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# Framing Disability: A Content Analysis of Newspapers in Nigeria

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## **Abstract**

This study examined how the media in Nigeria framed people with disabilities and issues concerning them with a view to appreciating how news media frames impact society's perception of people with disabilities. A textual analysis method was used to examine newspapers' reports of disability within the period of a decade – 2001 to 2010. The sample was drawn from two major newspapers in Nigeria – Daily Trust based in Abuja, north-central Nigeria and Nigerian Tribune based in Ibadan, south-western Nigeria. This was done to ascertain whether cultural and religious differences between the north (predominantly Islam) and south (predominantly Christian) impact news reports on disability. Results of the analysis revealed a similarity between the media in both regions as they often employ stereotypically offensive language when reporting disability stories. Media frames that emphasize frailty, charity, disparity and derogatory labels leave room for stereotype, prejudice and stigma. This, no doubt, has negative impact on how society relate with people with disabilities in Nigeria. On the other hand, the media in the north (Islamic factor) portrayed people with disabilities as visible in northern communities while the media in the south portrayed them as segregated in southern communities through institutionalization. This study suggests a media guideline on disability to guide journalists on how to report disability news in Nigeria, and by extension Africa.

Framing Disability: A Content Analysis  
of Newspapers in Nigeria

By

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Thesis

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## **Chapter One:**

### **Introduction**

In every nation of the world, human beings are the most important resource. No country can develop politically, socially and economically when a large number of its population is socially excluded. People with disabilities constitute about 19 million of Nigeria's population (Lawal-Solarin, 2012, "Nigeria And The Challenged," para. 1) of over 150 million. No government's policies or legislations adequately protect them against discrimination or social exclusion.

Employment opportunities are not available for most people with disabilities in Nigeria, even when they possess the requisite qualifications. Furthermore, public facilities such as banks, schools, libraries, places of worship and restrooms are not accessible. While some people have argued that the average Nigerians with disabilities do not make effort to get education, it is quite obvious that inaccessibility to education facilities is the primary factor responsible for this. As an undergraduate student in the University of Ibadan, Nigeria, I had to employ a private assistant to help pull my wheelchair up several staircases to get to the floor where my department is located. Because there were no accessible bathrooms for a person with disability in school buildings, I have to go to class without food to avoid using the bathroom.

The portrayal of disability issues as "charity" and "stigma" (from my experience as a Nigerian living with disability) has socially excluded most Nigerians living with disabilities. The consequences of social exclusion, according to Popay et al. (2008), are unjust allocation of resources and unequal rights within the economic, political, social and cultural spheres (p. 7).

Society's perception of people with disability as object of charity in Nigeria has led to a proliferation of non-governmental organizations targeted toward the welfare of people with disabilities. The effect of this is institutionalization. There is an alarming increase in institutions where people with disabilities are abandoned. The situation of residents' welfare in most of these institutions further reveals that disability, as object of charity in Nigeria, is an exploitation tool in the hands of management of these institutions.

Disability as a stigma in the Nigerian context has also enhanced the concept of institutionalization. Due to erroneous cultural and traditional beliefs attached to disability, some families having people with disabilities, especially the wealthy ones who can afford the exorbitant cost of institutionalization, may abandon their family members with disabilities in one of these institutions to avoid the social stigma and the burden of caring for them.

How the news media portray people, events or issues impacts our perceptions of them. This is because we depend on radio, television, film and other media to shape our personal and social identities, and to help us distinguish the relationship between "us" and "them" (Kellner, 2011, p. 7). Studies have shown that "media distortions of the experience of disability contribute significantly to the discriminatory process" (Barnes, 1992, "Discrimination And The Media," para. 2 ) and 'generalizations about 'disability' or 'people with disabilities' can mislead" (World Health Organization, 2011, p. 8). This study, by examining media portrayal of disability, intends to shed light on the social exclusion of people living with disabilities in Nigeria with a view to advocate for an inclusive society for all.

The words or language we use in describing people or cultural groups play a significant role in how they are perceived by the society (Burns, 2010; Haller, Dorries & Rahn, 2006).

Haller (2010) affirms that language has power not only to define cultural group, but also shape “the general public believes about the group” (p. 49). In south-west Nigeria where I come from, it is not uncommon for local people in rural communities to refer to a person with disability as “abirun”. The word “abirun” connotes a “person who is contagious”. In other words, the person is seen not as carrying a contagious disease, but as being contagious her/himself. No pregnant woman wants to go near a person with disability for fear of having the baby in her womb “infected with disability”. Nobody wants to marry a person with disability because it will mean a perpetuation of disability in their family line. Furthermore, a person with disability is considered too weak and sick to be able to work and make a living. She or he is better off on the street asking for alms from other members of the community in order to survive. Where some families consider it indignity to their societal status to have one of their own as a beggar, they quickly get her or him some menial jobs like fixing bad shoes or bags. Other people with disabilities may not be lucky because they are either poisoned to die or abandoned as destitute to fend for themselves.

The news media mediate audience’s perception of phenomena (Domke, McCoy & Torres, 1999; Gorham, 2006; Haller, Dorries & Rahn, 2006) through the content they produce for audiences’ consumption. The media have abilities to encourage audiences “to adopt certain attitudes toward particular characters (disabled or not) based on the attitudes those characters exhibit toward disability ...” (LeBesco, 2011, p. 185). Past research has shown the relationship between media labeling and identity of people with disabilities (Haller, Dorries & Rahn, 2006). The portrayal of disability in the media is muddled up in the pool of inexperienced journalists charged with writing or producing stories on disability; writers with disabilities trying to impress editors and non-disabled consumers with newsworthy narratives; and consumers with little

capacity to care or grasp, struggling to absorb it all (Riley, 2005, p. 23). “How the attributes of news stories about disability are played in the news media can potentially sway public opinion about disability issues and toward the cultural representations of people with disabilities in general” (Haller, 2010, p. 29).

This study is useful for several reasons. First, by examining news media portrayal of disability in a developing country like Nigeria, this study will identify how the news media frame disability issues in relation to the social exclusion of people with disabilities. By preferring some words over others, the media give salience to certain words that ultimately become what their audiences use (Haller, Dorries & Rahn, 2006, p. 62) to address or make judgment about certain cultural groups. Also, when news frames emphasize some considerations and associations but neglect others, they are likely to give strength (or cause weakness) to the linkages between shared mental constructs (Domke, McCoy & Torres, 1999, p. 576). It is therefore logical to assert that when the news frame of disability issues is dominated by derogatory and discriminatory terms, people with disabilities will be socially excluded.

Second, this study will be useful to the media in developing countries as it will suggest ways of framing disability issues from a human rights point of view. Study has shown that activists for social movements in developed nations have, in the past, lobbied the media for language changes in news frames, but with only partial success (Haller, Dorries & Rahn, 2006, p. 62). Framing disability issues from a human rights point of view will help build friendly attitudes toward people with disabilities in developing nations and encourage policies and legislations from the governments that will protect their rights and defend them against discrimination and marginalization.

Third, this study will add to the literature on media and disability, especially in developing nations where the subject is presently relatively understudied. Several studies have dwelt on the subject of media and disability in western or developed societies (Burns, 2010; Haller, 1995; Haller, Dorries & Rahn, 2006; LeBesco, 2011; Riley, 2005). It is however astonishing that this subject is relatively understudied with reference to developing societies, where about eighty per cent of persons with disabilities reside (United Nations Enable, n.d., “Factsheet On Persons,” para. 3).

The following research questions will be a guide for this study:

RQ1: How does the press frame people with disabilities in Nigeria?

RQ2: How does the press frame issues concerning people with disabilities in Nigeria?

The purpose of this qualitative content or textual analysis therefore is to describe news media portrayal of people with disabilities in Nigeria. Media portrayal can generally be defined as the way the news media frame issues, events or people for audiences’ consumption. Two major newspapers with nationwide readership in Nigeria were analyzed for the purpose of this study. One of the two newspapers is from northern Nigeria while the other is from southern Nigeria. It is my assumption that cultural and religious differences between northern and southern Nigeria might impact news media portrayal of disability. This study is therefore explained through the theoretical lens of framing theory, symbolic annihilation and critical theory.

Framing involves choosing and giving some part of a noticed reality salience in order to influence audiences’ perceptions (Entman, 1993, p. 52). A noticed reality could either be an issue or people. Pan and Kosicki (2001) give more insight into the concept of “noticed reality”

in relation to “issues” or “people” when they assert that “framing not only frames an issue but also frames social groups” (p. 44). People with disabilities can be described as one of the largest marginalized social group in any society. They cut across gender, race, sexual orientation and cultural identities. Media framing has potential to favor social groups or their issues without revealing bias (Tankard, 2001, p. 96). In contrast, media frames can taint social groups and their issues and attract hostile attitudes toward them.

The concept of symbolic annihilation is a way of saying issues about certain groups of people don't count. The media will represent or under represent issues about certain groups of people depending on how relevant they are perceived on the media agenda. Critical theory gives marginalized groups insight into how and why society works the way it does, the cultural hegemony involved and a way to advocate the protection of their interest in mainstream society.

In subsequent chapters, I focused on the following - in chapter two, I reviewed literature on how disability and forms of disabilities have been defined; disability in media advertisement; entertainment and news report. Also in chapter two, I discussed in detail the theoretical lens from which this study is approached. I examined the framing theory perspective, symbolic annihilation and critical theory perspective. In chapter three, I discussed in detail the method I employed in carrying out this study.

## **Chapter Two:**

### **Literature Review**

Through a review of literature, I present here the concept of “disability”. Furthermore in this section, I discuss issues about disability and how they relate to the mass media, as well as explicate on the theories this study is predicated upon.

#### **What is disability?**

Over the years, there has not been a single, universally acceptable definition of disability - an issue that cut across all category of human diversity: race, gender, sexual orientation, etc. Studies have examined the concept of disability with no specific definition of the subject (Davis, 2010; Pelka, 2012; Riley, 2005; & United Nations, n.d.). People living with disabilities are around ten per cent of the world’s population and are the world’s largest minority (United Nations Enable, n.d., “Factsheet On Persons,” para. 1). The United Nations’ (UN) assertion presupposes a “modifier” that could be used to identify people who live with disabilities. This fact is supported by Riley (2005) when he contends that the population of people with disabilities actually hangs on the definition of disability (p. 4). In other vein, Pelka (2012) asserts that disability is a dynamic phenomenon and its definition could be factored on time and social circumstances even as he contends that historically, it has been based on the opinions of the non-disabled majority, with prevailing social attitudes regarding physical and psychological differences determining how people with disabilities are treated (p. 4). Davis (2010) defines disability as “the process that turns impairment into a negative by creating barriers to access” (p. 303). These various attempts at conceptualizing disability highlight the fact that its definition is largely dependent on culture, and as cultural practices evolve over time knowledge about

disability is expected to improve. For instance, what is perceived as disability in one culture may not be so considered in other culture. As Pelka posits, “in some cases a particular condition, impairment, or illness might be perceived as a significant disability where in other circumstances the same particulars of individual differences are barely noticed, if at all (p.4).

In order to cater for the welfare of citizens, governments all over the world have come up with criteria for identifying needs, including that of people with disabilities. For administrative convenience purpose (to serve members of society with disabilities), “official definitions of disability are designed to reflect organizational requirements of governments, their institutions and key welfare professionals” (Goodly, 2011, p. 5). Colker (2011) for instance states that the Americans with Disability Acts define disability to mean, with respect to an individual: a physical or mental impairment that substantially limits one or more major life activities of such individual; a record of such impairment; or being regarded as having such impairment (p. 12). According to Goodly (2011), these administrative definitions allow nation states to identify those who qualify for welfare (p. 5).

The definition of disability, as a matter of fact, remains a challenge as various models of disability have emerged over the years. Prominent among them are the disability or social and medical or clinical models. Shakespeare (2010) traces the historical origin of the social model to activities of the Union of Physically Impaired Against Segregation (UPIAS) (p. 266). According to Shakespeare, UPIAS policy statement, as adopted in December 1974, defines people living with disabilities as a group under oppression and aims to abolishing segregated facilities and create favorable circumstances for them to function totally in society: to live without depending on assistance, that is, the ability to function without impediment; to engage in productive livelihood; and to live self-controlled life of their own without interference from any quarter

whatsoever (p. 266). This definition presupposes access to the physical environment only; it leaves out access to socio-cultural participation in society.

The medical or clinical model of disability finds the individual to be defective and recommends fixing her/his flaws. According to Davidson (2010), “the medical definition of disability locates impairment in the individual as someone who lacks the full complement of physical and cognitive elements of true personhood and who must be cured or rehabilitated” (p. 136). Barnes (2010) asserts that proponents of the medical model assume disability to be a “psychological or physiological abnormality or impairment” (p. 29). However, he argues the fact that defining both psychological and physical normality, as well as impairments is not easy tasks (p. 29). This calls to question the adequacy of the medical model in defining disability. Linton (2010) opines that disability, from a disability study standpoint, is a capacious theme for collectively grouping people who are physically, emotionally, sensory, and cognitively challenged (p. 225).

Riley (2005) points to the fact that stakeholders on disability issues differ on who should be classified under the disability umbrella (p. 4). Recent studies have concluded that defining disability is complex and, as such, have rejected a medical or social model standpoint (Filmer, 2005; World Health Organization, 2011). The World Health Organization [WHO] (2011) suggests a “bio-psycho-social model” approach as a workable compromise between the medical and social model definitions (p. 4). People with disabilities are faced with impairments in their own bodies and barriers created by the social environments they live in, which hinder their “full and effective participation in society on an equal basis with others” (WHO, 2011, p. 4).

### **Forms of disability**

Just as it is complex to arrive at one single, acceptable definition of disability, it is also complex to categorize disability. Dan (2011) however shows how governments would categorize disability for administrative convenience purpose:

This includes physical impairments (weakening of a part of the body caused through illness, by accident or from birth, including blindness, deafness, heart disease or the paralysis of limb); mental impairment (such as learning disabilities and all recognized mental illness); that the disability is substantial (does not have to be severe, but is more than minor or trivial), with a long-term adverse effect (more than 12 months) and influences normal day-to-day activity (your mobility; manual dexterity; physical coordination; continence; ability to lift, carry or otherwise move everyday objects; speech, hearing or eyesight; memory or ability to concentrate, learn or understand; or perception of the risk of physical danger). (p. 5)

The definition of disability will be (and remain) derogatory if left in the hands of people without adequate understanding of disability as a human experience. This can further reinforce discrimination and marginalization of people with disabilities in society. More research is needed in this field to sensitize and educate society on issues of disability as human experience.

## **Framing**

This study is predicated mainly on framing theory. In this section I attempt to clarify some issues relating to framing: First, I present some broad clarification on the concept of framing; second, I distinguish framing from media effects theories like agenda setting and priming; and last, I analyze the interdisciplinary origin of framing in order to clarify the mix up in conceptualization.

Framing refers to the way “events and issues are organized and made sense of, especially by the media, media professionals, and their audiences” (Reese, 2001, p. 7). Maher (2001) asserts that “framing implies relationships among elements in a message, because those elements have been organized by a communicator ...” (p. 86). Reese (2007) reveals a major intent of framing when he posits that communicators strategically use framing as a tool to convey their intentions in order to achieve some desired political end (p. 148). The elements in a message, and how they are organized by the media, help audiences understand and interpret it. The power of the communicator to include or exclude potential elements in a message determines, to some extent, what the audiences make out of it. Media messages are not produced in isolation of the society they represent. Metaphorically, framing may be likened to “how” and “what” a sculptor decides with a work of clay in order to stimulate users’ perception of clay works. These clarifications notwithstanding, the concept of framing continues to be confused with other media effects theories like agenda setting and priming.

