

## **Child's rights act and girl child's portrayal on instagram: Awareness and perception of Nnamdi Azikiwe University undergraduates**

Nweke, Chinyere Felicia, Okoli, Ogechukwu N., Chiaghana,  
Chiazor & Obi, Evelyn Chinwe

### ***Abstract***

*This study aimed to analyze the awareness and perception of NAU undergraduates on Child Right Act and girl-child's portrayal on Instagram. The objectives of the study were to find out the respondent's level of awareness of the Child Right Act, their perception of the portrayal of the girl child on Instagram and to ascertain if Instagram influencers adhere to the Child Right Act. The study was anchored on the framing theory. The research adopted a mixed method approach: quantitative (survey) and qualitative (Focus Group Discussion) methods. Findings revealed that respondents' awareness of the Child Right Act is low. Also in the findings, the respondents perceived that the girl-child is being portrayed on Instagram in a negative manner. The study recommended among others that social media networks should censor and ban any inappropriate content that portrays and affects children negatively.*

***Key words:*** *child right, girl-child, portrayal, awareness, perception and instagram*

## **Introduction**

In recent years, the pervasive influence of social media platforms has significantly shaped societal perceptions and awareness regarding various social issues. Among these issues, the rights and portrayal of children, particularly girls, have garnered significant attention. With the rise of platforms like Instagram, where visual content dominates, the portrayal of the girl child has become a subject of scrutiny due to its potential implications on gender stereotypes, empowerment, and overall societal perceptions.

Every human being who is an adult today at some point was a child, that once depended on parents, guardians, relatives for survival. The National Child Welfare Policy of 1989 defines a child as anybody who is twelve years or below. However, a draft decree put into law has now set the age of the child in Nigeria as eighteen years or below. It is pertinent to note that this age definition of the Convention is already in practice under municipal laws.

Every child born into this world is entitled to basic human rights. These basic rights include: the right to health, family life, play and recreation, right to worship, an adequate standard of living and to be protected from abuse and harm, etc. Children's rights cover their developmental and age-appropriate needs that

change over time as a child grows up. There are four general principles that underpin all children's rights, they include;

- Non discrimination: all children have the right to enjoy their rights regardless of color, sex, age, language, race, religion, property, etc.
- The best interests of the child: this must be "a primary consideration " in all actions and decisions concerning a child and must be used to resolve conflicts between different rights.
- Right to life, survival and development: every child has the inherent right to life and it is expected that the government must ensure their survival and development to the highest extent possible.
- Respect for the views of the child: children have the right to express their views freely on all matters affecting them, and their views should be considered in accordance with their age and maturity.

Human rights were defined by Donnelly (2013) as inherent rights possessed by all individuals, regardless of nationality, ethnicity, gender or any other status. These rights are universal, inalienable and indivisible, encompassing civil, political, economic, social and cultural aspects. To ensure that the rights of children in Nigeria are not abused, the child right act of Nigeria was introduced. Child's Right Act (2003) is the law that guarantees the rights of all children in Nigeria. The Child's Right Act mandates that when a child is concerned, their best interest is to take precedent. It goes on to state that the parent or legal

guardian is obligated to fulfill the duty to give the child basic protection.

Instagram on the other hand, was first defined as a "mobile phone photography sharing service" by Professor Susanne Stormer from the University of Copenhagen in her research paper on social media in 2012. She went on to say that Instagram allows users to "transform the mundane, the everyday, into art and meaning". Instagram has evolved since then, and is now known as a "photo and video sharing social networking service. Instagram was first launched on October 6th, 2010, by Kevin Systrom and Mike Krieger. It started out as a free mobile app for iPhone operating system (iOS), and has since expanded to be available on Android devices and the web. The app was originally designed as a way to share photos with friends and family, and has since evolved into a social media platform with over a billion users. The app has undergone a number of changes since its launch, including the addition of video sharing, stories, and other features. But its core mission remains the same - to help people share and connect through visual storytelling. This research work therefore seeks to unravel the awareness and perception of Child's Rights Act among UNIZIK undergraduates and its implication for the portrayal of the girl child on Instagram.

