high level of belief in media coverage suggests that they view the information as reliable and trustworthy, which can influence their perceptions and understanding of the issue.

This finding can be interpreted through the Uses and Gratifications Theory (UGT), which posits that individuals actively seek media content that satisfies their specific needs. One of these needs is the desire for reliable information. The high believability of media coverage on paternity fraud indicates that the residents of Awka South are likely seeking media sources they can trust for information on this issue. In turn, the media, through various channels, meets these informational needs by providing content that appears factual and grounded.

Additionally, previous research by Ogunleye (2021) found that Nigerians tend to trust media reports, particularly when they align with their existing beliefs or when the media adhere to perceived standards of professionalism and credibility. The high believability in this study may also reflect the public’s increasing reliance on credible news sources to make informed decisions about societal issues, especially one as emotionally and legally complex as paternity fraud. As UGT suggests, when media outlets fulfill the need for reliable and meaningful information, audiences are more likely to believe and internalize the messages they encounter.

Simply put, the high believability in media reports on paternity fraud among residents of Awka South underscores the media's role in shaping public understanding of sensitive issues. This aligns with the theoretical premise of UGT, as people actively seek trustworthy sources to meet their informational needs, leading to higher levels of belief in the content provided.

Use of Media Reports on Paternity Fraud

The analysis of respondents' use of media reports about paternity fraud reveals significant patterns in how the media is utilized for different purposes: information, enlightenment, and entertainment. Regarding the informational use, 65% of respondents indicated that they primarily used media reports to gain knowledge about paternity fraud, with 40% reporting they use it "often" or "very often" for this purpose. This suggests that the majority of respondents turned to the media for factual updates and insights on the issue.

For enlightenment purposes, 55% of participants stated that they used media coverage of paternity fraud to better understand the societal, legal, and emotional implications of the issue. A substantial number (30%) said they used the media for enlightenment "sometimes," indicating an active interest in understanding the broader implications of paternity fraud beyond the immediate facts.

In terms of entertainment, 25% of respondents acknowledged using media reports on paternity fraud for entertainment, with a smaller number (10%) using it "very often" for this purpose. This suggests that, while entertainment played a role in engagement with media on the topic, it was a less significant factor compared to informational and enlightenment uses.

Overall, the data revealed that media reports on paternity fraud were most commonly used for informational and enlightenment purposes, with entertainment being a secondary motivation. This highlighted the importance of media in shaping public awareness and understanding of complex social issues like paternity fraud.

The finding that residents of Awka South LGA mostly uses media reports on paternity fraud for informational and enlightenment purposes, with entertainment being a secondary motivation, aligns with previous research that emphasizes the importance of media as a tool for acquiring knowledge and understanding societal issues. Research by Hall and Stevens (2018) have shown that media is often consumed for its ability to inform and educate the public on complex topics. This suggests that, in the case of paternity fraud, residents are more interested in gaining insights into the issue, including its social, legal, and emotional consequences, rather than seeking entertainment.

This finding can be understood through the framework of Uses and Gratifications Theory (UGT), which posits that individuals actively select media based on their specific needs. According to UGT, when people consume media content, they do so to fulfill specific gratifications such as information, social interaction, and entertainment (Katz, Blumler, & Gurevitch, 1973). In this study, the high usage of media for informational and enlightenment purposes suggests that residents of Awka South are using media reports to enhance their understanding of the complex issue of paternity fraud, including its legal ramifications, moral implications, and its impact on family structures.

Previous studies, such as those by Lichter and Qiu (2016), have similarly shown that media coverage of family-related issues, such as paternity disputes and custody battles, serves to inform the public about the intricacies of these matters. The secondary role of entertainment in this study reflects a similar finding in the Uses and Gratifications literature, where audiences primarily seek media for meaningful content that satisfies their intellectual and informational needs, rather than simply for diversion or amusement.

Conclusion

The findings of this study have significant implications for understanding how media coverage of paternity fraud shapes public perceptions and behaviours. The high exposure to media reports on paternity fraud among residents of Awka South LGA suggests that this issue is receiving considerable attention, potentially raising awareness and prompting public discussions about its legal and social implications. The predominance of social media

and online news websites as primary channels of exposure highlights the growing role of digital platforms in shaping public discourse, particularly among younger and more internet-savvy populations.

The high believability of media reports on paternity fraud further suggests that residents view these reports as credible, which can influence their understanding and attitudes toward paternity fraud. This is particularly important in shaping public opinions on family dynamics, trust, and the legal framework surrounding paternity disputes. The fact that residents use media reports primarily for informational and enlightenment purposes indicates a desire for reliable knowledge rather than sensationalized or purely entertaining content. It underscores the public's reliance on media as a source of information for critical social issues, particularly those affecting family and societal structures.

These findings have important implications for policymakers, media organizations, and advocacy groups seeking to use media coverage to inform the public, promote legal reforms, and address the complexities of paternity fraud in Nigerian society. Effective media campaigns can leverage this high exposure and believability to further educate the public and encourage meaningful discussions around the topic.

Recommendations

Based on the above findings and conclusions, the following recommendations were put forwards:

1. Given the high exposure to media reports on paternity fraud, it is recommended that media outlets intensify efforts to present balanced, fact-based, and informative coverage of the issue. This could involve incorporating expert opinions, legal perspectives, and real-life stories to create a comprehensive understanding of the consequences and solutions surrounding paternity fraud.
2. Towards maintaining the high level of trust the audience have in them (as revealed by the study), media organizations should adhere to ethical journalism standards by

ensuring that their reports on paternity fraud are accurate, well-researched, and devoid of sensationalism. Fact-checking and expert validation should be central to coverage to ensure the information remains credible and reliable.

3. Media outlets should continue prioritizing informative and educational content about paternity fraud, ensuring that stories are presented in a way that enlightens the public on legal, social, and emotional aspects. Additionally, providing resources such as legal advice or access to counseling services through media platforms could further enhance the enlightenment value of these reports.

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