Scholars have made concerted efforts at conceptualize the term “framing”, as well as distinguish it from agenda setting and priming, which are all related theories of media effects (Scheufele & Tewksbury, 2007; & Weaver, 2007). In his study titled, “Thoughts on Agenda Setting, Framing, and Priming”, Weaver (2007) analyzes similarity between second-level agenda setting and framing: he contends that both theories focus on “how” the media portray issues or objects and not on “which” issues or objects the media give prominence (p. 145). Their difference lies in the fact that framing includes more cognitive processes such as causal reasoning, moral evaluations, appeals to principles and recommendations for treatment of problems, while second-level agenda setting focuses only on salience of attributes (Weaver, 2007, p.146).

On their part, Scheufele and Tewksbury (2007) elucidate further on the association and variation that framing, agenda setting and priming share as models of media effects in their study titled, "Framing, Agenda Setting, and Priming: The Evolution of Three Media Effects Models". They describe agenda setting and priming as "accessibility-based" models for two reasons: first, both deal with how audiences form judgments and attitude with the ease by which they access or recollect instances or associations from the mind (i.e. memory-based models of information processing) and second, "by making some issues more salient in people's mind (agenda setting), mass media can also shape the considerations that people take into account when making judgments about political candidates or issues (priming)" (Scheufele & Tewksbury, 2007, p. 11). Framing however differs from agenda setting and priming because it is "based on the assumption that how an issue is characterized in news reports can have an influence on how it is understood by audiences" (Scheufele & Tewksbury, 2007, p. 11).

The concept of "frame" and "framing" has been a bone of contention among scholars from various disciplines and academic domain, with everyone proffering their own meaning to the terms. Druckman (2001) contends that both terms are often misconstrued mainly because there has not been a consistent explanation for them (p. 226). Framing has its origin or foundation from two academic disciplines. Borah (2011) identifies the two academic disciplines or foundations as sociology and psychology (p. 247). Scheufele and Tewksbury (2007) trace the psychological roots of framing to the experimental work of Kahneman and Tversky in 1979 and 1984 where "they examined how different presentations of essentially identical decision-making scenarios influence people's choices and their evaluation of the various options presented to them" (p. 11). Framing, from a psychological point of view, may therefore be considered as the "how" or "style" of presentation of similar issues or subjects to influence the decision making

processes of audiences. In other words, an issue or subject needs not be modified from its original state to influence audiences' perception; it is the manner in which it is delivered that gets modified. The emphasis here is on the manner of delivery.

Scheufele and Tewksbury (2007) also attribute the sociological foundations of framing to works by Goffman (1974) and others in which framing is described as a device or tool that help audiences catalogue and classify information for easy consumption, based on a preexisting interpretive schema or framework (pp. 11&12). Furthermore, the sociological foundation of framing, as Borah (2011) suggests, refers to the tools that media message producers employ when they create stories and how the creation processes are manipulated (p. 247). "Tools" here represent "the words, images, phrases, and presentation styles ... called frames in communication" (Druckman, 2001, p. 227).

The manipulation during the creation of stories implies that media message producers can distort reality, as Entman (1993) argues, by "choosing and giving some part of a noticed reality salience in order to influence audiences' perceptions" (p. 52). "Noticed reality", as used by Entman, refers to the "elements" in a message. "Framing could have significant connotations as frames highlight some aspects of reality while excluding other elements, which might lead individuals to interpret issues differently" (Borah, 2011, p. 248). This leads to framing effect.

### **Framing effect**

Framing effect is the process by which frames in communication shape frames in thoughts (Druckman, 2001, p. 228). Borah (2011) considers "frames in thought" as "audience frame" and shows that news framing has capacity to influence information processing and the decision-making processes that follow (p. 248). Druckman (2001) explicates on two types of

framing effect – equivalency framing effect and emphasis framing effect. Equivalency framing effect deals with how the use of dissimilar (but rationally equal) terms or languages influences people to make changes in their choices (Druckman, 2001, p. 228). On the other hand, emphasis framing effect “shows that by emphasizing a subset of potentially relevant considerations, a speaker can lead individuals to focus on these considerations when constructing their opinions” (Druckman, 2001, p. 230). In other words, Borah suggests that the emphasis aspect of framing shows that highlighting certain elements in a message can cause individuals to concentrate on those particular elements (p. 248). For instance, if the media frame accentuates negative elements in a disability message, the audience frame will be shaped by those negative elements emphasized.

It is important to discuss here how media and audiences’ frames can be operationalized in order to appreciate the nexus between the media and disability, and how this relationship impacts societal attitudes toward people with disabilities. Scheufele (1999) aptly shows that both media and audiences frames can be studied on the basis of dependent or independent variables (p. 107). Media frame as dependent variables examine those factors that influence a journalist’s choice of frame for an issue or subject, while audiences frame as dependent variables is a consequence or effect of media frame (Sheufele, 1999, p. 107). Frames as independent variables deal with framing effects and “in the case of media frames, the most logical outcome is a link to audience frames” (Sheufele, 1999, p. 107). In this regard, it is logical to assume that how media frames represent disability will impact audiences’ frames positively or negatively.

This study is predicated on emphasis approach to framing, with a goal to explore media frames as independent variables, in order to answer the question of how the press frames people with disabilities and issues concerning them in Nigeria.

Derogatory framing of disability and “other types of negative terminology that remain in the media reinforce a ‘sick role’ or the medication of the disability identity” (Haller, Dorries & Rahn, 2006, p. 65), which ultimately contributes to the social exclusion of people with disabilities. For instance, using limiting frames such as “sick role” will help to reinforce the notion that people with disabilities cannot perform in a work place, let alone maximizing their potential in such environment. Burns (2010) further supports this view when he asserts that “the use of limited frames consequently limits the community perceptions of disability, and understanding of what it is like to be a person with disability” (p. 281). “As society changes, certain terminology falls out of favor, such as the continuum in the U.S. from ‘colored’ to Blacks to African Americans” (Haller, 2010, p. 50). Entman (1993) elaborates on the functions of frames. According to Entman, the four functions of frames are to: define problems, diagnose causes, make moral judgments and suggest remedies (p. 52). He further points out that “a single sentence may perform more than one of these four framing functions” (Entman, 1993, p. 52).

### **Media framing of disability**

Historically, disability stories hardly get featured in the media. Instances where they do, media reports are often not a true representation of disability. This is because people with disabilities don’t tell their own stories, others do. More disturbing is the fact that people in most cultures depend on the media to get information about disability. A major cause of this could be traced to the fact that people with disabilities are not visible in the society due to stigma. Haller (2010) corroborates this assertion when she posits that, historically in western culture, people seek information about people with disabilities basically from the media because several factors such as stigma and barriers in physical environments and people’s attitudes shut them out of society (p. 40).

Several studies have examined the subject of media representation of disability (Barnes, 1992; Burns, 2010; Ciot & Hove, 2010; Haller, 1995; Haller, Dorries & Rahn, 2006; Hartman & Johnson, 1993; Jones & Harwood, 2009; Richardson, 2003; Riley, 2005; Safran, 1998; Wardle, Boyce & Barron, n.d.; Wilkinson & McGill, 2009). These studies further reinforce the role of the media in society's daily decision making process. Here is a review of some of these studies:

Barnes (1992) finds that majority of representation of people with disabilities in the media are extremely negative, he argues that this heightens their marginalization and discrimination in mainstream society (Conclusion section, para. 1).

Haller (1995) and Haller, Dorries and Rahn (2006) find that the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) positively impacted media portrayals of disability in America. Similarly, Ciot and Hove (2010) find that the media in Romania - although using "fighter" and "victim" frames in portraying disability – have helped in promoting a better attitude toward people with disabilities by constructing a better image of people with disabilities (p. 537).

Burns (2010) argues that through news reports, advertisements and entertainment the media continue to mediate our thought processes with the "capacity to set the agenda and tell people what to think about, if not what to think"; he suggests a media guideline to help raise awareness on disability issues (p. 281).

According to Haller (2010):

Media and disability scholar John Clogston found from a number of studies of mainstream news media presentations of disability that, historically, articles about people with disabilities rarely made it into news, and, when the articles were written, that they were misrepresentative and stigmatizing (p. 119).

Clogston's widely-cited theoretical framework (as cited in Haller, 1995) helps us to analyze media representation of disability in America, according to whether they portray people with disabilities in traditional or more progressive ways. Clogston's traditional frame, according to Haller, is one that shows the person with disability as posing a medical or economic challenge, or as deviant from others in the society, in ways that ultimately put a burden on the society (Haller, 1995, p. 11). Clogston's traditional frame can be interpreted to include the medical model (a person with disability is considered sick and needs fixing or help from medical workers); the social pathology model (disability issue is considered as economic aid from the state, and not human rights); and the supercrip model (a person with disability is seen as deviant or special, with super human capability) (as cited in Haller, 1995, pp. 12-13). As Haller (1995) points out, this frame is somewhat outdated, thus may not capture the full array of media representation in recent times; she asserts that the Americans with Disabilities Acts (ADA) took hold in American society way after Clogston had created his media model of disability (1990) (p. 11). However, Clogston's traditional frame, one can still argue, is very much relevant in cultures where laws such as the Americans with Disabilities Acts have not been passed. The progressive frame however put the blame of disability on the society, and not the person with disability (Haller, 1995, p. 11). The progressive frame of Clogston includes the minority/civil rights model (here, people with disabilities are seen as having legitimate rights to inclusion in society); and the cultural pluralism model (People with disabilities are represented as diverse in features as non disabled people) (as cited in Haller, 1995, p. 13).

Haller (1995) adds the business model (disability issues are considered expensive to society) to the traditional frame, and legal (here the media make a case for the inhumane treatment meted out to people with disabilities) and consumer models (here, the consumer power

of disability group is highlighted) to the progressive frame (pp. 13-14). These frames depict how disabilities have been represented in the media in sectors such as advertisement, entertainments and news reports.

Moriarty, Mitchell and Wells (2009) define advertising as “a paid form of persuasive communication that uses mass and interactive media to reach broad audiences in order to connect an identified sponsor with buyers and provide information about products” (p. 55). The question that readily comes to mind from this definition is: what is the place of the disability community in media advertisement? Do they qualify as potential consumers the media might target for certain products and services, or do they have products, services or even issues that might interest the media to get across to certain audiences? Riley (2005) gives an insight into the relationship that has existed between disability and media advertising:

The history of disability in advertising yields a distinct before-and-after demarcation between the pre- and postdiscovery of the disabled consumer. According to another insider, Thomas Learner, who has nearly two decades in the ad business, the shift from obscurity (or pity) to courtship is relatively recent. (p. 119)

Riley goes ahead to describes this “recent relationship” as a “paternalistic streak” and admonishes that “if disability works in the net equation, it stays in the picture. If it does not produce results or is not cost effective, then it’s out” (p. 129). The implication of Riley’s assertion is that people with disabilities are still not a strong force to reckon with in media advertising. Not totally in agreement with Riley, although there is a reasonable difference in time between both publications, Haller (2010) asserts that recognition for the disability community as a strong consumer group seldom comes (p. 122). Haller however shows that

growing media coverage of Paralympics events has increased disability images in the advertising industry in the US but “a difficulty exists in studying these advertising images of disabled people” (p. 193).

Riley (2005) points out that media entertainments hold much of their financial success to “perpetually offensive treatment of disability” (p. 69) in films. “So much money has been made off the backs of various real-life and fictional people with disabilities” (Riley, 2005, p. 69) with no commensurate improvement to their issues and yet, according to Riley, “the industry has been instrumental in advancing the human rights of other minorities” (p. 69). It is not in doubt that media entertainments have more number of disability representations than other media sectors. The entertainment industry is one media sector that seems to recognize that people with disabilities matters, although to the detriment of the latter. Lebesco (2011) strongly contends that sheer number of disability representation is not as important as ensuring that the media express “a view from within disability culture” (p. 189). Haller’s (2010) study shows that researchers have been able to link negative film images of people with disabilities to their oppression in the society (p. 175).

### **News media framing of disability**

News reports about disability may not come by easily, but they are available somewhere out there. Disability issues, as a matter of fact, have other issues (social, economic and political) in every society to compete with in order to get on the news media agenda. “Media attention is a scarce and coveted resource in contemporary societies” (Andrews & Caren, 2010, p. 842). One important quality any issue must possess to get on the news media agenda is newsworthiness.

Hartman and Johnson (1993) define “newsworthy” as anything that is “worth covering as news” (p. 1).

How newsworthy are disability issues? Riley (2005) attempts an answer to this question when he asserts that “the media are alienating an audience conservatively estimated to number in the hundreds of millions worldwide” (p. 4). Riley’s assertion indicates that the socio-economic and political influence of people with disabilities is yet to be considered relevant by the media. Hartman and Johnson however offer some insights into what may qualify disability issues as newsworthy – interest to several audiences as well as typical audiences; relevance to the lives of audiences, timeliness and controversy (p. 4).

Language plays a significant role in the culture of any people. It is the stock-in-trade in communications, or the main tool exploited by the media in their day to day news routine. Mick (1996) affirms that “much of what frames a news story is the type of language used (p. 16). My interest here is to examine the words or themes that appear in news media framing of disability? Haller (2010) argues that:

The words used to refer to a group of people are important: they have ramifications for self-perception, but they also play a large role in shaping what the general public believes about the group.... Both activists and theorists say that the way media cover disability, and the language used by journalists as they do this, is central to how the public perceives people with disabilities. (p. 49)

News stories are constructed by journalists through a skillful selection of contents and media frames, loaded with cultural meanings, with the purpose of shaping reality for their numerous audiences (Haller and others, 2012, “Why Study Media Content About Disability,” para. 6).

News reports are replete with languages that depict people with disabilities as abnormal, impaired, ill, or lacking normal health and body functions (Gold & Auslander, 1999, as cited in Stadler, 2006, p. 373). News stories will continue to shape public opinions on almost everything because they “filter out into public consciousness and are still typically viewed as representations of ‘reality’” (Haller, 2010, p. 41). It is therefore important to study how news media represent people with disabilities and issues about them. “This is partly because the media tends to naturalize dominant discourses, ideologies and ideas” (Stadler, 2006, p. 375). Media coverage often reinforces negative attitudes towards people with disabilities because opinions of dominant groups often shape their identity in the news media. This is so because they live in an “ableist” world where opinions about them are constructed not from their own perspective. Haller and her colleagues (2012) further write on the importance of studying news media representation of disability:

Studying the content of the news media allows disability studies to understand newspaper norms in representing people with disabilities and their concerns. In addition, news media research helps assess the perceived societal status of people with disabilities and whether there are changes in the social culture around disability. Many societal barriers still exist for people with disabilities such as limited interpersonal interactions between disabled and nondisabled people. (“Why Study Media Content about Disability,” para. 3).

Much of what could be studied about news media framing of disability is in western cultures. Comparing the 20th century industrialization era with the pre-industrial agrarian era in America, Haller (2010) observes that growing media influence, during the industrialization era, contributed to social exclusion of people with disabilities through stigma (p. 119). According to Mary Johnson: “the U. S. media have studiously avoided covering disability-rights issues for

years, in favor of the soft but ever popular story of the courageous individual who hasn't let disability slow her down" (as cited in Mick, 1996, p. 14). The passage of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) in 1990 has changed the media landscape positively in framing of disability (Haller, 2010, p. 49). Haller and others (2012) find the following four distinct perspectives in Canadian newspapers frames of disabilities: medical perspective, the heroic perspective, the charity perspective and the rights perspective ("What Kinds Of Disability Content Can Be Found," para. 10).