The importance of children to a family, community, society, country and the world as a whole cannot be over emphasized. It is known that children are an heritage given to man". The word

"heritage" means "blessings". Hence, children are blessings to the earth and therefore should be loved, cared for and respected. Unfortunately, children have had to endure abuse in various forms: both physically and emotionally. Some children have not experienced any form of abuse that can be named, even so have had to put up with parents and or guardian who are indifferent to their needs. Some children have not experienced indepth expressions of love from people who should offer such. Some have not felt the excitement that should naturally be inherent in childhood. It is a coma-like situation, in which the children are simply helpless.

One of the subtle ways in which children have had to suffer, is their portrayal on social media platforms. For instance, there have been a number of studies about how girls and young women are portrayed on Instagram. In a study titled “exploration of how female body image is presented and interpreted on Instagram, it was found that female body image presentation emphasizes attractiveness, sexualities and perfectness in about 120 sampled photographs (Yang H., 2018). In another study published in the journal "Girlhood Studies", it was found that girls and young women on Instagram are often portrayed in a sexualized way; this can be seen in the use of revealing clothing, suggestive poses and suggestive captions with an emphasis on their physical appearance (Francesca G. et al , 2021:Ward, 2016). The study also found that girls and young women are often depicted in stereotypical ways, such as being portrayed as carefree, fun-loving, or as "selfie addicts". However, it is

important to note that Instagram is a diverse platform, and not all girls and young women are represented in this way. This type of portrayal can reinforce harmful gender stereotypes and contribute to the objectification of girls and young women. Additionally, some studies have found that girls and young women are often shown as "lacking agency" on Instagram, meaning that they are depicted as passive, rather than active, participants in their own lives. That is, girls and young women are often shown as being dependent on others, rather than having control over their own lives (Van D et al (2020).). This can be seen in images where they are shown as being passive objects of desire, rather than as active agents in their own lives. This can contribute to the idea that girls and young women are not capable of making their own decisions and being in control of their own lives.

A child according to the juvenile justice (Care and Protection of Children) Act, 2015, means a person who has not completed eighteen years of age. This is also in line with the definition of who a child is according to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child. The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child defined a child as a human being below the age of 18 years unless under the law applicable to the child. This is ratified by 192 of 194 member countries. The term child may also refer to someone below another legally defined age limit unconnected to the age of majority. In Singapore, for example, a child is legally defined as someone under the age of 14 under the "Children and Young

Persons Act" whereas the age of majority is 21. In U.S. Immigration Law, a child refers to anyone who is under the age of 21.

Children generally have fewer rights and responsibilities than adults. They are classified as unable to make serious decisions. The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, also known as the CRC or the Children's Rights Convention is an international treaty that was adopted in 1989 to promote and protect the rights of children around the world. It defines a child as anyone under the age of 18, and it outlines a variety of rights that all children are entitled to, including the right to education, the right to health, and the right to protection from violence and exploitation. The act also details the freedom and responsibilities of children.

In 2003, Nigeria adopted the Child Rights Act to domesticate the Convention on the Rights of the Child. The Children's Rights Act of 2003 expands the human rights bestowed to citizens in Nigeria's 1999 constitution to children. Although this law was passed at the Federal level, it is only effective if state assemblies also codify the law. The bill was first introduced in 2002, but did not pass because of opposition from the Supreme Council for Sharia. Though the act was officially passed into law in 2003 by former president of Nigeria, Chief Olusegun Obasanjo as the Children's Rights Act 2003. The supreme council of Sharia in Nigeria alongside some other legislators from the North, characterised the child's right act as anti-culture, anti- tradition and anti- religion. Some of the

contentious issues include the definition of the child (a person below 18 years) as it pertains to child marriage particularly for girls. Portrayal is the deliberate construction and representation of individuals, groups, or concepts by the media, which influences cultural perceptions and interpretations (Hall S., 1997).

This study focuses on examining the intersection of child's rights and the portrayal of the girl child on Instagram, specifically exploring the awareness and perceptions of Nnamdi Azikiwe University undergraduates. By delving into the awareness levels and perceptions of university undergraduates, this research aims to uncover insights into how Instagram shapes their understanding of child rights, particularly concerning the portrayal of girls. Understanding the perspectives of these respondents is essential, as they represent a generation deeply immersed in digital culture, where social media platforms play a central role in shaping attitudes and behaviors. Several studies have shown that social media can negatively affect girls, leading to depression, negative body image, and potentially even suicide. Girls may compare themselves to unrealistic or edited images of others, feel pressured to conform to beauty standards, or face cyber bullying and harassment. A common scenario on Instagram involves "bikini shots," which are photos of girls in bikinis that are intended to be sexual or provocative. Such images frequently bear hash tags such as fitspo or thinspo, garnering considerable likes and comments in the process. This can lead to girls feeling pressured to change their bodies in order

