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MEDIA FRAMING OF INCLUSIVE LEADERSHIP IN ADDRESSING WORKPLACE GENDER DISCRIMINATION IN NIGERIAN NEWSPAPERS

Osazuwa, Joseph Helen & Imhanobe, Habsat Joyce PhD

Department of Masscommunication. College of Arts and Social Sciences. Igbinedion University Okada. Edo State. Nigeria
osazuwa.helen@iuokada.edu.ng & imhanobe.habsat@iuokada.edu.ng

ABSTRACT

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This study examined how Nigerian newspapers framed inclusive leadership in addressing workplace gender discrimination. Anchored on Framing Theory, the study adopted quantitative content analysis of newspaper articles published between 2020 and 2024. A total of 186 articles were identified, out of which 120 met the inclusion criteria and were analyzed. The unit of analysis was the individual newspaper article. Coding categories included problem definition, causal attribution, responsibility attribution, tone, and solution orientation. Intercoder reliability was established using percentage agreement (0.82). Findings revealed that 65% of articles framed inclusive leadership as a solution to workplace gender discrimination, while 70% adopted a positive tone. Organizational leadership was identified as the primary agent of change in 52% of the coverage. The study concludes that Nigerian newspapers recognize inclusive leadership as a viable strategy for reducing workplace gender discrimination but underutilize sustained advocacy framing. The study recommends increased thematic coverage and stronger policy-oriented framing.

Keywords: Inclusive leadership, gender discrimination, media framing, newspapers, Nigeria

Introduction

Gender discrimination in the workplace continues to pose a significant challenge to organizational development and national productivity. Women often experience unequal opportunities in hiring, promotion, remuneration, and leadership representation. These disparities undermine workplace inclusiveness and hinder sustainable development. Scholars argue that inclusive leadership fosters equity, diversity, and participation in decision-making processes (Northouse, 2019).

The mass media play an important role in shaping public discourse on workplace gender discrimination. Through agenda-setting and framing, newspapers influence societal perceptions and policy priorities. According to Entman (1993), framing involves selecting aspects of perceived reality and making them more salient in communication texts. Nigerian newspapers therefore serve as critical actors in constructing narratives around inclusive leadership and gender equality.

Despite increased advocacy for gender equality, studies indicate that media coverage of workplace discrimination remains inconsistent and event-driven (Okunna, 2018). There is limited empirical evidence on how inclusive leadership is framed as a solution to workplace gender discrimination. This study addresses this gap by examining newspaper framing patterns.

Statement of the Problem

Despite global advocacy for gender equality and Nigeria's commitment to international conventions such as the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG 5), workplace gender discrimination remains pervasive across public and private sector organizations. Women in Nigeria continue to experience structural barriers including unequal pay, limited access to leadership roles, and exclusion from decision-making processes, and subtle forms of organizational bias (World Economic Forum, 2023; Tricco et al., 2024). These challenges not only undermine women's career advancement but also weaken organizational effectiveness and national development outcomes.

Workplace gender discrimination persists in Nigeria despite policies promoting equality. Inclusive leadership has been proposed as a mechanism for reducing discrimination; however, the extent to which Nigerian newspapers frame inclusive leadership as a solution remains unclear. Media framing shapes public understanding and influences organizational practices. Without sustained framing, advocacy efforts may be weakened. Therefore, this study investigates how

Nigerian newspapers frame inclusive leadership in addressing workplace gender discrimination.

Objectives of the Study: The objectives of this study are to:

1. Determine the frequency of newspaper coverage of inclusive leadership and workplace gender discrimination.
2. Identify dominant frames used in reporting inclusive leadership.
3. Examine responsibility attribution in newspaper coverage.
4. Determine the tone of coverage toward inclusive leadership.
5. Identify solution-oriented frames emphasized in the coverage.