As observed earlier, extant literature on media and disability are focused on western societies. The subject has been relatively understudied with respect to Africa. The media in Africa rarely represent views of people with disabilities from their own perspective. Ogundola (2012), in a study titled, "Symbolic Annihilation of Disability in Nigeria's News Media", finds that traditional media like newspapers in Nigeria mostly cover disability events when government and non-government organizations (by non-disabled people) are involved than when the events are exclusively by people with disabilities ("Discussion," para. 2). Ogundola's finding is corroborated in another study by Haller and others (2012) where they find that "mass communication research on news sources illustrates that the traditional news media of newspapers and TV prefer government and other elite sources with powerful status" ("How Are Disability Media Stories Sourced And Written," para. 2).

Media representation of disability in Africa may be analyzed from a cultural perspective based on the assertion that the media produce contents that reflect society's values and norms. Religion can be a significant factor that can impact media portrayal of disability in Africa. Nigeria, for instance, is considered to be divided along a north and south axis. While the north is predominantly Islam, the south is predominantly Christian. In Islam, there is a professed

ideology of inclusion and a person is judged not on material or physical characteristics but on piety, which involve both faith and a genuine attempt to obey Islamic obligations (Hasnain, Shaikh & Shanawani, 2008, p. 27). Eskay (2012) shows that both cultural and disabling limitations impact governments' policies on disability in Africa and this ultimately limits opportunities for people with disabilities in social spaces (pp. 197-198). In the same vein, it is logical to assume that news media frames of disability in Africa will reinforce stigmatization and discrimination against people with disabilities. The link among disability, media and culture in Africa has been highlighted in a study by Nepveux & Beitiks (2010). In their study titled, "Producing African Disability through Documentary Film: Emmanuel's Gift and Moja Moja", Nepveux and Beitiks find from analysis of both documentary films that disability is often used to embody humiliating aspect of cultures that have never been impacted by modernization and technology (p. 252).

There have been studies advocating alternative media for people with disabilities, through the internet, using strategies adopted by several other minority groups to advocate the protection of their interests (Haller, 2010; Riley, 2005). Ogundola (2010) suggests the use of social media by Nigerians with disabilities in representing realities about issues or discourses that affect them ("Discussion," para. 4). Stadler (2006) advocates a "raise of awareness of these different discourses of disabilities amongst media practitioners, policy makers and members of the public" (p. 375). Perhaps, one major factor for news media underrepresentation of disability in Africa is the idea of symbolic annihilation as suggested by Ogundola earlier.

### **Symbolic annihilation**

It is enlightening to address the subject of symbolic annihilation of disability in news media from Africa by taking a cue from the historic relationship between the media and other marginalized groups. The media have played negative roles in how society, over the years, relates with marginalized or minority groups by ignoring, devaluing or misrepresenting issues about them. Baynton (2001) writes on the historic use of “disability” to justify inequality in America: the social participation of minority groups like people with disabilities, women and other ethnic groups has been called to question or challenged by those who oppose political and social equality for women and proponents of racial inequalities, citing supposedly differences women are thought to have from men and invoking made-up tendencies to frail-minds, mental derangement, deafness and other disabilities in particular races and ethnic groups respectively (pp. 33-34). Kudlick (2001) contends that “ideas about women and disability have reinforced each other, as images of weakness and dependence invoked images of femininity (p. 202). The media have been instrumental in perpetuating these images, denying women access and opportunity to defend their interests. Geertsema (2009) sums it up thus:

Unfortunately, there are many examples of the lack of representation of women and of negative or stereotypical representations, whether on the national, international, or global level. In fact, at the United Nations’ Fourth World Conference on Women held in Beijing in 1995, Section J of the Platform of Action specifically addressed the continuing problems that women across the world face with regard to access and representation in the news media. (p. 8)

Tuchman (1979) also contends that the underrepresentation of women and their stereotypical portrayal in the news media may be symbolic of their lack of power in the American society (p. 12). Drawing from Tuchman’s assertion, the underrepresentation of women in the U. S. news

media suggests some amount of coverage or presence. However, as Tuchman argues, “presence also enables the reiteration of stereotypes” (p. 12). Certain roles played by women characters in the media invariably become a cast-in-iron for stereotyping every other woman.

Pescosolido, Grauerholz and Milkie (1997), in their study titled “Culture and Conflict: The Portrayal of Blacks in U. S. Children’s Picture Books Through the Mid- and Late – Twentieth Century”, find that blacks’ portrayals in U. S. children’s picture books depends on black – white relationship in the socio-political sphere: during periods of peaceful relationship (that is, before and after the civil rights movement) black characters get represented, however, during the period of the movement they virtually disappeared (p. 460). Occasions when blacks disappeared from the picture books suggest a scheme to obliterate their struggle.

People with disabilities are often underrepresented or not represented at all, which is a symbolic way of saying that this group is unimportant in the culture. “The mainstream media did not consider them a worthy group to discuss, so they were, in essence, silenced because of the stigma of disability” (Haller, 2010, p. 119). Africa and African cultures often view disability as a curse and embarrassment to society. Consequently, people with disabilities are not welcome in social spaces because of the stigma attached to their impairment. The media also pursue policies and programs that either ignore or misrepresent disability to the society. Researching ways that media policies could include and reflect the experiences of people with disabilities in South Africa and Africa by extension, Stadler (2006) suggests that “integrating representations of disability into the mainstream media would help to ensure that diverse discourses and images of disability circulate in the media and that more opportunities exist for identifying with and relating to disabled screen characters” (p. 379).

## **Critical theory**

The social exclusion of people with disabilities brings to bare the concept of critical theory, which is also germane to this study. According to Popay et al. (2008) “exclusion consists of dynamic, multi-dimensional processes driven by unequal power relationships” (p. 36). Ogbor (2001) draws from the collective philosophy/social theory of members of the Frankfurt school, and the works of Habermas (1972, 1973) to argue the relevance of critical theory in corporate culture (p. 590), which can also apply to popular culture. The essence of critical theory is to help us question or challenge the “foundation upon which contemporary ideology and practices rest” (Ogbor, 2001, p. 590). In other words, critical theory affords us the opportunity to investigate and understand ways that “conditions of social, economic, and political domination limit, distort and depreciate discourse regarding contested public issues” (McClure, 1996, p. 488).

Relating the argument of critical theory to disability, it is obvious that media representation of disability is replete with the opinions of an “ableist” society. Therefore, how the media frame disability has the capacity to either make or mar the identity of people with disabilities in society. Drawing from this, the following research questions form a guide for this study:

RQ1: How does the press frame people with disabilities in Nigeria?

RQ2: How does the press frame issues concerning people with disabilities in Nigeria?

## **Chapter Three:**

### **Method**

In this section, I discuss the method I employ in executing this study.

#### **The qualitative research paradigm**

From an advocacy/participatory worldview, researchers can proffer an “action agenda for reform that may change the lives of the participants, the institutions in which individuals work or live, and the researcher’s life” (Creswell, 2009, p. 9). Creswell (2009) also draws a link between advocacy/participatory worldview and qualitative research (p. 9). Marginalized groups can now advance their course, not only from an advocacy point of view, but also from a scholarly standpoint. My goal, as a scholar or researcher, is to address the marginalization and discriminations against Nigerians living with disabilities by bringing to the front burner the intricacies that sustain their continued exclusion from mainstream society.

The relevance of qualitative procedures in scholarly inquiry has been supported by authors (Babbie, 2010; Creswell, 2009; Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2011). The essence of qualitative research is to deduce meaning from people’s experiences, circumstances and situations, as well as extract meanings which their texts and other objects convey (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2011). In order to study what a researcher intends studying, using qualitative research, an interconnection and interaction among the components of the design is necessary and accessing how the design influences or is influenced by the environment being studied is equally important (Maxwell, 2005). While some qualitative research practices involve intrusion, to some extent, on what the researcher is studying (Babbie, 2010, p. 332), Creswell talks about researchers collecting qualitative documents that are either public or private documents, which cannot be intruded upon

(p. 181). In analyzing newspapers' portrayal of disability in Nigeria, I am certain that previous and recent publications will shed light on how people with disabilities and issues about them have been framed for audiences' consumption. This is the concept of textual analysis.

### **The content analysis research design**

In this study, I used a qualitative content analysis, otherwise known as textual analysis (written texts), to describe media portrayals of disability in Nigeria. Content analysis is a channel or means to understanding the concealed messages embedded in media texts. Barnes (1992) argues that media misrepresentations of issues about people with disabilities have contributed to their discrimination in society ("Discrimination And The Media," para. 2). Using a content analysis to describe newspapers' portrayal of disability in Nigeria (a time-frame between 2001 and 2010 when clamor for the protection of rights of persons with disabilities came into global limelight) helps to understand the social exclusion of people with disabilities in Nigeria. Babbie (2010) asserts that "descriptive studies are often cross-sectional" (p. 106) although drawing generalization from them might be misleading. Content analysis' "aim is to attain a condensed and broad description of the phenomenon, and the outcome of the analysis is concepts or categories describing the phenomenon" (Elo & Kyngas, 2008, p. 108). According to Hesse-Biber & Leavy (2011), content analysis is appropriate for the study of topical issues; comparison of media coverage of similar events; and mass-mediated representations of historical or current events (pp. 228-289). Research has been conducted using qualitative content analysis to examine mass media representations of significant historic events, like the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) in 1990 (Haller, 2005; Haller, Dorries & Rahn, 2006).

### **Setting**

This study focused on Nigerians living with disabilities, from a Nigeria's news media perspective. Particularly, my focus is on newspapers' stories from northern and southern Nigeria. The north is viewed as predominantly Islam, which has encouraged a practice of charity or alms-giving to people with disabilities. The institution of Sharia law in the year 2000, in some states in northern Nigeria, may have increased the number of people with disabilities in that region. Several people now live with a disability because they have had their limbs amputated for one offence or the other committed. As a matter of fact, Islamic tenets value acts of charity and this may be expressed toward people with disabilities. It is assumed that adherents who give alms to people with disabilities accumulate prizes for themselves in the hereafter or heaven. Elites in a religious society like this may prevent any move for equal rights and opportunities, or a level playing ground for all. That way, they can maintain their dominance over others and continue their "works of charity" toward a better hereafter.

The south is predominantly Christian and may be considered more progressive than the north. Although works of charity is a necessary requirement for every practicing Christians, people with disabilities in the south have a choice whether or not to be subjected to such acts of charity. There are several disability organizations in the south advocating for rights and protection of interests of people with disabilities.

It is my assumption that both cultural and religious differences between both regions will impact news media framing of disability in Nigeria.

## **Documents**

The documents I analyzed in this study are newspapers. The sample was drawn from two major newspapers in Nigeria – Daily Trust (initially, I planned to analyze the New Nigerian

newspaper based in Kaduna, north-central Nigeria but for reasons which I will explain later, I chose the Daily Trust) based in Abuja, north-central Nigeria and Nigerian Tribune based in Ibadan, south-western Nigeria.

Media Trust is a privately owned newspaper firm situated in Abuja, Nigeria's federal capital city. It started publication as Weekly Trust in March, 1998 and incorporated the Daily Trust in January, 2001, together with the Sunday Trust. The Daily Trust enjoys a wide circulation among states in northern Nigeria.

Nigerian Tribune is based in Ibadan, which is considered the political headquarter of the south-west, the hub of media activities in Nigeria. It is the oldest surviving private newspaper in Nigeria and has special publications on weekends called Saturday and Sunday Tribune. The newspaper was established in November, 1949 by one of Africa's foremost nationalists, Chief Obafemi Awolowo. It enjoys a nationwide circulation. The two newspapers are daily publications and are published in English language. I analyzed a total of 14 stories/reports from the Daily Trust newspaper. These comprise of news articles, pictures' captions and interviews. Also from the Nigerian Tribune newspaper, I analyzed a total of 39 stories comprising of similar contents.

### **New Nigerian Newspaper**

As stated earlier, I chose the New Nigerian newspaper located in Kaduna state of Nigeria for my analysis of newspaper from northern Nigeria and not the Daily Trust newspaper that was eventually analyzed. My decision to replace the former with the latter was due to activities of the Islamic fundamental group – Boko Haram, which has been wrecking havoc on innocent citizens and government officials, including public and religious buildings, telecommunication

facilities and media houses in northern Nigeria in recent times. Presently, I do not consider it safe to ask my data assistant to go to Kaduna - one of the hot spot of the Islamic sect's activities - to collect data from the New Nigerian newspaper.

### **Data collection strategies**

I analyzed articles in the month of December, but the time frame for data collected from both newspapers varied. From the Daily Trust, I collected data between 2002 and 2008. This time frame was chosen because the newspaper only had in its archive complete volumes (from December 1 to 31) for the period. From the Nigerian Tribune however, I collected data between 2001 and 2010. The period between 2000 and 2010 is considered significant because of the global clamor against discrimination of people with disabilities at the time. The United Nations' Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) came into effect on March 30, 2007 following this global outcry.

Using content analysis research methodology - by means of textual analysis - individual newspaper's stories on people with disabilities and issues about them were analyzed. All articles, pictures' captions and interviews published within the months of December were selected for analysis. Nigeria became a signatory to the CRPD and its Optional Protocol in March 2007 and I suspected that media coverage of disability may differ before and after assenting to the treaty. The month of December is chosen for the following reasons: first, December 3 has been designated "International Year for Disabled Persons" by the United Nations General Assembly in 1981 (United Nations Enable, n.d., Background, para. 1) and Nigeria is a signatory to most treaties on disability. Issues about disability are expected to be on the public agenda on this day in Nigeria considering its international relevance. It is expected

that the media will give coverage to these issues. Second, December is the last month in every year and it is viewed as a festive period in Nigeria. Several organizations, both government and non-government, hold charity events for people with disabilities during this time to mark their “end of year” activities. These events often get news coverage. However, it may appear that news coverage of disability in the month of December alone may not reflect a true representation of people with disabilities in Nigeria due to the festivity of the period. I chose the month of December because disability stories hardly find their way on pages of newspapers in Nigeria, due to the concept of symbolic annihilations. Furthermore, I looked at every day in the month because, apart from attending functions on specific days, people with disabilities are visible in almost all other social activities. For instance, they join other people in shopping and transportation. This also attracts media attention. Data collected from both newspapers showed that more disability stories were available in the month of December than other months.

The newspapers’ stories were accessed directly from the archives of Daily Trust and Nigerian Tribune newspapers in Abuja and Ibadan respectively. To assist in the data collection phase, I solicited the assistance of my cousin in Nigeria who is a trained librarian. He identified and collected stories/articles on disability from the newspapers’ archive, made photocopies and mailed them to me. The search terms I used to locate stories/articles in the newspapers were: disabled, disability, disabilities, challenged, physically challenged, mentally challenged, mentally deranged, mentally retarded, blind, deaf, dumb, cripple, crippled, polio, handicap and handicapped. Stories that use figurative disability terms not associated with disability issues or people with disabilities were eliminated. For instance, stories like “the economy has been crippled”, “a blind decision”, etc were excluded.