to fit in with the beauty standards that are portrayed on social media. Ringrose journal of general studies published in 2015 explores the ways in which girls negotiate their identities and sexuality on social media, and how they respond to the dominant cultural messages about femininity and sexuality. However, some studies have also suggested that social media (instagram) can have positive effects on girls, such as providing them with social support, information, and inspiration. Instagram as a platform also help girls to express themselves, share their achievements, and advocate for their rights. For example, on International Day of the Girl Child, actress Thus Mbedu posted a video on Instagram to stand with Save the Children South Africa, an organisation that aims to empower girls to strive for greatness. She also encouraged girls to trailblaze #LikeAGirl and celebrate their potential.

Van Doorn and B. B. Duffy in their "Journal of Gender Studies" published in 2020 explores how girls and young women construct gender identities through their social media content, and how they respond to and resist dominant gender norms. The study found out that girls and young women on Instagram are often aware of the conflicting messages about femininity that they receive from society. They want to be seen as both feminine and powerful. They use various strategies to express both these aspects of their identities. Some of these strategies, like showing off their bodies, can be seen as self-objectification. But they are also a way of expressing agency and power.

Banet-Weiser S., Press A. and Turkle S., (2019), in their researches discovered that many Influencers often portray girls and young women on Instagram in a way that emphasizes traditional gender roles. Girls and young women are often shown in stereotypically feminine roles, like fashion and beauty. They are also often shown as sexual objects, through the use of sexualized language and revealing clothing. Influencers often promote a narrow and unrealistic ideal of feminine beauty, which can be harmful to girls and young women.

The specific idea of how influencers should adhere to the Convention on the Rights of the Child when it comes to girls was proposed by the United Nations Girls' Education Initiative (UNGEI). UNGEI is a partnership of organizations and governments that work together to promote girls' education. Their guidelines for influencers were developed in consultation with girls and young women around the world. These guidelines are based on the principles of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, as well as the Sustainable Development Goals. The guidelines ask influencers to:

- Promote gender equality and respect for human rights
- Promote positive and non-stereotypical representations of girls and young women
- Promote respect for diversity and inclusion
- Encourage critical thinking and social engagement
- Encourage ethical and responsible behavior online
- Ensure the safety of their audience.

Manic (2020) examined, "the development of childhood in early stage. The fundamental reason behind this study was to ascertain the meaning of way childhood development. The researcher refers to early childhood development as a physical, cognitive, linguistic and socio- emotional development of a child from the prenatal stage up to age eight. Findings from the respondents showed that childhood development happens in a variety of settings (homes, schools, health facilities) and involves a wide range of activities from child care to nutrition to parent education. Also, findings showed that early Childhood Development encompasses a number of distinct sub-stages, each of which presents particular needs Pregnancy and pre-natal: prenatal care, attended births, registration, postnatal care 0 to 3 parent education, early stimulation and nutrition interventions, home-based care, crèches 3 to 6 parent education, preschool 6 to 8 transition to formal education, improved early primary school From a development point of view, children who come from the most vulnerable and disadvantaged backgrounds need good-quality services and care the most, including children with special needs for early childhood development.

Ogugua and Linda (2021) discovered that the rights of children in Nigeria are trivialized despite the enactment of the Child Right Act 2003 and the domestication of the Act in some states as laws. The study found out that some provisions of the constitution of Nigeria 1999 is in contradiction of the provisions of CRA 2003 especially with definition by age. The study also recommended that the provision in the Nigerian Constitution

should be amended to be inconsonance with the Acts and Laws on who is a child in Nigeria. That the child Right Act and laws should be implemented will great WILL and have immediate effects as well as ensure frequent training of the judicial officers on guaranteeing provisions of the Child Right Act 2003 and laws of various States.

Also, Amirikpa (2010) examined the state of the girl child and women across third world countries. The study showed that the girl-child, and by extension, women generally have not been accorded their natural right of place in the scheme of things as human beings, and as equal players in the affairs that concern them. They are short-changed, victimised, and stereotyped as hewers of wood and drawers of water, as well as mere labour providers on the farms and in the home. As such, the girl-child has become a victim of female trafficking across international borders, denied access to education and are seen as inferior the male child. the girl-child is certainly doomed to an eternity of oppression and destruction, unless the structures that stand on her way are uprooted and the wool of deliberate ignorance are pulled-off her face through the granting of right and unfettered access to free and compulsory quality self education needed for self empowerment and self actualisation.