Research Questions: The following research questions guided the study:

1. How frequently do Nigerian newspapers cover inclusive leadership in relation to workplace gender discrimination?
2. What dominant frames characterize newspaper coverage?
3. Who is portrayed as responsible for addressing workplace gender discrimination?
4. What tone characterizes newspaper coverage?
5. What solutions are emphasized in the coverage?

Literature Review

Inclusive Leadership and Workplace Gender Equality: Inclusive leadership has gained prominence as a leadership paradigm that actively fosters diversity, equity, and fairness within organizational contexts. It is characterized by leaders who encourage participation, value individual differences, and create environments where all employees feel respected and included. Studies indicate that inclusive leadership contributes positively to organizational outcomes, including enhanced employee engagement, psychological safety, and reduced discrimination (Fatoki, 2024). Research conducted within African workplace contexts affirms that inclusive leadership can enhance employee voice and belonging, thereby facilitating environments less prone to discriminatory behaviors (Fatoki, 2024). Similarly, Adebayo and Musa (2025) found that inclusive leadership in Nigerian firms significantly improves organizational diversity and performance, suggesting that such leadership styles help dismantle barriers that traditionally marginalize underrepresented groups.

Despite its growing relevance, most research on inclusive leadership tends to focus on organizational outcomes rather than how leadership is understood and communicated within broader societal discourse. Furthermore, while inclusive leadership has been linked

to reduced bias and mitigated workplace discrimination globally, empirical evidence on its role within the Nigerian workplace remains limited, particularly when considered through the lens of public narratives and media representation. This underscores the need for communication-oriented inquiries into how inclusive leadership is presented in society.

Media Framing of Gender and Leadership Issues: The media are powerful in shaping public understanding of social problems, including gender equality and leadership. Framing theory posits that media frames influence how audiences interpret issues by emphasizing particular aspects of reality, attributing causes, and suggesting solutions (Scheufele & Tewksbury, 2007). Studies on media representations of gender demonstrate that framing often reinforces stereotypes or marginalizes structural explanations for discrimination. For instance, research on gendered framing in Nigerian newspapers shows that media coverage tends to emphasize personal characteristics or episodic narratives when discussing gender issues, thereby limiting public understanding of systemic discrimination (Luka & Ugondo, 2025).

Although research on media framing of workplace gender discrimination specifically is sparse, related studies in political communication reveal persistent gendered framing biases that marginalize women in leadership contexts, suggesting that similar patterns may exist in workplace discourse. These biases often reflect deep-rooted cultural norms that equate leadership with traditionally masculine traits, thereby shaping public perceptions of who is suitable for leadership roles (Luka & Ugondo, 2025). Such framing biases can hinder broader societal acceptance of inclusive leadership as a legitimate mechanism for addressing inequality.

Framing Theory and Media Representation: Framing theory emphasizes the role of media in constructing meaning. According to Entman (1993), frames work by defining problems, diagnosing causes, making moral judgments, and recommending remedies. This process shapes how audiences perceive social issues and what solutions appear legitimate or desirable. In studies of gender and communication, framing analysis has been used to show how media narratives influence public understanding of gender roles, leadership qualities, and workplace dynamics (Luka & Ugondo, 2025). In essence, frames do not merely reflect reality; they actively construct interpretive frameworks that guide audience interpretation (Scheufele & Tewksbury, 2007).

Inclusive Leadership as a Framed Solution: Inclusive leadership is conceptualized as a leadership approach that values diversity, encourages participation, and fosters equitable organizational environments (Shore et al., 2018; Fatoki, 2024). Research indicates that inclusive

leadership can reduce workplace discrimination, enhance employee engagement, and support organizational fairness (Atiku et al., 2024; Fatoki, 2024). However, whether inclusive leadership is perceived as an effective solution to workplace gender discrimination depends in part on how it is framed in public discourse, particularly in media narratives. Media frames that emphasize inclusive leadership as a structural and actionable strategy for reducing bias are likely to promote broader acceptance and adoption of inclusive practices by both media audiences and organizational stakeholders.