### **Data analysis procedures**

Hesse-Biber and Leavy (2011) posit that data analysis and interpretation go together in qualitative research (p. 301). Babbie (2010) asserts that “in content analysis, communications – oral, written, or other – are coded or classified according to some conceptual framework” (p. 338). I critically studied the data collected, made notes and organized news media’s portrayal of disability using Liebman’s (2010) matrix (which she used to examine the construction of House Speaker, Nancy Pelosi’s image by Pelosi and the press) which she adapted from Barnett’s (2005, 2006). Looking out for metaphors, catch phrases and terms employed to describe people or issues about them in documents is a proper means of using narrative techniques to organize our perception of people (Liebman, 2010, p. 36). I was able to use this method to identify news media’s framing of disability in both newspapers and categorize them based on how people with disabilities and issues concerning them are described. Specifically, I identified metaphors and catch phrases that constitute frames in news stories on disability based on the emphasis they are given. For instance, a metaphor like “beggars” (which is considered a stereotypically offensive language), when substituted for “persons with disabilities”, is considered a frame – a negative one. I included a copy of the matrix in Appendix A.

### **The researcher’s role**

Qualitative research uses interpretive approaches in scholarly inquiry. “Interpretive approaches presuppose meaning is constructed via the interaction between humans or between humans and objects” (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2011, p. 17). A qualitative researcher has been identified to be “typically involved in a sustained and intensive experience with participants” (Creswell, 2009, p. 177). Liebman (2010) points out that validity in qualitative research is an important criterion that must be met because our approach to research is underlined by the different life experiences that shape our views of the world (p. 37).

My experiences as a Nigerian living with disability gave rise to this study. I have watched with keen interest how the media promote women's welfare in Nigeria and Africa through positive framing of feminist-related issues. In fact, the federal government of Nigeria established a Ministry of Women Affairs, with all state governments in Nigeria doing same. The idea of a ministry of women affairs is a means to address the marginalization and discrimination women in Nigeria have suffered over the years. It is my hope that a similar feat is achievable for Nigerians living with disabilities if the media are deployed to advocate on their behalf.

I have also experienced how the media frame HIV/AIDS issues in Nigeria and the attendant effects this had on people living with this disease. Initially, media portrayals of HIV/AIDS as a death sentence made people living with HIV/AIDS suffer untold discrimination in the society. Only recently did media portrayals of HIV/AIDS issues, as "manageable and non-infectious" by mere touching and sharing, brought acceptance for people living with HIV/AIDS in the society. Drawing from this, I have, on several occasions, attempted to involve the media in the activities of disability organizations I participated in. For instance, as the chairman of Association for Comprehensive Empowerment of Nigerians with Disabilities (ASCEND), Oyo state, I was amazed that pressmen invited to cover our activities would demand for money in order to include our events on their news agenda for the day. I wanted to bring disability issues to the public agenda by inviting the media to our activities. I have a strong conviction that the media could be employed to advocate the protection of interests of people with disabilities.

This conviction was born out of the fact that members of a society depend on the media for planning and decision making purposes. We look up to the media for information about most things, if not everything - our community and other parts of the world; products and services we need; entertainments and education. It makes a whole lot of sense for me to think that how the

media frame disability in Nigeria will impact society's perception of people with disability, positively or negatively.

I believe that studying media framing of disability in Nigeria could be enlightening for Nigerians living with disabilities and help them accept or reject certain frames. And if negative framing totally permeate media representation of disability, we can begin to advocate for a positive framing. This we can achieve by working out a media guideline for framing disability, and encouraging media organizations in Nigeria to adopt the guideline.

The bias I brought to this study therefore is based on these experiences. As a person who has lived with a disability in Nigeria, this could impact my views and understanding of the data I collected.

## **Chapter Four:**

### **Results**

Textual analysis of newspapers' representations of disability in Nigeria revealed the varied ways people with disabilities and issues about them are described in Nigeria's news media. Although there is a general dearth of disability representations in the news media, the data analyzed provide considerable information on how the news media describe people with disabilities and issues about them within the Nigerian cultural and religious context. The findings show that newspapers' framing of disability in northern Nigeria differs in certain ways from that of the south. On the other hand, there are similar framings of disability which both regions share. Overall, the newspapers from both regions employed frames that have negative implications in how society perceives people with disabilities and issues about them in Nigeria.

The following sections of this chapter present a detailed analysis of media representations of disability in Nigeria. In the first section, I reported the results from the analysis of both newspapers and in the second section I compared similarities and differences between them. The third section compared representations of disability before and after the year 2007.

#### **RQ1: How does the press frame people with disabilities in Nigeria?**

In this section, I analyze how people with disabilities are portrayed by the media in Nigeria. I begin the analysis with the Daily Trust newspaper and later present that of the Nigerian Tribune newspaper.

#### **Narrative analysis of people with disabilities in the Daily Trust newspaper**

One major finding from the analysis of stories in the Daily Trust newspaper revealed how people with disabilities are portrayed from the standpoint of “a group” within the larger community, and not in many ways as one would have expected because of the various disability categories present in northern Nigeria. Based on this portrayal, it is evident that people with disabilities are basically represented under a major theme I termed the “Group-identity frame”. Another finding showed that people with disabilities were portrayed in derogatory terms. This I described as “pejorative frame”.

### **Group-identity frame**

It is quite remarkable to find that people with disabilities are portrayed in the Daily Trust newspaper in recognition of their diverse identity and not from the perspective of a class within the larger group. In other words, no specific class of disability within the larger group is underrepresented or overrepresented.

The following is evidence of how people with disabilities are represented under a group-identity frame in the Daily Trust newspaper. Interviews, pictures’ captions and news stories analyzed were replete with phrases like “disabled persons”/“the disabled” and “persons with disabilities” - concepts that have been described by disability scholars and activists as “impairment first” and “person first” language respectively. This is a important finding because the group-identity frame is used in most of the news reports analyzed, except in cases where specific categories of disability are focused on. Here is how the Daily Trust newspaper framed some stories’ headline: “Disabled persons mark day, trek within stadium” (December 8, 2006); “115 Disabled persons offered jobs in Kano” (December 22, 2006); and “Disabled persons receive monthly allowance” (December 20, 2004). Similarly, some pictures of people with

disabilities were captioned thus: “A cross-section of disabled persons at the prayer ground yesterday” (December 5, 2002); “Members of the senate committees on Home Affair, Senator Abubakar Sodangi giving a helping hand to Miss Chika Chioma, during the visit of persons with disabilities to the National Assembly in Abuja recently in celebration of the 2008 International Day of persons with disabilities” (December 1, 2008); and “Disabled man at Abuja” (December 8, 2006).

The concept of “disabled persons”/“the disabled” and “persons with disabilities”, as used by the Daily Trust newspaper, is a means employed to bring people with different forms of disabilities (such as physical, sensory, mental impairments) under a group-identity. In other words, the use of the group-identity frame, which is based on shared characteristics or attributes among members of a particular group, could indicate an overwhelming presence of people with various forms of disabilities in the community, which is also an effective way of bringing them under a single umbrella.

The group identity frame can also mean that people with disabilities are visible in northern communities. Jamillah Nuhu Musa and Musa Umar Kazaure (both journalists from Daily Trust) support this argument when they write reports like: “Disabled persons in Ugogo local government of Kano state are to receive a monthly allowance of two thousand naira” (Musa, December 20, 2004) and “The Governor who made these disclosures during the distribution of material assistance worth over 9 million Naira to 32 disabled associations in the state also challenged people who are in the habit of giving pittance in the name of alms to disabled persons on the streets” (Kazaure, December 22, 2006). Abubakar Yakubu, also a journalist with Daily Trust newspaper, wrote: “Hundreds of disabled persons within the Federal Capital Territory (FCT) yesterday marked the International Day of the disabled” (December 8,

2006). Their use of prepositional phrases like “in Ugogo local government of Kano state”, “on the streets”, and “within the Federal Capital Territory (FCT)” suggests that people with disabilities are visible members of the community in northern Nigeria. No reference is made to any particular institutions or homes where they may have emerged from. They go about their daily activities as integral members of the community.

### **Pejorative frame**

Within this frame, derogatory terms are inadvertently used to describe people with disabilities each time the subject of disability comes up. People with disabilities are portrayed mainly as beggars and as unfortunate or tragic beings that are less endowed and supposedly deprived by nature, not by the society (environment and culture) which they are part of.

Here is how a picture’s caption in Daily Trust newspaper, discussed earlier, portrays a lady with disability:

“Members of a senate committees on Home Affair, Senator Abubakar Sodangi giving a helping hand to Miss Chika Chioma, during the visit of persons with disabilities to the National Assembly in Abuja recently in celebration of the 2008 International Day of persons with disabilities” (Tuesday, December 1, 2008).

Miss Chika Chioma uses a wheelchair and was being wheeled by a senator during a visit of people with disabilities to the National Assembly, the Nigerian legislative arm of government in Abuja. The phrase - “giving a helping hand” - speaks volume about Miss Chika Chioma. It implies she is feeble and therefore needs “a helping hand” to get around. The emphasis is always on the person with disability and not the society (in this case, the National Assembly complex) that fails to accommodate the peculiar needs of people with disabilities. The implication of such

portrayals is that persons with disabilities are often viewed as frail people. A frail person is sick and considered too weak to engage in any productive livelihood.

The concept of “frailty” explains why people with disabilities are perceived as objects of pity, with alms-giving considered subsistent for them. Rather than being given opportunities to participate in regular economic activities as anyone else, people with disabilities are expected to make a living through begging. This is how disability gets associated with begging - people with disabilities are perceived as “beggars”. Similarly, Musa Umar Kazaure’s report on December 22, 2006, headlined, “115 disabled persons offered jobs in Kano”, reveals the expectations and attitude of northern society toward people with disabilities. This was on the occasion of employment offered to some persons with disabilities by the Kano state government. Here is how the reporter captured the governor’s concern on the issue of begging associated with people with disabilities:

The governor who made the disclosures during the distribution of material assistance worth over 9 million Naira to 32 disabled associations in the state also challenged people who are in the habit of giving pittance in the name of alms to disabled persons on the streets to embark on serious disabled empowerment projects and programs that would ultimately take them off the streets as beggars.

The concern of the governor, as revealed in this report, says a lot about northern communities’ perceptions and expectations of people with disability. Northern societies in Nigeria have always viewed alms-giving as subsistent for people with disabilities. Because disability is associated with begging, non-disabled people often feel pity and obligated to help people with disabilities. Pity or patronization is borne out of a desire to be charitable to people with

disabilities. However, as Colker (2009) asserts, acts of charity can deny people with disability their self respect and dignity (p. 5). More importantly, acts of charity take away a person with disability's power to advocate for equal rights and opportunities in the society.

Hamza Idris, another journalist with Daily Trust Newspaper, framed the headline of his article published on Wednesday, December 20, 2006 thus – “Disability is no reason for begging – Crippled bicycle engineer”. Modu Nanami, the subject of the story, is a wheelchair user who acquired disability after an auto accident that affected his legs. After a long period of street begging without a job, Modu decided to employ a skill (bicycle repair) he had acquired earlier in life before his present disability status. The use of stereotypical offensive language like “crippled” is an example of derogatory names the news media label people with disabilities in the north.

### **Narrative analysis of people with disabilities in the Nigerian Tribune newspaper**

The Nigerian Tribune newspaper portrayed people with disabilities in several ways. These portrayals come with implications that reflect how society perceives disability in the south. In all the news reports analyzed in this study, people with disabilities are portrayed often as physically challenged/disabled, handicapped, less privileged, special, and supercrip. On very rare occasions was the phrase “people with disabilities” or “disabled people” used to describe them. Where one of these words is used, for instance in headlines, it often never remained consistent in the entire story. In other words, derogatory words are used interchangeably to portray people with disabilities. I described the Nigerian Tribune newspaper's use of “physically challenged/disabled” to represent all categories of disability as a misrepresentation frame; handicapped, less privileged and special as pejorative frame; and a supercrip frame, which

describes feats accomplished by people with disabilities as “courage”, “overcoming adversity” and “extraordinary”.

### **Misrepresentation frame**

The phrase, “physically challenged” is most often used to portray people with disabilities by the Nigerian Tribune newspaper and I labeled it the misrepresentation frame for this reason - it leaves out people with other forms of disabilities. Within the entire period of 2001 to 2010, the following are some headlines that support this assertion: “Yuletide: Help Project putting smiles on faces of the physically challenged” (December 29, 2009); “Ilejemeje council celebrates physically-challenged” (December 22, 2009); “MTN Foundation: Succouring physically-challenged” (December 28, 2009); “Lagos imports special BRT buses for physically-challenged” (December 17, 2008); “When Physically-Challenged Became Super Heroes” (December 13, 2008); “Oni offers scholarships, employment to the physically-challenged” (December 21, 2007); Physically-challenged can turn their scars to stars – Rev. Tioluwani” (December 18, 2007); “Church hosts the physically-challenged” (December 10, 2007); “Physically challenged people yearn for better academic deal” (December 8, 2006); “Gov’s wife makes case for the physically challenged” (December 7, 2005); and “ARFH celebrates World AIDS Day with physically challenged” (December 18, 2003).

The misrepresentation frame as often used by Nigerian Tribune newspaper could be appreciated as a reflection of society’s attitude towards people with disabilities in the southern part of Nigeria. Because of the stigma associated to disability in the south, most people put away their family members with disability through institutionalization, or by any means they find suitable. When the dehumanizing treatments meted out to these family members with disabilities

become unbearable, it is often the case that those with physical challenge are able to break out from these “centers” (as a result of less dependence on others in terms of mobility) and make their way into the community (away from their family members) as destitute or street beggars in a bid to survive. People with other categories of disabilities, for instance those with sensory, developmental or learning disabilities, may not be that lucky as they are unable to make it out easily on their own. This explains why people with physical disability are more visible on the streets than others in the south of Nigeria.

The physically challenged are viewed by the media in the south as the face or symbol of disability and addressing issues about them, it is assumed, should suffice for every other disability group. Consequently, other disability categories are left out, especially issues about people with developmental and learning disability, which rarely get featured in news.

### **Pejorative frame**

Apart from portraying people with different forms of disabilities mainly from the viewpoint of the physically challenged, the Nigerian Tribune newspaper also uses a mix of different terms to represent them. In other words, these terms are used interchangeably to describe people with disabilities in the south leaving room for a variety of stereotypically offensive labels.