In another study, Antonya (2010) examined the effect of gender stereotype on young girls' intuitive number sense. The study opined that women are highly under-represented in Maths, Engineering and related fields; a pattern that is associated with cultural stereotypes associating math more with boys than girls.

A research was conducted to determine whether boys or girls were better at Maths and counting. Results gotten indicated that while only a small number of girls in the sample had stereotype associating Maths with boys, these girls performed significantly worse. These results provide novel evidence that for young girls who do endorse stereotypes about math and gender, contextual activation of these stereotypes may impair their intuitive number sense, potentially affecting their acquisition of formal mathematics concepts and developing interest in math-related fields.

Another study by Mariska, Daalmans and Doeschka (2016) in the study "The direct effect of manipulated Instagram photos on body images on Adolescent girls. The study investigates the effect of manipulated Instagram photos on adolescent girls' body image, and whether social comparison tendency moderates this relation. A between-subject experiment was conducted in which 144 girls (14–18 years old) were randomly exposed to either original or manipulated (retouched and reshaped) Instagram selfies. Results showed that exposure to manipulated Instagram photos directly led to lower body image. Especially, girls with higher social comparison tendencies were negatively affected by exposure to the manipulated photos. Interestingly, the manipulated photos were rated more positively than the original photos. Although the use of filters and effects was detected, reshaping of the bodies was not noticed very well. Girls in both conditions reported to find the pictures realistic. Results of this study implied that the recent societal concern

about the effects of manipulated photos in social media might be justified, especially for adolescent girls with a higher social comparison tendency.

Similarly, in a study carried out by Steinberg (2017) "Sharenting: Children's privacy in the age of social media. The study opined that parents now shape their children's digital identity long before these young people open their first email. The study showed that children have an interest in privacy yet parents' rights to control the upbringing of their children and parents' rights to free speech may trump this interest. When parents share information about their children online, they do so without their children's consent. These parent act as both gatekeepers of their children's personal information and as narrators of their children's personal stories. This dual role of parents in their children's online identity gives children little protection as their online identity evolves. A conflict of interests exists as children might one day resent the disclosures made years earlier by their parents.

Lauren Flynn (2020) studied " Exploring Adolescent Girls' perceptions of their social media use. The study explores the social media habits of 14-17 year old girls in Ireland, as well as their perception of how social media affects their lives. The study is largely concerned with the negative implications of social media use on mental health, body image and social comparison, and cyberbullying. Primary research was carried out and data was collected from 98 participants via questionnaire. Quantitative data was analysed using the IBM

statistical analysis software Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) while Qualitative data was analyzed using thematic analysis. Majority of participants reported positive experiences of social media, including using it as a tool for communication and source of inspiration, motivation and education. Participants reported feeling that adults have an unduly negative view of adolescent social media use as well as a lack of understanding of the logistics of social media. A number of concerns relating to social media were also reported, including cyber-bullying and anonymity online, fake content, addictive potential, digital footprint, and social pressure of social media.

## **Research Questions**

In order to achieve the objectives of this work stated above, the following research questions have been formulated.

1. What is the level of awareness of NnamdiAzikwe University undergraduates on the Child Right Act?
2. Are Instagram influencers complying with the principles outlined in the Child Rights Act?
3. What is the perception of NnamdiAzikwe University undergraduates on the portrayal of the girl child on Instagram?

## **Theoretical Framework**

This study is anchored on the framing theory. The framing theory was propounded by Gregory Bateson in 1972 while a renowned sociologist Erving Goffman presented it in 1974 in his article "Frame Analysis: Essay on the organization of experience. Goffman points out that the framing theory is based on the idea that information does not exist in a vacuum, but is always presented within a certain context or "frame." This frame can include elements like language, visuals, and context. The theory is related to the agenda-setting tradition but expands the research by focusing on the essence of the issues at hand rather than on a particular topic. According to Entman, (1991), there are five popular ways for framing news stories. These are conflict, human interest/personalization, consequences, morality and responsibility. Framing theory, in the context of the topic "Child's rights and girl child's portrayal on Instagram: awareness and perception of NnamdiAzikiwe University undergraduates," refers to how the presentation of information on Instagram influences the way individuals perceive and interpret issues related to child rights and the portrayal of girls. On Instagram, various frames or perspectives are used to present content, including images, captions, hashtags, and comments. These frames can shape the audience's understanding and interpretation of the content. For example, images of girls on Instagram may be framed in ways that reinforce traditional gender stereotypes or challenge them, influencing how viewers perceive the roles, capabilities, and rights of girls.