Media Framing and Perceptions of Workplace Discrimination: Workplace gender discrimination occurs when organizational practices and cultural norms systematically disadvantage female employees in areas such as access to leadership roles, fair compensation, and professional advancement (Fakiya & Eguonor, 2025; Racheal, 2025). Media framing plays a significant role in influencing public perceptions of such discrimination. Frames that focus on episodic explanations (e.g., isolated incidents or individual failings) tend to obscure structural causes of inequality and minimize the perceived need for systemic reforms (Luka & Ugondo, 2025). Conversely, thematic frames which highlight patterns, trends, and structural factors encourage audiences to see discrimination as a broader social and institutional problem that merits comprehensive solutions including inclusive leadership.

Integrating Media Framing and Leadership Discourses: In the context of this study, the theoretical framework integrates media framing processes with concepts of inclusive leadership and workplace gender discrimination. The framework proposes that media frames influence how audiences understand workplace gender discrimination, attribute responsibility for the problem, and evaluate inclusive leadership as a viable corrective strategy. Specifically, the framework suggests that:

1. **Media definitions of workplace gender discrimination** influence whether audiences perceive it as an individual, cultural, or structural problem.
2. **Attribution of responsibility** in media frames (e.g., leaders, organizations, societal norms) affects perceptions of who is accountable for addressing discrimination.
3. **Media presentation of inclusive leadership** (positive, neutral, negative) shapes audience acceptance of inclusive leadership as an effective solution.

Theoretical Framework: The theoretical foundation of this study is grounded in **Framing Theory**, which provides the conceptual lens for understanding how media messages shape audience perceptions by

emphasizing certain aspects of social realities while downplaying or omitting others (Entman, 1993). Framing theory posits that the way media select, organize, and present information influences how audiences interpret events, assign responsibility, and evaluate solutions to social problems (Scheufele & Tewksbury, 2007). Frames define problems, diagnose causes, make moral judgments, and suggest remedies (Entman, 1993).

In this study, framing elements include Problem definition, Causal attribution, Responsibility attribution, Tone of coverage, and Solution orientation. By analyzing these relationships, the framework enables systematic exploration of how media framing impacts public understanding of both gender discrimination and inclusive leadership within the Nigerian context.

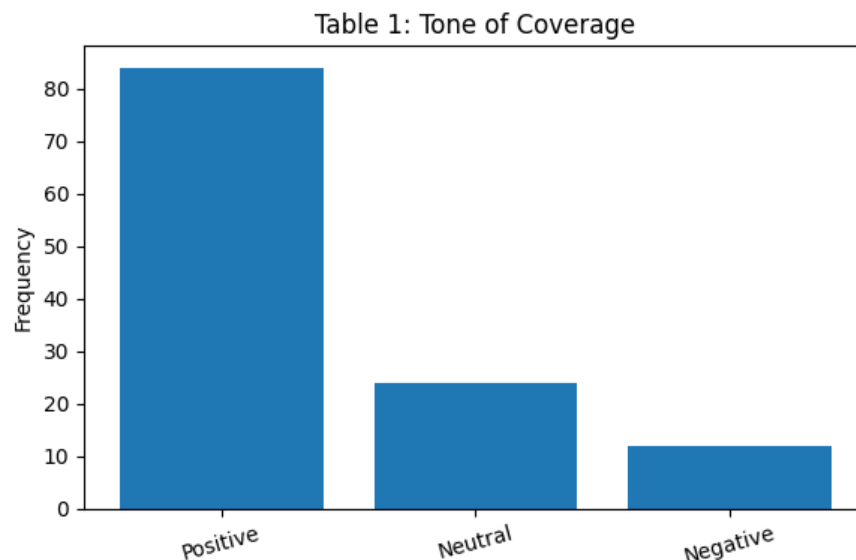
Methodology

The study adopted quantitative content analysis. The population consisted of newspaper articles on inclusive leadership and workplace gender discrimination published between 2020 and 2024. From the accessible