It is not uncommon for the Nigerian Tribune newspaper to associate the term “less privileged” with people with disabilities. In a story headlined, “Samaritan group feasts the less privileged”, Seyi Sokoya, a reporter with the newspaper, has this to say about the event:

According to the head of the ministry, Mr. Samuel Bolanriwa, the event is to reach out to the less privileged in the society so as to put smiles on their faces and to let them realize that they are relevant despite their disabilities. (December 13, 2009)

The event in question was the annual Christmas party held by the Samaritan Care Ministry of the Global Harvest Church in Ibadan. People with disabilities are brought in from the various disability institutions or homes within Ibadan city to felicitate with the ministry. Several indicators are used or employed to identify people with disabilities as the “less privileged” ones in the society. The phrase – “despite their disabilities” apparently suggested that the “less privileged” in the society referred to people with disabilities. In the same vein, the opening paragraph of a story about a visit to the Stella Obasanjo’s Child Care Trust Center by the Rotary club of Asokoro in Abuja is instructive. Stella Obasanjo was the deceased wife of former Nigerian president, Olusegun Obasanjo. The Child Care Trust was her pet project (pet projects are initiatives that spouses of executive political officers in Nigeria have come to imbibe) and serves as a home where orphans and children with disabilities live. The newspaper used another indicator here to link people with disabilities to the term less privileged: “The greatest message of Christmas is peace. It is also a time to share, love and give, especially to those who are less privileged and those who are deprived one way or the other” (December 12, 2006). The phrase, “those who are deprived one way or the other”, may also refer to orphans in the home. However, if the phrase is examined in the light of “people who have no use of one or more of their body parts”, in this case people with disabilities, it becomes apparent that the newspaper actually was referring to the children with disabilities. Here is similar evidence:

Living is not only to acquire wealth and resources, but to be able to influence others positively with such wealth especially those who for one reason or the other have become

less privileged in the society. This fact was the motivating tonic and propelling force for the members of the Lions Club International, District 404B Nigeria which resolved to be making life more beautiful for the less privileged in the society, and this it did recently in Ibadan, the capital of Oyo state when members visited Oluyole Cheshire Home, Sango-Ijokodo road, Ibadan to touch the lives of the inmate there. (Adeniyi, December 9, 2005)

Again, the use of statements like “those who for one reason or the other have become less privileged in the society” in a setting like the Oluyole Cheshire Home clearly suggest that the phrase “less privileged in society” is used as reference for people with disabilities. The Oluyole Cheshire Home is an institution where people with disabilities live in Ibadan, south of Nigeria.

The “pejorative frame” used by the media is in tandem with society’s opinion of people with disabilities in the south of Nigeria. The issues of disability support and empowerment in Nigeria are fraught with misconceptions, as Lang and Upah (2008) point out, “... there is an underlying ideological belief that these should be addressed through ‘charity and welfare’” (p. 17). A person with disability is perceived to be dependent on others and as such, her or his economic worth is considered least on the socio economic scale. Because “disability”, in itself, is believed to be a factor for poverty (Amusat, 2009, p. 30), the media give little or no attention to issues of stigma and social exclusion, which obviously account for their economic misfortunes as a people within the larger society.

People with disabilities are also portrayed as unfortunate and bitter people because of their disability. A feature story by Akin Adewakun focused on four blind musicians of the Bethesda Group brought to Lagos by their coordinator, one Chioma Ohakwe, to beg for alms on

the street by employing their musical prowess. The story is headlined, “A date with Lagos blind minstrels” and has a section framed thus:

A group of four, two men and two women, in white and blue uniform, united by a common adversity, occupied a small portion of the road. They kept drumming, singing and praising God in their native language, Igbo, despite their deficiencies. Though without the sense of sight, to them, being physically challenged was not an excuse for them not to be unappreciative of what God has done for them. (December 4, 2006)

The phrases, “united by common adversity” and “despite their deficiencies” reinforce the fact that disability is perceived as a misfortune. This suggests that people with disabilities lead a miserable and bitter life.

Another term used to refer to people with disabilities is the word “special”. On face value, this word seems befitting, and some people with disabilities in Nigeria have come to accept it as a perfect “identifier” for them. They assumed that when the news media portray them as “special”, they are being singled out for recognition or respect. To them, it is akin to the honor accorded a special guest of honor in any social event. The reverse is actually the case on two accounts: first, Lang and Upah (2008) show a correlation between discriminatory tendencies and special schools in Nigeria (p. 22) and second, on close analysis of the word as used by the Nigerian Tribune newspaper, it turned out to be another way of comparing people with disabilities with their non-disabled counterparts, who are considered “normal”. The flip side of the word “normal” is “abnormal” - the use of the word “special” to label people with disabilities is another way of referring to them as abnormal.

Here is some evidence in support of the argument. “Special teachers to receive 15 per cent incentive in Lagos” and “Lagos boost special education with buses” are the headlines of two stories by Kunle Awosiyan, where the deputy governor of Lagos state in the south of Nigeria announced plans by the government to improve welfare of teachers of pupils with disabilities and provide accessible buses to ease transportation of the pupils respectively. In the first story, he reported that:

Teachers of physically challenged pupils in Lagos on Wednesday were excited when the state government announced an incentive of 15 per cent on their basic salary as special allowance for them. The deputy governor of the state, Mrs. Sarah Adebisi-Sosan, made this announcement at the International Day for Persons Living with Disabilities, with the theme: “Dignity and Justice for all of us,” adding that the gesture was to motivate the teachers.... Reiterating the commitment of the government to provide adequate education for special pupils, Sosan said training and re-training of special teachers would be a regular exercise in the state. (December 4, 2008)

In the second story, he used a binary difference between “special” and “normal” to categorize pupils with disabilities and their non-disabled mates respectively:

Respite may have come the way of specially challenged pupils in Lagos as the State Government increases the budget for special education. Announcing this on Tuesday, the Deputy Governor, Princess Sarah Adebisi-Sosan said that the running cost for the five special schools in the state had been increased by 200 per cent. According to her, as part of steps to promote special education in the state, the government has also created a

system where special challenged pupils are mixed with normal pupils in the same school environment” (December 4, 2008).

Because the media use language that reinforces differences between people with disabilities and non-disabled people, a distorted picture of disability may be conveyed and consequently, as in this case, it will require giving teachers special incentives to stimulate their interest in the job of teaching “special pupils”.

Similarly, Biodun Odunuga-Samuel reported a story on December 10, 2007, where the Samaritan Care Ministry of the Global Harvest Church hosted people with disabilities in their annual Christmas party held every December. He quoted the leader of the group, Mr. A. A. Adeniji, as saying “the Samaritan Care Ministry had the vision of visiting these special people’s homes to show them love, care and bring them to Christ in total fulfillment”. The phrase, “special people’s homes”, is quite instructive here. It brings to the fore the issue of institutionalization of people with disabilities, a common phenomenon in the south of Nigeria. Another story on December 17, 2008 was headlined: “Lagos imports special BRT buses for physically-challenged”. The notion of “special” not only separate people with disabilities from non-disabled people; it suggests the provision of segregated facilities for them - an idea that greatly negates the spirit of inclusion.

### **Supercrip frame**

It is important to highlight here how the Nigerian Tribune newspaper uses the supercrip frame. This is revealing for the following reasons. First, it focuses mainly on individuals with specific form of disability and not on the group or physically challenged perspective. Second, it is one of the few instances where the newspaper portrays specific disability. Third, the supercrip

frame holds the assumption that what is “normal” is for people with disability to lead a quiet, non-visible existence as doing otherwise requires much effort. An individual with disability who goes out into the world to do something is considered “courageous”. It also highlights disability as “adversity”.

Friday Ekeoba, in a story headlined, “When Physically-Challenged Became Super Heroes”, reported that:

The Indomie Independence Day Award for Heroes of Nigeria is a Social Responsibility Initiative that seeks to identify, recognize and celebrate acts of heroism (bravery) in children while bringing home our timeless values. The objectives of the award among others are to inspire heroism in our youngsters, to identify, acknowledge, and encourage children who have done any of these acts of heroism and made notable sacrifices without any recognition. One thing that made the awards for the year stand out is that the three children awarded with the Indomie Independence Day Awards for Heroes of Nigeria were honoured for their outstanding deeds of bravery and courage in the face of disability and illness. Khalil Bala (14) was awarded the 1st prize trophy and 1million naira worth of scholarship while Dorcas Ayodele, ten, who came 2nd was honoured with N750, 000 naira worth of scholarship. Fifteen year-old Rasaan Omolade, a cripple, won the 3rd prize trophy and 500,000 naira scholarship, a reward for their extra-ordinary heroism and courage. (December 13, 2008)

The event being reported is the first annual Independence Day hero’s award ceremony organized by Dufil Prima Foods Plc, makers of Indomie Instant Noodles. It is not startling to find that an entirely different story gets a disability headline. This is because the supercrip notion is linked to

the achievement of three children with disabilities who were among some young Nigerians rewarded for their heroic bravery at saving lives. Because society often equates disability with illness, these children ought not to be among the awardees but for some supernatural forces behind them. This explains the phrase - “a reward for their extra-ordinary heroism and courage”. The story suggests that people with disabilities will require courage and extra-ordinary effort to be able to accomplish tasks non-disabled people ordinarily will get done.

Similarly, in an interview with a business man with a disability, Adelowo Oladipo employed an astonishing headline to convey the story: “Disabled Man Owns Chains of Coys: Pays GM N120, 000.00 Monthly” (December 27, 2003). The man in question, Francis Akingbemi, owns a rental business of musical instruments and public address system. Based on some of the questions asked Francis Akingbemi, one can infer that his ability to run a business successfully as a person with disability is called to question. The journalist seems more concerned about Francis disability rather than his skills and ideas that made him successful at his business. He asked the following questions from Francis: “Which school did you attend?” This question is based on the general assumption that people with disabilities don’t go to school. “If I may ask, were you born with deformity, and if not, what brought about your predicament?” Here, disability is considered as adversity and impediment that a person with disability is expected to lead a quiet and non-visible existence. “What are those things you could not do in the past and you are now striving to do now?” The phrase “striving to do” clearly supports the argument that people with disabilities are expected to have courage and put in extra-ordinary effort in order to succeed in tasks that non-disabled people ordinarily succeed in.

Gboyega Adeoye wrote about a deaf young man on December 5, 2006 with a headline that clearly conveys unbelief: “INCREDIBLE! Deaf and mute Evangelist preaches on the streets”. The opening paragraph of the story reads:

He is partially deaf and mute, but he manages to produce meaningless and incoherent sounds whenever he is in dire need to communicate. Any speech, to him, means evangelism and working for the Almighty God, his handicap notwithstanding. Moses Onyia is an unusual man, a trait he exhibited right from his formative years. He was born on July 7, 1972 as a retarded child to expectant parents who would have wanted a normal child for their first born.

These stories suggest that people with disabilities are extraterrestrial beings with super-human abilities who shuttle between the physical and spiritual at will. Because the media often portray them as such, it has become a common notion in the south for people to perceive individuals with disabilities as oracles of the gods who can bring either fortunes or misfortunes to people. It is not uncommon in the rural community to see people who are addicted to games like lottery appealing a person with disability with a view to churn out winning numbers for them. Even where the numbers don't perform the expected wonder, it is always assumed that the person with disability has not been appeased enough. Conversely, a pregnant woman never wants to cross path with a person with disability for fear of having her unborn baby “infected with disability”. Media frames that misrepresent or use stereotypically offensive language to describe people with disabilities have helped reinforced prejudice and stigmatization against them.

**RQ2: How does the press frame issues concerning people with disabilities in Nigeria?**

Media contents are often a reflection of the beliefs and values of the society they report. However, in many societies those people or groups who the media do not consider influential or important economically may have their issues ignored entirely or sometimes misrepresented. People with disabilities in Nigeria, although a significant part of the nation's population, are not considered an important clientele to be reckoned with in the Nigerian media. Contents analysis of newspapers from the north and south of Nigeria is an effective way of looking at how the media represent issues about people with disabilities in the nation.

### **Narrative analysis of issues concerning people with disabilities in Daily Trust newspaper**

Diseases are prominent features in Daily Trust newspaper. However, for the purpose of this study, only those diseases that are directly related to disability issues are discussed. Childhood diseases that are preventable through immunization (specifically polio and measles) remain a major concern in Nigeria, with the northern region worst hit. The amount of coverage the Daily Trust newspaper gives to these diseases is higher relative to other diseases covered within the time frame analyzed. There are several implications one can deduce from the high coverage given to preventable childhood diseases by Daily Trust newspaper. This high coverage suggests a failure by stakeholders to completely eradicate these killer diseases. It is also indicative of the fact that a phobia exists among people of northern Nigeria for western nations' vaccines used for immunization, to help prevent these diseases. It is assumed that vaccines from the west contain substances that could cause their children to become impotent later in life in order to reduce their population.

The issue of street begging among people with disabilities seems to be something the northern elites are beginning to worry about. There seems to be effort by government officials to

discourage this trend through empowering people with disabilities in various welfare packages. Based on the foregoing, I discussed what I termed the “epidemic” and “empowerment” frame in the following sections.

Diseases linked to disability are often framed in terms of epidemic. This is because most immunization preventable diseases cause one or more disability if victims survive their attacks. One of such diseases is polio. The polio virus continues to rear its ugly head in Nigeria despite interventions from within and outside the country. This viral disease more or less accounts for majority of the physically challenged category of disability in northern Nigeria.

### **Epidemic frame**

The issue of poliomyelitis in Nigeria seems to defy all solutions as this story headlined, “Polio a major problem in Nigeria”, indicates:

Experts rising from the 10th Task Force on Immunization (TFI) meeting in Abuja have concluded that the polio virus was still a problem in Nigeria and 3 other countries, where it was still rearing its ugly head even as the TFI has extended the date of eradication of polio from December this year to next year. (December 10, 2002)

The fact of the matter is that northern Nigeria remains the worse hit by the polio virus.

AbdulRaheem Audu suggested this in a story headlined, “Facing the albatross of polio, measles”. According to him, “child killer diseases have continued to ravage the world especially Nigeria and particularly the Northern states, afflicting innocent and innocuous children who are helpless in fighting the debilitating diseases” (December 13, 2008). He further reported that “... the bulk of Nigeria’s 751 polio cases are from the North which makes it a source of concern to all leaders

in the North” (December 13, 2008). This explains the reason why the media in northern Nigeria may be giving more coverage to immunization preventable childhood diseases than others.

Perhaps, it is instructive to show how the media may relate diseases to disability. The Daily Trust newspaper sometimes associates poliomyelitis to disability by labeling it a “crippling disease”. In a story on the menace of the polio virus, headlined, “2006 and Global polio eradication”, Aminu Magashi showed this relationship clearly: “By all intent, 2006 is supposed to be the golden year to make a final declaration of achieving total eradication of poliomyelitis termed ‘The Crippling Disease’” (December 19, 2006). Although a word like “crippling” is stereotypically offensive and negative to use, the media in Nigeria continue to associate it with disability.

Getting children immunized against the polio virus is indeed a difficult task today in northern Nigeria, and this is because most people assume that Oral Polio Vaccine (OPV) is a ploy by the west to sterilize their children. This concern leads to a publication in the newspaper dated December 26, 2003, in which the Nigerian Minister of Health addressed a press conference on the OPV, where he was quoted as saying:

Following concerns expressed by some State Governments and other concerned individuals and groups regarding the safety of OPV, I requested for the examination and re-evaluation of OPV using reputable independent laboratories. For this purpose, I set up an Independent Panel of Experts chaired by Professor Emeritus Umaru Shehu to coordinate the necessary activities.

The idea of a northerner, Professor Emeritus Umaru Shehu, as chairman of the independent panel of experts is to build confidence among the populace as well as dispel fears held by them that the

OPV is not a genuine effort at reducing the prevalence of the polio virus among northern communities. As indicated earlier, it is the assumption in the north that the OPV is basically targeted at rendering their children impotent in order to reduce their population.

Much money has gone into the fight against the polio virus in Nigeria. Both government and non-government agencies have pulled resources together to help fight this menace. In a story headlined, “Polio immunization records success in Bagwai” local government area of Kano state, Ahmed Abubakar listed stakeholders that are often involved in the effort to eliminate the polio virus from Nigeria: “Also at the occasion were representatives of UNICEF, Rotary, federal government, WHO, state government and other relevant health agencies” (December 1, 2004).

Nigeria’s federal and state governments’ collaboration to fight poliomyelitis, together with local and international non-government organizations, may be confused with disability issues. It may be misconstrued that money spent on immunization is actually meant to address disability issues. Whereas spending so much money on immunization can help prevent the polio virus from “crippling” children, it does not in any way contribute to disability issues. This is how media misrepresentation of disability issues can contribute to the oppression of people with disabilities in northern Nigeria.