## **Methodology**

The research design adopted for this study is a mixed method approach. The approach combines quantitative (survey) and qualitative (Focus Group Discussion) methods in order to provide a comprehensive understanding of the topic under study. The population for this study is the undergraduate students studying in the main campus of NnamdiAzikiwe University which stood at 37,970 students (NnamdiAzikiwe University Academic Planning Unit, 2023). The Taro Yamane's formula was used to determine the sample size of 300 from the population. Multistage sampling technique was used to select respondents for the survey. At the first stage, the Faculties were listed in alphabetical order, and using a table of random numbers, the following Faculties were selected: Arts, Education, Management, Physical Sciences, Social Sciences as shown in table 1.

At the second stage, the researchers chose two departments from each of the five Faculties selected above, using the same simple random procedure described earlier. Thus, a total of 10 departments emerged as follows: Arts— Linguistics and History; Education — Education Foundation and Science Education; Management Sciences — Accounting and Public Administration; Physical Sciences— Industrial Chemistry and Industrial Physics; and Social Sciences — Mass Communication and Psychology as shown in table 1.

At the third stage, the researchers selected thirty students from each of the 10 departments. The researcher employed the

convenience sampling procedure here which enabled him to select the thirty students he came across at each department. This, on the whole, resulted to 300 respondents

**Table 1: Sampling Stages**

<b>Stages</b>	<b>Selections</b>	<b>Total</b>
1st Stage	5 Faculties from UNIZIK	$5 \times 1 = 5$ faculties Arts, Education, Management Sciences, Physical Sciences and Social Sciences
2nd Stage	2 Departments from each Faculty	$2 \times 5 = 10$ departments Linguistics, History, Education Foundation, Science Education, Accounting, Public Administration, Industrial Chemistry, Industrial Physics, Mass Communication and Psychology
3rd Stage	30 students from each department	$30 \times 10 = 300$ students

Also, a focus group discussion was conducted to explore in depth the perceptions, awareness and experiences of the respondents regarding the child's right act and the portrayal of the girl child on Instagram. On FGD, 2 participants were drawn from each of the department representing the faculties making four groups of five participants for FGD. The methods of data collection used in this research were a structured questionnaire (for the survey) and interview guide (for the FGD) since the two were considered effective data collection instrument. The questionnaire was administered online via an online survey tool named Google forms to the department's WhatsApp group. Google forms offered accessibility, data organization and data security advantages to this research and the responses were automatically recorded and stored on the online survey platform, with separate data set for each department's session. This approach was implemented to enhance data accuracy and accommodate the department- specific schedules to promote focused interaction with participants from specific departments, minimise the chances of errors and ensure that data is accurately recorded. Answers extracted from the questionnaire were recorded as numeral data. Their frequencies were found and the percentages computed accordingly. Statistical tables were used to present these data. Also the in-depth interview was summarized and interpreted through narrative techniques.

## **Data Presentation and Analysis**

Findings from this study were drawn from data obtained from the 300 respondents. Also on gender status 146 of the respondents representing 48.7% were males while 154 representing 51.3% of the respondents were female. Basically, this result shows that the respondents were more of females than males. In terms of age of the respondents, about 60 representing 20.1% of the respondents were between the ages of 16-20 years, 205 representing 68.8% of the respondents were between the ages of 20-25 years while 33 representing 11.1% of the respondents were between the ages of 25 years and above. Therefore, this study reveals that the respondents for this study were primarily between the ages of 20-25 years and they are adequately matured enough to provide the answers and perspectives revealed in this study. Regarding the marital status of the respondents, 95.6% of the respondents are single while 13% are married. This implies that majority of the respondents were single students.