population of **186 articles**, a total of **120 articles** met the inclusion criteria and were selected for the final analysis. Purposive sampling was used to select national newspapers based on circulation and accessibility. Three national newspapers were purposively selected based on circulation, accessibility, and relevance. Articles were retrieved using keywords such as: Inclusive leadership, Workplace gender discrimination, Gender equality, and Women leadership. The unit of analysis was the individual newspaper article. Coding variables included: Frame type, Responsibility attribution, Tone of coverage, Solution emphasis, and Source of information. Two trained coders analyzed the data. Inter-coder reliability was calculated using percentage agreement, yielding a coefficient of 0.82.

A structured coding sheet is developed to capture: Type of media content, Dominant frame (episodic vs thematic), Problem definition (individual, cultural, and structural), Attribution of responsibility (leaders, institutions, and individuals), Representation of inclusive leadership (positive, neutral, negative), and Gender focus (male-dominated, female-centered, balanced).

Table 1: Tone of Coverage

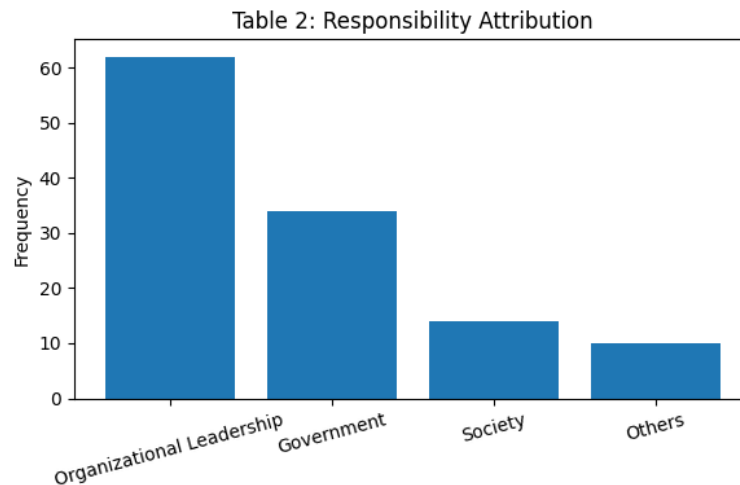


The chart shows that positive coverage dominates (70%), indicating that media reports largely presented favorable perspectives. Neutral coverage accounted for 20%, while

negative coverage was limited to 10%, suggesting relatively low criticism or unfavorable reporting.

Data Presentation and Analysis**Table 1: Tone of Coverage**

Tone	Frequency	Percentage
Positive	84	70%
Neutral	24	20%
Negative	12	10%
Total	120	100%