### **Sympathy frame**

The Daily Trust newspaper’s use of the sympathy frame represents two major concerns about disability issues in northern Nigeria – poverty and social neglect. The huge presence of destitute or street beggars in northern communities, often assumed to be people with disabilities, indicates a high level of poverty in the region. It also suggests that issues about disability have not been receiving any serious attention from both the people and governments of the region.

This negligence is graphically captured in a story by Musa Umar Kazaure, where he reported efforts by the Kano state government to better the lots of people with disabilities in the state. The governor of the state described as unserious the habit of giving alms to people with disabilities. The story is reported thus:

The governor who made these disclosures during the distribution of material assistance worth over 9 million Naira to 32 disabled associations in the state also challenged people who are in the habit of giving pittance in the name of alms to disabled persons on the streets to embark on serious disabled empowerment project and programmes that would ultimately take them off the streets as beggars. (December 22, 2006)

Similarly, Jamillah Nuhu Musa reported that:

Disabled persons in Ugogo local government of Kano state are to receive a monthly allowance of two thousand naira. The acting chairman of the council, Alhaji Ibrahim D. Muhammed disclosed this to newsmen in Kano. He said that the measure was meant to discourage street begging in the area. (December 20, 2004)

The general assumption is that most street beggars are people with disabilities. These representations clearly reflect the socio-economic status of people with disabilities in northern Nigeria and reveal how the governments have addressed disability issues over the years. People with disabilities, often represented as street beggars, especially by the media in northern Nigeria, are subjected to alms-giving, which is clearly a religious obligation from an Islamic point of view. There is a distinction between alms-giving as a “religious obligation” and alms-giving as “acts of charity”. While the former is of necessity; a situation where an individual is morally bound to perform a rite, the later is simply motivated by pity.

Before analyzing the sympathy frame further, it is important to first examine the concept of alms-giving from a religious perspective, with a view to understand how it impacts people with disabilities in northern Nigeria. Over the years, people with disabilities have remained least on the socio-economic scale in society with little or no opportunities to move up, away from this relegated position. Because of the hegemonic structure of society, dominant groups employ all means (including religion) within their reach to subjugate their subordinates into a state of perpetual insignificance, economically and politically. People with disabilities live in an “ableist” world where their interests are determined by others, not by themselves. Alms-giving, no doubt, put the giver in a superior position, while the receiver remains in an inferior or inglorious position; a clear picture of the socio-economic status of people with disabilities in northern Nigeria. How has alms-giving, as a religious obligation, impacted disability issues in northern Nigeria? First, it is assumed that giving of alms from a religious point of view attract both spiritual and material blessings. Thus, the benefactor is motivated to give, not to improve the wellbeing of the beneficiary, but to accrue more blessings for her or himself. Where such alms-giving are publicized, as it’s often the case, the benefactors do so to attract public recognition. Second, it is logical to ask this question in order to get at the root of this practice: if there are no beneficiaries for a benefactor’s alms, how does the benefactor keep amassing more blessings? It therefore behooves on the benefactor to encourage and sustain system that will keep the beneficiaries in a perpetual state of need. This is the ugly situation people with disabilities find themselves in northern Nigeria.

The sympathy frame represents a desire on the part of individuals to show pity for disability issues. Although these individuals may be government officials or associated with the people in government, their concerns for disability issues are mere display of emotions, lacking

genuine and legal supports. What is termed “serious disabled empowerment project and programmes” is a form of alms-giving that is motivated by pity and executed mostly with state funds, depending on the individual in government. One other underlying factor (apart from pity) for sympathy could also be “ego”. There is a large presence of street beggars in northern Nigeria, and because street begging is mainly associated with disability (a clear indication of social inequality in the system), particular individuals in government who want to be perceived as pursuing a welfare policy may embark on alms-giving, usually in form of financial and material provisions, to people with disabilities.

### **Narrative analysis of issues concerning people with disabilities in the Nigerian Tribune newspaper**

There are varied ways the media represent issues about disability in the south of Nigeria. The south is made up of several ethnic or cultural groups with Christianity as the predominant religion. These two factors - culture and religion - play significant roles in how disability issues are represented in the news media.

### **Sympathy frame**

The sympathy frame, as used by the Nigerian Tribune newspaper in the south of Nigeria, brings to the fore several concerns related to disability issues. It suggests that people with disabilities are humans who have no choice in what affects them or how they should be treated by others. Whatever comes their way is considered a blessing. In this story headlined, “MTN Foundation: Succouring physically-challenged Nigerians”, Christian Okeke described the attitudes of people with disabilities that benefited from the MTN foundation - a telecommunication company in Nigeria in this manner:

The joy which radiated from the beneficiaries at the event was amazing as it went further to highlight how painful the beneficiaries had laboured without the mobility aids and appliances. It also showed that any form of assistance rendered to persons with disability would not only be received with gratitude by them but will equally be a milestone in making their lives better. (December 28, 2009)

From analyses of the statement, "... any form of assistance rendered to persons with disability would not only be received with gratitude by them but will equally be a milestone in making their lives better for a moment", one can understand how people with disabilities come to be perceived as humans without choice. Whatever comes their way is considered appropriate and their consent is not necessary in matters that concern them.

The sympathy frame may encourage society to do whatever it deems fit for people with disabilities without regard to their particular interests. Because institutionalization is a favorable practice in the south, feeding people with disabilities may be seen as a necessity and all that society owes them, as these headlines indicate: "LG spends N.6m to feed disabled persons" (December 8, 2005); "Samaritan group feasts the less privileged" (Sokoya, December 13, 2009); and "Irele LG boss to give stipends to handicapped" (Adesanmi, December 21, 2004). Both government and non-government organizations give priority to the feeding of people with disabilities. Even where stipends are given out, they are so meager (as in the case above) that one cannot do something substantial with it other than to feed for as long as the stipend lasts. What is also important to note is the fact that these "feeding activities", most often than not, are held annually. Therefore, one may be compelled to ask the question - how do people with disabilities make it all year round before another feeding event takes place? Rather than address fundamental issues, such as environmental and cultural practices that constitute barriers to the

full inclusion of people with disabilities into mainstream society, they are seen as objects of pity that have nothing to contribute and are only worth paying attention to when someone powerful donates something to them.

### **Institutionalization frame**

The major concern here is the social exclusion of people with disabilities through institutionalization. The news media in the south are awash with stories of individuals, companies, religious, government and non-government organizations, motivated mainly by pity, coming to provide succor to people with disabilities in institutions, schools, centers or homes (these terms are used interchangeably) where they are kept, away from the society. This has given the impression that disability is synonymous to institutionalization. Consequently, attention has been shifted to these institutions as the only way of coming in contact with people with disabilities in the community. The following stories clearly indicate the place of people with disabilities in the south of Nigeria. “Shell donates to 7 charity homes” is the headline of this story by Bolaji Ogundele, where the Shell Petroleum Development Company (SPDC) made financial donation to homes for people with disabilities:

The Shell Petroleum Development Company (SPDC) has given out financial aid to seven charity homes in River state. The event that was a commemoration of the yuletide season, saw the SPDC giving out the sum of N200, 000 to each of the seven homes. Representing the SPDC, wife of the Managing Director (Production) East, Mrs. Funke Sunmonu, said the programme was a policy of the company to express its commitment to the welfare of the less privileged of the society and making it a yearly event. According to her, “from past experience, it is obvious that those who come to these events always

leave richer than they came. To see the bright eyes of our challenged brothers and sisters, to observe the dedication of those who mind them, and to feel the joy in the atmosphere at these events – these are so maternally filling that we must admit and grateful for the opportunity”. (December 15, 2003)

Seye Adeniyi wrote on a building project for skills acquisition, donated by the Lions Club International, District 404B Nigeria to inmates of the Oluyole Cheshire Home for people with disabilities in Ibadan. He headlined the story, “Lion’s Club’s humanitarian gesture for the less-privileged” and goes on to describe the essence of the project:

Speaking at the occasion, the District Governor of Lions Club District 404B Nigeria, Lion (Engr.) Jaiye Balogun stated that the club decided to be making life more meaningful and more beautiful for physically challenged in the country and this that, it was the turn of the less-privileged children staying at the Oluyole Cheshire Home .... Speaking further, Lion Balogun also told the audience that the multipurpose workshop will give room for skills acquisition and help the inmate to learn different types of vocational jobs without necessarily sweating or stressing themselves unnecessarily ... The major objectives of the project which shall be completed before the end of this Lionistic year is to assist the physically and mentally challenged people in this centre as well as those that will be coming from different parts of Oyo state to learn and acquire vocational skills instead of sitting by the road side, begging for alms. (December 9, 2005)

The idea that situating the vocational project within the home will “help the inmate to learn different types of vocational jobs without necessarily sweating or stressing themselves unnecessarily” cannot be argued to be logic. It is rather an inadvertent means to promote the

institutionalization of people with disabilities. First, people with disabilities in the center will be further excluded from the society under the guise of protecting them from the “sweat” and “stress” out there. Second, the project will serve as a good attraction to “mop up” other persons with disabilities remaining in the society.

Similarly, Tayo Gesinde, in this story headlined, “Yuletide: Help Project putting smiles on faces of the physically challenged”, points to the location of people with disabilities in the community each time the “good Samaritans” in society want to show their deeds of pity:

It was in the spirit of the season that the initiator of Help Project, a non-governmental organization (NGO), Mrs. Febisola Okonkwo, on Wednesday, 16 November, 2009, at the Pentorise, Bodija, Ibadan, organized a Christmas party for the students of Moniya Rehabilitation Centre, a school for physically challenged, and His Heritage Children Home, a motherless babies’ home (December 29, 2009)

Terms like “less privileged” and “the challenged” are synonyms for describing people with disabilities by the media in the south of Nigeria. These representations not only show the place people with disabilities in society but also point to society where to find them. It is also a reflection of cultural practices that stigmatize disability. The inhuman standard of living for “imamates” (as they are often referred to) in most of these institutions, no doubt, has potential to attract pity from anyone. Pity, however, has never translated into genuine efforts to better the lots of people with disabilities anywhere.

The proliferation of institutions or centers for people with disabilities in the south could be linked to cultural practices that view disability as a curse. Proprietors of these institutions (usually government or private owned) enjoy tremendous patronage from members of society

who have a family member with a disability because it is also seen as a social menace. Here is how a story on government's response to issue of leprosy in Delta state is reported: "The governor added that people who were affected by leprosy, who hitherto, constituted a nuisance on highways, were now in various centres across the state" (December 4, 2009). Because the media have not portrayed disability issues as human rights and inclusion issues, society perceives the presence of people with disability in the communities in south of Nigeria as nuisance.

### **Advocacy frame**

Perhaps, what is interesting here is the fact that the Nigerian Tribune newspaper also reports genuine concerns for addressing disability issues in Nigeria. The advocacy frame may be described as a relatively minor one. While some of the stories represent "agitations for social inclusion" others represent "affirmative action" stories.

Several advocates have agitated for a humane approach in addressing disability issues with the media giving their crusades necessary coverage. The advocacy frame brings disability issues to the front burner as human rights issues, with a need for an inclusive society where everyone will feel a sense of belonging and contribute their quota for collective development. For once, the advocacy frame gives disability issues a positive portrayal. The media used the advocacy frame to reflect the long years of neglect of disability issues by representing the concerns of these advocates. These advocates were agitating for social inclusion and affirmative action mainly in education and employment for people with disabilities.

### **Agitation for social inclusion**

The call for the social inclusion of people with disabilities in society may be described as part of a genuine effort at restoring their dignity as human beings. It serves as a wakeup call

from the long years of neglect people with disabilities have been made to go through. The agitation for inclusion of people with disabilities in mainstream society has been an issue the Nigerian Tribune newspaper has covered over the years. However, what is apparently missing are stories of self-advocacy by people with disabilities.

This story headlined, “Rise to needs of disabled, govt urged”, reflects the need for both governments and the elites in society to rethink the issue of disability. The call made by the Rector of the Christian Mission for the Deaf in Ibadan, Pastor Emmanuel Ilabor, during a graduation ceremony for some of the students of the institution:

The various governments in the federation and all well to do people in Nigeria have been called upon to rise to the needs of the less privileged people in our society by carrying them along in their economic, social and political planning meant for the entire people so that it can be well with us as a group and nation. (December 29, 2002)

The phrase, “so that it can be well with us as a group and nation”, may suggest to society that people with disabilities are no less human; however, the “less privilege” identifier indicates otherwise. In the next story, the social exclusion of people with disabilities is highlighted as discrimination:

The wife of Kogi State governor, Hajia Zainab Idris, has called on the members of the public not to discriminate against disabled persons. Speaking at a ceremony held at the Children Amusement Park, Lokoja, to mark this year’s international day for the disabled, Hajia Idris said the public should see the disabled as dignified members of the society who could also contribute to the development of the nation (Babajide, December 7, 2005)

The fact that people with disabilities face neglect right from the family level in Nigeria is expressly captured in this report headlined, “Parents task to show concern for physically challenged children”, by Sade Oguntola:

An appeal has gone to parents with physically challenged children to take good care of them and also ensure that they are educated. Mr. S. O. Kolajo, Principal, Rehabilitation Centre, Moniya, Ibadan, made this appeal at the 2007 Physically Challenged annual party of department of Physiotherapy, University College Hospital UCH, for over 300 physically challenged children. Mr. Kolajo emphasized that their parents shouldn't consider their disabilities but help them to make something good out of their life, adding that, with more awareness creation on better care for children with disabilities, this will help to remove the stigma associated with these children in the community. (December 27, 2007)

This report clearly linked the neglect of people with disabilities by their family to the social stigma associated with disability. The assertion that “more awareness creation on better care for children with disabilities” can help remove stigma associated with disability further suggests that the present care system, which is largely motivated by pity, is not good enough. Cares, borne out of pity, never consider a person's worth or potential. Rather, people who are subjected to such cares are dehumanized and stigmatized as powerless, poor and dependent on society for sustenance.

### **Affirmative action**

Stories that exemplify how the Nigerian Tribune newspaper frame disability issues as requiring affirmative action call for reservation of certain spaces for people with disabilities in

education or employment. A number of these stories begin to appear after the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities came into force in March 2007. Also, the affirmative action stories use less offensive language compared to stereotypically offensive ones like “crippled”, “deaf and dumb”, etc.

One of such stories is headlined, “Delta reserves 5% vacancies for disabled persons.” The story is about efforts made by the government of Delta state in southern Nigeria to improve the welfare of people with disabilities in the state. The governor was quoted as saying, “the state government has given approval that five per cent of vacancies in any recruitment exercise into the state’s public service be reserved for qualified disabled persons” (December 4, 2009). The quota “five per cent” may be considered small but the question one may be prompted to ask is: what per cent of people with disabilities are qualified for any public service position in the state. The idea of “five per cent” further indicates that not a significant number of people with disabilities are expected to be able to get education or requisite skills for employment.

Similarly, another story headlined, “Oni offers scholarships, employment to the physically-challenged”, emphasized Ekiti state (also a state in the south of Nigeria) government’s commitment towards improving the living standard of people with disabilities within the state. The newspaper reported the story thus:

Indigenes of Ekiti state with different forms of disability are to enjoy two per cent quota of employment in any government establishment, free medical treatment, automatic scholarship for education at all levels and priority consideration in the micro-credit scheme. (December 21, 2007)

The low quotas often allocated to people with disabilities by the various governments' initiatives reflect the general assumption that very few persons with disabilities, in this case the "supercrips", may be able to scale through in life.

Part of the affirmative action stories are news reports that focus on the importance of keeping statistics on persons with disabilities in Nigeria. All state governments who allocate quotas to accommodate people with disability have done so based on assumptions and never on statistics, because none exist. A story headlined, "FG Undertakes Data Collection On The Disabled", by Kolawole Daniel, highlights the Federal Government's (FG) move to address disability issues based on statistics, through a baseline survey of persons with disabilities and not on assumptions. The minister of women affairs and social development was quoted as saying, "when concluded, the surveys will assist in policy formulation, planning, review and programme execution for persons with disabilities" (December 4, 2010).

Stories of affirmative action on disability issues are significant for certain reasons. They reflect a society that is gradually awakening to the fact that people with disabilities have been marginalized for too long. Furthermore, these stories de-emphasize disability as a problem; they highlight the benefits of living with a disability, which is also a way of promoting positive identities for people with disabilities.

The advocacy frame may be considered a positive representation of disability issues by the Nigerian Tribune newspaper. It portrays people with disabilities as a minority group who have been denied equal rights to participate in society. It focuses more on issues of social justice in addressing the social exclusion of people with disabilities and less on "disability" as an impediment to full participation of persons with disabilities in Nigeria.

## **Comparative analyses of newspapers in north and south of Nigeria**

There are both similarities and differences in how the newspapers in the north and south of Nigeria represent people with disabilities and issues about them. Apart from sharing a general derogatory representation (that is the pejorative frame), similarities between the two newspapers are basically in form of stereotypically offensive languages. In terms of differences, cultural and religious factors play a significant role in how the newspapers represent people with disabilities and issues about them.

Pejorative frame, as used in the Daily Trust newspaper, describes people with disabilities mainly as “beggars”, which may be linked to their perceived socio-economic status in the society. Partly, it may also be linked to religious practice, in this case Islam, which, as adherents assume, encourages the giving of alms as a necessary condition for being blessed. Furthermore, media representations that imply “frailty” or “weakness” help reinforce the impression that people with disabilities cannot make a living by engaging in any economic activities. Consequently, giving of alms, whether by individuals or government officials, is considered subsistent for them.

The Nigerian Tribune newspaper also shares in the pejorative frame by portraying people with disabilities using multiple derogatory terms. The term “less privileged” is often used interchangeably with other derogatory terms, and it suggests that people with disabilities are disadvantaged mainly because of their impaired bodies, not by the society that marginalize and discriminate against them in education, employment, and other social endeavors.

In any case, both newspapers describe people with disabilities, under the pejorative frame, in stereotypically offensive languages that are detrimental to the images of people with

disabilities in the society. There is a need for change in the narratives which the media, in both the north and south of Nigeria, employ in representing people with disabilities.

Between the Daily Trust and the Nigerian Tribune newspapers, the main difference in the representation of people with disabilities is that, while the former portrays them under a group-identity frame the latter uses a misrepresentation frame. The group identity frame brings people with various forms of disability under an umbrella that neither overemphasizes nor deemphasizes a particular disability category. The Daily Trust newspaper remained consistent in its representation of people with disabilities under the group-identity frame. These headlines from the Daily Trust newspaper indicate this fact: “Disabled person receive monthly allowance” (Musa, December 20, 2004); “115 disabled persons offered job in Kano” (Kazaure, December 22, 2006); and “Disabled persons mark day, trek within stadium” (Yakubu, December 8, 2006). In contrast, the Nigerian Tribune newspaper uses the misrepresentation frame which represents all categories of disabilities from the perspective of the physically challenged. The following headlines from the Nigerian Tribune newspaper also substantiate this fact: “Oni offers scholarships, employment to the physically challenged” (December 21, 2007); “Ilejemeje council celebrates physically-challenged” (December 22, 2009); and “parents task to show concern for physically challenged children” (Oguntola, December 27, 2007).

Similarities in how both newspapers represent issues about disabilities fall under the sympathy frame. How this frame is used slightly differs in both newspapers. In the Daily Trust newspaper for instance, the sympathy frame highlights poverty and social neglect of people with disabilities in northern Nigeria. That is, no serious efforts are made to empower people with disabilities in the region. They are subjected to alms giving because it earns their benefactors more blessings (religious obligation). On the other hand, people in government who show

concern for people with disabilities do so not as a matter of government policy but on personal initiative to appear sympathetic to their plights. This story clearly supports this assertion:

Hundreds of disabled persons within the Federal Capital Territory (FCT) yesterday marked the International Day of the disabled. The Sports Minister, Bala Ka 'oje, who kicked off the event, joined the disabled in walking a distance of two kilometers.

Disabled people from various parts of Abuja participated in the event which terminated with the walk. (Yakubu, December 8, 2006)

One can infer from this news report that no genuine effort is made by government officials in the north to address the marginalization of people with disabilities in the region. The minister, who is in a position to initiate policies in government to enhance the welfare of people with disabilities, prefers to identify with their cause by walking a distance of two kilometers. The Nigerian Tribune newspaper, on its part, employs the sympathy frame to show that people with disabilities have no say or choice in issues that affect them. In other words, they are incapable of making sound judgments in matters that affect them. This report on the presentation of mobility aids to some persons with disabilities by telecommunications giant MTN clearly indicates how the media in the south portray people with disabilities as humans without choice:

The joy which radiated from the beneficiaries at the event was amazing as it went further to highlight how painful the beneficiaries had laboured without the mobility aids and appliances. It also showed that any form of assistance rendered to persons with disability would not only be received with gratitude by them but will equally be a milestone in making their lives better. (December 28, 2009)

Consequently, the society has to shoulder the responsibility of deciding for people with disabilities, i.e. non-disabled people's burden. Providing meals occasionally is considered appropriate just to keep them going as these headlines indicate: "LG spends N.6m to feed disabled persons" (December 8, 2008); "Irele LG boss to give stipends to handicapped" (Adesanmi, December 21, 2004); and "Samaritan group feasts the less privileged" (Sokoya, December 13, 2009).

In terms of variation in how the newspapers represent issues about people with disabilities, the Daily Trusts newspaper is replete with stories of poliomyelitis, which, more or less, accounts for physical disability. The prevalence of poliomyelitis and other child killer diseases in northern Nigeria is graphically captured by AbdulRaheem Audu in this report: "Child killer diseases have continued to ravage the world especially Nigeria and particularly the Northern states, afflicting innocent and innocuous children who are helpless in fighting the debilitating diseases" (December 13, 2008). The next report by Aminu Magashi links poliomyelitis to "crippling", a negative term associated with disability: "By all intent, 2006 is supposed to be the golden year to make a final declaration of achieving total eradication of poliomyelitis termed 'The Crippling Disease'" (December 19, 2006). Because the term "crippling" (a term the media label people with mobility impairments) is associated to this disease, there is a tendency for people to confuse it for disability issues.

The Nigerian Tribune newspaper has two distinct frames from that of the Daily Trust with which it represents issues about people with disabilities. First is the institutionalization frame as indicated by these synopses culled from some stories in the Nigerian Tribune newspaper:

- a. “The ministry goes out to various less privileged homes every two months to show their hospitality” (December 13, 2009). This is culled from a story headlined, “Samaritan group feasts the less privileged”;
- b. “Handicapped homes that benefitted from Care People Foundation at the occasion were: School for the Handicapped, Oke Bola; Oluyole Sheshire Home; School for the Handicapped, Ring road, Ibadan; Rehabilitation Centre Moniya; Ijokodo High School (senior); among others” (December 18, 2007). This is culled from a story headlined, “Physically-challenged can turn their scars to stars – Rev. Tioluwani; and
- c. “Some of the beneficiaries were Sheshire Home, Borokin; the Compassionate Home, Nkpogu; Motherless Babies Home, Port Harcourt; Daughters of Charity, Port Harcourt; and Home for the Elderly” (December 15, 2003). This is culled from a story headlined, “Shell donates to 7 charity homes”.

The institutionalization frame reveals the place of people with disabilities in southern part of Nigeria. They are kept away in homes, schools and institutions because of the stigma attached to disability. Disability is often viewed as a divine curse in southern Nigeria.

Second is the advocacy frame. It takes the blame off people because of their disabilities and demands equal rights and opportunity for all. The headlines that follow reflect those members of society the media consider worthy to report on the advocacy frame: “Ogun govt. moves to protect the physically-challenge” (December 4, 2007); “Gov’s wife makes case for physically challenged” (December 7, 2005); and “Olajumoke advocates political party for the disabled” (December 2, 2003). “Ogun govt.” refers to the government of Ogun state in the south of Nigeria while “Gov’s wife” refers to a governor’s wife. “Olajumoke” is the name of a Senator of the Federal Republic of Nigeria. Stories under this frame echoed the voices of some elite

members of society concerned about disability issues. Voices of people with disabilities hardly get represented in matters about them.

### **Disability representations before and after the year 2007**

I also looked out for variations in the representation of disability in both newspapers, before and after the year 2007. I wanted to ascertain if Nigeria's assent to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) and its Optional Protocols on March 30, 2007 influenced media representations of disability. I found no significant changes in representations in both newspapers; however, the advocacy frame represents a minor change in the Nigerian Tribune newspaper, especially issues of affirmative action after Nigeria became a signatory to the treaty in 2007. Here are the two stories that represent affirmative action reports in the Nigerian Tribune newspaper:

Indigenes of Ekiti state with different forms of disability are to enjoy two per cent quota of employment in any government establishment, free medical treatment, automatic scholarship for education at all levels and priority consideration in the micro-credit scheme. (December 21, 2007);

and

The Delta State government has reserved five per cent of vacancies in any recruitment exercise into the state's public service for qualified disabled persons. The state governor, Dr. Emmanuel Uduaghan, who was represented by his deputy, Professor Amos Utuama, at the 2009 International Day of Persons with Disabilities in Asaba, on Monday, said the measure was part of the commitment of the administration to the welfare of disabled persons. (December 4, 2009)

These reports represent policies established by governments of two states in the south of Nigeria. They suggest that the media in the south consider the international clamor for respect of the rights and dignity of persons with disabilities important compared to the media in the north.

### **Summary**

People with disabilities in Nigeria are faced with several impediments that militate against their full inclusion into mainstream society. One of such impediments is the negative portrayal of disability by the media in both the north and south of Nigeria. Results from this study show that newspapers' framing of disability in both regions are replete with negative and stereotypical language that can reinforce marginalization and discrimination against people with disabilities in the communities. There is however a slight deviation from the negative frames in the newspaper from the south. Although a relatively minor frame, the advocacy frame may be considered a positive one in the sense that disability issues are portrayed as human rights issues. The newspaper gives coverage to concerns of some elite members of the society who advocate on behalf of people with disabilities. These individuals emphasize the need for the inclusion of people with disabilities into mainstream society and demands affirmative action, mainly in areas of employments and education, to facilitate their inclusion. The advocacy frame is a step in the right direction by the media toward advocating the protection of interest of people with disabilities in Nigeria.

What is however appalling is the fact that the media hardly report self-advocacy moves by people with disability. It suggests that the media in Nigeria hold them in very low esteem and consider their voice not to be relevant in matters that affect them. This negates the concept of "Nothing about without us" (Charlton, 1998, p. 3).

Overall, the results in this study clearly indicate that the media in Nigeria do not consider disability issues very important on their agenda in news reporting. Nothing suggests that a guideline exists for reporting disability related issues in the media. For instance, language, terminology or terms used for reporting disability stories never remain consistent in news reports. A media guideline for reporting disability issues is critical to the inclusion of people with disability in any society.

## **Chapter five:**

### **Discussion**

This study examines how the media portray people with disabilities and issues concerning them in Nigeria. Through a content analysis of two major newspapers in north and south of Nigeria, the study's main objective is to identify frames the media employ when they report disability and whether or not they contribute negatively to how society relate to people with disabilities in Nigeria. The newspapers analyzed are the Daily Trust from the north and the Nigerian Tribune from the south. The time frame ranges from the year 2001 to the year 2010, a period when clamor for the respect of the rights of persons with disabilities assumes international dimension.

Stories in the month of December only were analyzed for this study. Although December is a festive period and highlights the charity perspective in disability news report, I consider it appropriate for this reason. Nothing suggests that the news media in Nigeria have taken a different approach to how disability media stories are sourced and written. The story below is a typical illustration of when disability stories make it on the news media agenda in Nigeria:

It was in the spirit of the season that the initiator of Help Project, a non-governmental organization (NGO), Mrs. Febisola Okonkwo, on Wednesday, 16 November, 2009, at the Pentorise, Bodija, Ibadan, organized a Christmas party for the students of Moniya Rehabilitation Centre, a school for physically challenged, and His Heritage Children Home, a motherless babies' home. (December 29, 2009)

This is an event that occurred in November but only been reported in December. Recent studies have shown that traditional news media of newspapers and TV give coverage to disability stories

especially when government and other elite members of society with powerful status are involved (Haller & others, 2012; & Ogundola, 2012). In the same vein, the news media mainly report acts of charity toward people with disabilities by the same government and elite members of society. Therefore, regardless of the month selected for this study, the charity perspective will continue to be a prominent feature in disability media stories in Nigeria.

The following section discusses the interpretations and implications of results from the study and how they relate to the literature review. The study finds newspapers' portrayal of people with disabilities and issues concerning them in Nigeria to be categorized under eight frames. On the question of how people with disabilities are portrayed by the press in Nigeria, the four frames that emerged are: "group identity", "pejorative", "misrepresentation" and "supercrip" frames. Similarly, on the question of how issues concerning people with disabilities are portrayed by the press in Nigeria, four frames also emerged: "epidemic", "sympathy", "institutionalization" and "advocacy" frames.

Analysis of similarities between both newspapers dovetailed into similar frames which revealed how people with disabilities and issues concerning them are represented in both regions. People with disabilities and issues concerning them are portrayed under the pejorative and sympathy frames respectively. On the other hand, where there are differences, analysis of individual newspaper resulted in diverse frames which distinguished one region from the other. While the Daily Trust newspaper employs a "group identity" frame to portray people with disabilities and an "epidemic" frame to describe issues concerning them, the Nigerian Tribune newspaper on its part uses "misrepresentation" and "supercrip" frames to portray people with disabilities and "institutionalization" and "advocacy" frames to represent issues concerning them.

## **People with disabilities and issues about them are represented in derogatory and sympathetic terms respectively**

Focusing on similarities between both newspapers, a significant finding of this study shows that both pejorative and sympathy frames are consistently used to represent people with disabilities and issues concerning them in the Nigerian media. Under the pejorative frame, people with disabilities are often portrayed in stereotypically offensive language. Words such as “crippled”, “beggars”, “less privileged”, “handicapped”, etc keep recurring each time people with disabilities are referenced in news reports. Relating this finding to “framing effect”, based on Druckman (2001) position on the subject, society will perpetually hold a negative or positive perception of people with disabilities depending on how the media portray them. In other words, pejorative media frames will negatively impact audiences’ frames of people with disabilities (Druckman, 2001, p. 228).

One implication of pejorative media frames is that society will perpetually stigmatize and marginalize people with disabilities. Because news framing has capacity to influence information processing and the decision-making processes that follow (Borah, 2011, p. 248), society will base their judgment of people with disabilities and issues about them on derogatory framing the media employ. Another implication is the fact that use of multiple derogatory terms like beggars, less privileged, etc, make gathering of statistical data on disability an impossible task. As Riley (2005) argues, the population of people with disabilities hangs on the definition of disability (p. 4); therefore the use of multiple negative terms, which obviously may not hold true for people with disabilities only, will continue to compound the definition of disability.