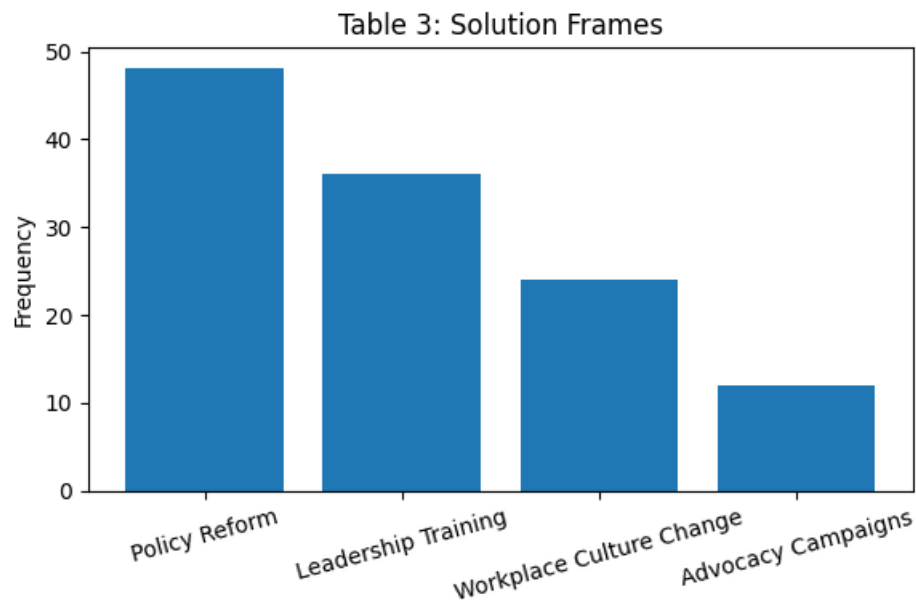
Table 2: Responsibility Attribution

Most responsibility was attributed to organizational leadership (52%), followed by government (28%). Society (12%) and other actors (8%) were mentioned less frequently, indicating that leadership was viewed as the primary driver of outcomes.

Table 2: Responsibility Attribution

Responsibility	Frequency	Percentage
Organizational Leadership	62	52%
Government	34	28%
Society	14	12%
Others	10	8%
Total	120	100%

Table 3: Solution Frames



Policy reform was the most frequently proposed solution (40%), followed by leadership training (30%). Workplace culture change accounted for 20%, while advocacy campaigns represented 10%, showing a preference for structural and leadership-based interventions.

Table 3: Solution Frames

Solution	Frequency	Percentage
Policy Reform	48	40%
Leadership Training	36	30%
Workplace Culture Change	24	20%
Advocacy Campaigns	12	10%
Total	120	100%

Findings

Dominant Media Frames: Findings reveal that Nigerian media employed both **episodic and thematic frames**, with **episodic framing** appearing more frequently. A majority of the articles focused on isolated incidents of discrimination, individual success stories, or personal leadership attributes rather than broader structural or institutional patterns of workplace gender inequality.

Problem Definition and Attribution of Responsibility: Workplace gender discrimination was predominantly defined as a **cultural or individual problem**, often linked to societal attitudes, personal bias, or organizational culture. Fewer articles framed gender discrimination as a **systemic or institutional issue** requiring policy and leadership reforms. Responsibility for addressing discrimination was frequently attributed to individual employees or societal norms, while organizational leaders and institutions were less frequently identified as primary agents of change.

Representation of Inclusive Leadership: Inclusive leadership was generally portrayed **positively**, especially in opinion pieces and feature articles. However, inclusive leadership was often discussed **implicitly** rather than as a clearly articulated leadership framework. In many cases, inclusive leadership appeared as a peripheral concept rather than a central solution to workplace gender discrimination. Only a limited number of articles explicitly framed inclusive leadership as a strategic and institutional response to gender inequality.

Solution Frames: While media coverage acknowledged the importance of fairness and diversity, proposed solutions emphasized awareness creation, individual attitude change, and cultural sensitization more than leadership accountability or organizational reform. Structural interventions such as leadership training, policy enforcement, and institutional accountability were underrepresented.

Discussion of Findings

The findings demonstrate that Nigerian newspapers recognize inclusive leadership as a key strategy for addressing workplace gender discrimination, as evidenced by the predominance of positive framing (70%) and solution-oriented coverage (65%). This result directly supports Framing Theory's proposition that media do not merely report issues, but actively shape interpretations by emphasizing certain aspects of reality (Entman, 1993). By framing inclusive leadership as a viable remedy, newspapers contribute to constructing gender equality as an organizational responsibility rather than an individual concern.

The dominance of positive tone in the coverage aligns with the findings of Adekoya (2021), who observed that media framing of gender-related policies often adopts supportive narratives when institutional reform is emphasized. Similarly, the attribution of responsibility primarily to organizational leadership (52%) corroborates Okunna's (2018) argument that structural framing encourages audiences to view gender inequality as rooted in institutional practices. This suggests that Nigerian newspapers are increasingly adopting thematic framing, which highlights systematic episodic accounts of isolated incidents.