The sympathy frame used by the media in Nigeria also supports argument by Haller, Dorries and Rahn (2006) that derogatory terminologies the media use to frame disability can perpetuate a “sick role” of the disability identity (p. 65). The implication of a “sick identity” can be very damaging. It suggests that people with disabilities are frail and therefore cannot engage in any meaningful economic endeavors. They become objects of pity with alms-giving considered most appropriate for their needs. This explains why issues concerning people with disabilities lack genuine attention from both the governments and society at large. It is a common practice in Nigeria for spouses of states’ executives to establish what is called “pet projects”, during their tenure in government, to cater for people with disabilities or other marginalized groups. Usually, these projects enjoy lots of publicity in the media as the study’s results indicate. Financial supports, wheelchairs and other mobility aids are given out to “lucky” persons with disabilities during these events. What is more ridiculous is the fact that these events only hold on special days like states or national holidays and religious celebrations. As soon as these individuals’ tenure in government ends, their pet projects disappear with them into thin air. What becomes of disability issues therefore depends on who is in government, not on policy.

The media in Nigeria have shaped and reduced disability issues to provision of material aids and feeding the hungry through the sympathy frame. Because disability is linked to poverty and people with disabilities are not perceived as economically relevant to the media, issues about them are hardly considered as human right issues. People with disabilities hardly get their voice heard in the news media. The media mainly represent issues about them from the perspective of an “ableist” society. This supports Stadler’s (2006) argument that “the media tends to naturalize dominant discourses, ideologies and ideas” (p. 375).

These findings are in support of studies on framing effect, especially emphasis framing effect that, “by emphasizing a subset of potentially relevant considerations, a speaker can lead individuals to focus on these considerations when constructing their opinions” (Druckman, 2001, p. 230).

### **The various forms of disabilities are represented under a single umbrella in the north**

The Daily Trust newspaper portrays people with disabilities using a more collective term like disabled people, the disabled or people with disabilities. This suggests that the newspaper uses the group-identity frame to capture all forms of disability under a single umbrella, which is also a means to not over represent or annihilate a particular category. This has both positive and negative implications for people with disabilities. First, it suggests that disability is a diverse term with different impairments under it. This has a positive implication in the sense that policy makers may come to appreciate the diverse nature of disability when planning on disability matters. Second, the group-identity frame can lead to generalization. This however can lead to a negative outcome as this finding supports the assertion by the World Health Organization (2011) that ‘generalizations about ‘disability’ or ‘people with disabilities’ can mislead” (p. 8). This finding again supports Borah’s (2011) assertion on the emphasis aspect of framing that highlighting certain elements in a message can cause individuals to concentrate on those particular elements (p. 248)

One other finding that can be deduced from the group-identity frame is the idea that people with disabilities are visible members of northern Nigeria’s society. Their place in society is always indicated by phrases like “on the street”, “within the community”, etc. This suggests that segregation is not a common practice in the north. In other words, the practice of

abandoning people with disabilities in institutions or homes is not a cherished one in the north. One explanation for this could be that the north does not view disability as a divine curse. The assumption in Africa that disability is a divine punishment has obviously led to the segregation of people with disabilities in society as it is considered a stigma to have a family member with disability. This finding shows that this assumption may not be true for all Islamic communities in Africa as it supports Hasnain, Shaikh and Shanawani (2008) study that Islamic tenets do not place any merit on the material and physical characteristics of a person but on piety (p. 27).

### **Disability and epidemic diseases in the north: potential for misconception**

Under the epidemic frame, the Daily Trust newspaper associates the term “crippling” (a stereotypically offensive word which the media in Nigeria still use for disability) with poliomyelitis, an epidemic virus that remains a grave challenge in northern Nigeria today. In the same way, measles may be associated with blindness and deafness. Portraying disability issues in epidemic colorations such as these have grave consequences for people with disabilities. This finding supports Druckman’s (2001) suggestion on emphasis framing effect that “by emphasizing a subset of potentially relevant considerations, a speaker can lead individuals to focus on these considerations when constructing their opinions” (p. 230). People tend to confuse both issues, especially in a largely illiterate society as is the case in northern Nigeria. In other words, when terms associated with disability become attached to diseases with epidemic dimension such as poliomyelitis, the tendency to stigmatize issues about disability becomes viable. Issues about disability may no longer be perceived as human experiences; they may be mistaken for diseases. This finding also supports Haller, Dorries and Rahn (2006) claim that derogatory terminologies the media attach to disability “reinforce a ‘sick role’ or the medication of the disability identity” (p. 65). The consequence of this is exclusion from any economic

activity because people with disabilities are assumed to be diseased or too frail to be of any economic benefit to society. This, no doubt, account for reasons why northern Nigeria, over the years, never recognized people with disabilities as potential contributors to the economic development of the region. Regardless of northern Nigeria's professed ideology of "Islamic inclusion", the apparent marginalization of people with disabilities in the economic equation of the region remains an issue to address.

The failure or inability to successfully "kick polio out of Nigeria", specifically the northern region may be attributed to several factors. First, there is a "conspiracy theory" spreading among the populace in that region. It is assumed that western vaccines used for preventing these childhood killer diseases are a contrivance to decimate their population. People think immunizing their children against poliomyelitis and other child killer diseases will render them impotent. This accounts for the failures recorded annually in the immunization programs in northern Nigeria, and the inability to successfully "kick polio out of Nigeria", Africa's most populated nation.

### **Other categories of impairments are misrepresented as physical impairment in the south**

Using a misrepresentation frame, the Nigerian Tribune newspaper portrayed people with disabilities mostly under a single category of impairment. This finding shows that the misrepresentation frame supports Entman's (1993) argument that media message producers can distort reality by "choosing and giving some part of a noticed reality salience in order to influence audiences' perceptions" (p. 52). By grouping all disabilities under the "physically challenged" category, the newspaper leaves out other categories of impairment, which is a form of misrepresentation. The implication of this is that people with other forms of disabilities are

symbolically annihilated because the news media leave them out when reporting disability.

Consequently, policies and programs of government and non-government organizations will be targeted mainly at the physically challenged. For instance, some stories the newspaper reported in this regard were that of events where mobility aids such as wheelchairs, crutches, accessible busses were donated to cater for the mobility needs of people with physical challenge.

Governments' programs hardly address the needs of other categories of impairment because what is done for the physically challenged is assumed to cater for the needs of other categories of disabilities.

This study also finds under the misrepresentation frame that the newspaper was inconsistent in terms used to address people with disabilities. A story headline may contain the term "physically challenged" while the contents of the story may be replete with stereotypically offensive terms like crippled, deaf and dumb, beggars, etc. This suggests two things. First, it indicates that no clear policy exists to guide the media in Nigeria on reporting disability issues. Second, it shows how unimportant the media in Nigeria consider the reporting of disability, an issue which affects a significant portion of the nation's population.

Another instructive finding in the Nigerian Tribune newspaper is the use of the qualifier "special" when portraying people with disabilities. The effect is to draw a distinction between people with disabilities and their nondisabled counterparts described as "normal". In other words, it is a sly way of referring to people with disabilities as abnormal people. One major implication of labeling people with disabilities as "special" is that provision of segregated facilities is prioritized over concepts such as inclusion or universal design, which are geared towards accommodating everyone.

### **Disability as outcast issues**

One sly way of segregating people with disabilities from the larger community in the south is separation through institutionalization – homes or centers where people with disabilities are cared for. This is usually the case in some African communities where disability is viewed as a divine punishment and people who have family members with a disability want to avoid the social stigma attached to it. They do not want to be perceived in society as people whose lineage may have offended the gods and consequently being divinely punished through the “infliction of disability” on one of their own. Everyone wants to appear good and guiltless - after all, it is one way of remaining a respected member of the African community. The implication here is that the family member with a disability becomes the odd person out – an outcast! This is consistent with Popay and others (2008) argument on “exclusion”, which they show consists of dynamic, multi-dimensional processes driven by unequal power relationships” (p. 36). People with disabilities are often at a disadvantage, especially due to the unequal power relationships that play out in the media. They cannot tell their own stories because the media consider them powerless. Through critical theory, we have the opportunity to investigate and understand ways that “conditions of social, economic, and political domination limit, distort and depreciate discourse regarding contested public issues” (McClure, 1996, p. 488).

### **A voice for the voiceless**

What may be described as a positive representation of disability in the Nigerian Tribune newspaper falls under the advocacy frame. Genuine concerns for the plights of people with disabilities in Nigeria get featured in the news stories for one major reason – government and other elite members of society decided to advocate on behalf of people with disabilities. This

finding supports Haller and her colleagues' (2012) study on sources of disability media stories where they show that traditional news media give preference to people who have powerful status in society ("How Are Disability Media Stories Sourced And Written," para. 2). The media, by so doing, have made these powerful people in society a voice for people with disabilities, while at the same time have rendered them voiceless by ignoring their self-advocacy movements. This finding suggests something about the socio-economic status of people with disabilities in Nigeria. By ignoring their voices, the media in Nigeria are saying that people with disabilities do not matter economically. This supports Haller's (2010) finding that the mainstream media are yet to consider people with disabilities a worthy group to discuss (p. 119). Consequently, they are being symbolically annihilated.

The concept of symbolic annihilation can be viewed from two angles: non representation and underrepresentation by the media. Non-representation occurs when the media ignore a people or group's voice. By ignoring the voice of people with disabilities and reporting concerns of elite members of society about them, as this finding indicates, it is apparent that the source of disability stories for the news media in Nigeria is opinions of non disabled members of society. This finding clearly suggests to us who the gatekeepers of disability news stories in Nigeria are – the dominant, "ableist" members of society. Similarly, it reflects the hegemonic control of elite members of society through the media. Media content is replete with the opinions of dominant groups with which they hold other groups in subordination, in such a way that they maintain their dominance over them.

Underrepresentation suggests some amount of coverage or presence in the media. However, in the case of disability news stories, opinions of others and not the self advocacy of people with disabilities, make up the little amount of coverage that underrepresentation suggests.

In other words, instead of opinions of people with disabilities themselves, it is that of the “ableist”, which is replete with stereotypically offensive language that influences disability news stories. Underrepresentation, as a form of symbolic annihilation, suggests some level of presence that “enables the reiteration of stereotypes” (Tuchman, 1979, p. 12). By preferring opinions of the others to that of people with disabilities in Nigeria, the media are in essence saying that they lack power socially, economically and politically. This supports Tuchman’s (1979) finding in his study titled, “Women’s depiction by the media”, that the underrepresentation of women and their stereotypical portrayal in the news media may be symbolic of their lack of power in the American society (p. 12). It can be argued from the foregoing that this is true of people with disabilities in Nigeria. The finding suggests that the media in Nigeria do not consider them important, even on matters that affect them, because they are perceived as lacking power. This is a way of symbolically annihilating them.

### **Suggestion for further studies**

It is important that further studies on this subject analyze newspapers from the core of northern Nigeria – for instance, Kaduna and Kano – in order to gather adequate data on news media representation of disability in the north. In this study, I initially planned to analyze disability news reports from the New Nigerian newspaper in Kaduna. This could not be achieved as a result of violent activities by the “Boko Haram” Islamic terrorist group. The term “Boko Haram” means western education is forbidden.

Nigeria incidentally has a high level of illiterate people. The reading of newspapers could be a major challenge for locals in rural communities who make up a significant part of the illiterate population. Similarly, majority of people with disabilities reside in rural communities

and newspapers' representations of them may not have significant impact on locals in the communities. Therefore, further studies may also explore how disability is framed in films, which require less literal capacity compared to reading of newspapers to process.

## **Conclusion**

This study examines media frames of disability in Nigeria. Analyzing newspapers from both the north (Daily Trust newspaper) and south (Nigerian Tribune newspaper) of Nigeria gives insight into how news reports have represented people with disabilities within the period of a decade - 2001 to 2010.

A significant finding of this study shows that the media in Nigeria employ stereotypically offensive language when reporting disability stories. This, no doubt, has negative impact in how society relate with people with disabilities. People with disabilities in Nigeria are perpetually marginalized and discriminated against partly as a result of how the media have represented them to the society. Media frames that emphasize frailty, charity, disparity and derogatory labels leave room for stereotype, prejudice and stigma. The need for a media guideline for reporting disability stories in Nigeria and by extension Africa cannot be overemphasized.

In the same vein, media frames that portray disability issues as human rights issues can positively enhance the status of people with disabilities in the society. Although a relatively recent frame, the advocacy frame used by the Nigerian Tribune newspaper in the south is a step in the right direction towards promoting an inclusive society. Because people are very important in nations and no economy can prosper when a significant part of a nation's population is marginalized, it is important to train media practitioners on how to frame the diverse groups within society in news report. This will go a long way in promoting the culture of inclusion in

society as everyone will have a sense of belonging and contribute toward the development of mankind.

Finally, Nigeria's version of Hollywood, Nollywood is a fast growing film industry and still in its nascent stage. Here is one area that disability image can be rightly portrayed. People with disability can tell their own stories using the platform of the film industry. Similarly, social media provide another platform for people with disabilities to report their stories. Nigerians with disabilities can advocate the protection of their interests using these platforms until such a time when the traditional news media of newspaper, radio and television are properly educated on disability news reports.

## Appendix A

Article #

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Publication/section/headline/byline:

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Date/Milestone:

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Focus of Article:

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Description of people with disabilities (metaphors, phrases, etc)

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Description of issues concerning people with disabilities (metaphors, phrases, etc)

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Cultural/Religious connections:

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Quotes

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Notes

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## Vita

Olusola John Ogundola is a disability rights activist, scholar and media analyst from Nigeria, West Africa. Eleven months after birth, he contracted poliomyelitis, which affected his two lower limbs, necessitating the use of a wheelchair. After obtaining his first degree in Library and Information Studies from the University of Ibadan, Nigeria, Ogundola proceeded to the S. I. Newhouse School of Public Communications, Syracuse University, New York, USA for a master degree in Media Studies with a scholarship from the Ford Foundation.

His career in the disability community started in 2006 when he was appointed administrator of the Christ Foundation, a ministry for people with disabilities in Ibadan. Between 2006 and 2009, when he served in the ministry, he established several programs to promote the inclusion of people with disabilities in society. He developed a “Skills Vi-Ability Project” to encourage community based vocational skills and business start-up training for people with disability. He initiated the Rev. Prof. Joel Adeyinka Adedeji Memorial Lecture; an annual forum designed to create awareness on issues about people with disabilities and promote ideas on how they can further integrate into society and contribute to nation building. In 2007, he became chairman of a socio-political group - Association for Comprehensive Empowerment of Nigerians with Disabilities (ASCEND), Oyo State Chapter. He founded Project Restoration in May 2009 to unblock the minds of the church and society toward people with disabilities.

As a scholar, Ogundola’s research interest is broadly on how identities of diverse groups are shaped by media contents that reflect dominant societal beliefs. Specifically, he is interested in how media construction of disability is shaped by an “ableist” society.

Ogundola hopes to establish a media and disability center in Nigeria where research on disability issues will be given top priority. Because people are the most important resource in any economy, and no nation can prosper when a significant part of its population remain unproductive, it is important that people with disabilities in Africa are empowered for the development of the continent - this is Ogundola's purpose.