However, despite the positive tone, the study found limited sustained advocacy coverage. This supports Uche (2020) observation that Nigerian media frequently engage in episodic reporting of workplace equality issues, focusing on events such as conferences or policy announcements without continuous follow-up. Episodic framing, according to Framing Theory, reduces the likelihood of sustained public engagement and may weaken pressure for long-term organizational reforms.

Furthermore, the prominence of policy reform (40%) and leadership training (30%) as solution frames reflects a shift toward constructive media advocacy. This finding aligns with Entman's (1993) notion that frames suggesting remedies influence public expectations about appropriate solutions. By emphasizing leadership training and policy reform, newspapers implicitly promote inclusive leadership as a strategic organizational practice.

Overall, the results indicate partial convergence with prior studies. While earlier research highlights limited media engagement with workplace gender inequality, this study reveals growing recognition of inclusive leadership as a corrective mechanism. Nevertheless, the persistence of episodic coverage confirms earlier critiques that Nigerian newspapers have yet to fully utilize thematic framing for sustained advocacy. These findings reinforce the relevance of Framing Theory in explaining how media emphasis on leadership solutions can shape discourse on workplace equality.

Conclusion

The study concludes that Nigerian media frame inclusive leadership positively but provide limited sustained coverage. Strengthening thematic advocacy will enhance media contribution to workplace equality.

Recommendations

1. For Media Practitioners

Adopt Structured Editorial Guidelines: Develop and implement editorial policies that require at least **50% of coverage on workplace gender issues to focus on structural causes and leadership solutions**, not only individual stories.

Regular Features on Inclusive Leadership: Introduce a **monthly column or feature** highlighting successful inclusive leadership practices in Nigerian organizations, with examples of measurable outcomes.

Train Journalists on Gender-Sensitive Reporting: Conduct **annual workshops** for media staff on gender equality, framing theory, and inclusive leadership, including practical exercises on framing stories that highlight systemic issues.

2. For Organizational Leaders

Communicate Inclusive Practices Publicly: Publish **quarterly reports** or press releases on gender diversity initiatives and inclusive leadership programs, ensuring media coverage of these actions.

Establish Inclusive Leadership Metrics: Implement clear KPIs for leaders (e.g., percentage of women in management, retention of marginalized staff, employee engagement surveys) and share results with stakeholders and media.

Engage in Media Partnerships: Partner with local media outlets to **create case studies or interviews** showcasing practical inclusive leadership initiatives in the organization.

3. For Policymakers and Gender Advocates

Mandatory Media Campaigns on Inclusive Leadership: Fund and coordinate at least to promote awareness of gender equality and inclusive leadership practices. **Introduce Policy Incentives for Media Coverage:** Offer recognition awards or tax incentives for media houses that **regularly publish balanced, structural-framed stories on gender equality and leadership**. **Develop Public Guidelines for Gender Reporting:** Publish a **comprehensive handbook** for journalists, detailing how to report on workplace discrimination and inclusive leadership, with examples of both episodic and thematic framing.

4. For Researchers

Conduct Longitudinal Studies: Track the **impact of media coverage on audience perceptions of inclusive leadership** over time to assess which framing strategies are most effective. **Cross-Platform Media Analysis:** Expand research to include **television, radio, and social media**, providing actionable insights on how inclusive leadership is represented across platforms. **Develop Practical Toolkits:** Create **research-informed guides** for organizations and media on how to communicate inclusive leadership initiatives effectively.

Contribution to Knowledge

By extending framing theory to leadership and workplace gender discourse within the Nigerian media context, this study contributes to mass communication scholarship and offers practical implications for journalists, organizational leaders, policymakers, and gender advocates. Strengthening media narratives around inclusive leadership can play a crucial role in promoting equitable workplaces and advancing gender equality in Nigeria.

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