### **Research question one: What is the level of awareness of Nnamdi Azikwe University undergraduates on the Child Right Act?**

**Table 2:** Response to the level of awareness of NAU undergraduates on the Child Right Act.

<b>Variables</b>	<b>Response</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percentage%</b>
Are you aware of the Child Right Act?	Yes	107	35.9%
	No	193	64.1%

<b>Total</b>		<b>300</b>	<b>100%</b>
If your answer to the first question above is No, what could be the reason why you aren't aware of the act?	I'm knowing about the act for the first time	185	61.5
		51	17.3
	I'm not interested	64	21.2
	Any other reason, please state	<b>300</b>	<b>100</b>

**TOTAL**

If your answer to no.5 above is Yes, how often do you study the act?	Always	13	4.3%
	Never	122	40.6%
	Sometimes	56	18.8%
	Rarely	109	36.3%
Rate your awareness about the child right act	Low	170	56.8%
	Moderate	105	34.8%
	High	25	8.4%
		<b>300</b>	<b>100%</b>

**TOTAL**

Do you have an	Yes	261	87%
INSTAGRAM	No	39	13%
account?			
<b>TOTAL</b>		<b>300</b>	<b>100%</b>

**Source:** field survey, 2024

The table shows that 35.9% of the students who responded to this survey have already heard of the child right act before taking the survey and 64.1% out of the respondents haven't heard of it before the survey. It also shows that 61.5% of the students who responded to this survey are just hearing about it for the first time, 17.3% are not interested about the act whilst 21.2% stated various reasons why they haven't heard of the child's right act.

The table above also shows that 4.3% of the students study the child's act regularly, 18.8% study the act sometimes, 36.3% rarely study what's in the child's act and surprisingly, a whopping 40.6% have never ever study the child's right act. Finally, this table indicates that about 56.8 percent of the respondents are not aware of the child rights act, 34.8% voted that they are moderately aware while 8.4 agreed that their awareness level of the child rights act is high.

**Research Question Two:** Are Instagram influencers complying with the principles outlined in the Child Rights Act?

**Table 3:** Response on whether Instagram influencers are complying with the principles outlined in the Child Rights Act?

<b>Option</b>	<b>Response</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percentage%</b>
Do you have an INSTAGRAM account?	Yes	261	87%
	No	39	13%
<b>Total</b>		<b>300</b>	<b>100</b>
If yes, how often do you visit Instagram?	Always	119	39.7%
	Sometimes	99	32.9%
	Rarely	51	17.1%
	Never	31	10.3%
<b>Total</b>		<b>300</b>	<b>100%</b>
Do you know who Instagram influencers are ?	No	17	5.7%
	Yes	263	87.6%
<b>TOTAL</b>		<b>300</b>	<b>100%</b>
If yes, in your opinion, do Instagram influencers play a huge role in	No	20	6.5%
	Yes	225	74.9%
	Not sure	55	18.6%

the portrayal of  
 the girl child  
 whether  
 positively or  
 negatively on  
 Instagram?

**300**                      **100%**

**TOTAL**

In your No  
 observation, do  
 Instagram Yes

105                      34.9%

37                      12.4%

influencers Not sure

158                      52.7%

through their  
 posts on  
 instagram

portray the girl  
 child in the  
 right manner?

**300**                      **100%**

**TOTAL**

---

**Source:** field survey, 2024

This table above shows that 87 percent of the respondents who are students have an Instagram account while only 13 percent of the respondents do not have an Instagram account. It also shows

that 39.7% of the respondents always visit their INSTAGRAM handles, 32.9% visit it sometimes, 17.1% rarely visit their Instagram handle, while a total of 10.3% have never visited the Instagram platform. Again, the table above reveals that 87.6% of the students who filled this survey know who Instagram influencers are, 6.7% are not sure about who they are and only 5.7% of the respondents do not know who Instagram influencers are. It also shows that about 74.9% of the respondents agree that Instagram influencers play a huge role in the portrayal of the girl child either positively or negatively on Instagram, 6.5% of the students disagreed and a total of 18.6% of the students are not sure. This table further shows that only 12.4% of students who filled this survey agrees that Instagram influencers through their posts on instagram portray the girl child in the right manner. 34.9% of the respondents disagreed by choosing the "No" option while a whopping number of 52.7% are not sure if the girl child is portrayed rightly or not.

### **Research Question Three: What is the perception of NnamdiAzikwe University undergraduates of the portrayal of the girl child on Instagram?**

**Table 4:** Response to what is the perception of NnamdiAzikiwe University undergraduates of the portrayal of the girl-child on Instagram,

---

<b>Variable</b>	<b>Response</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percentage%</b>
-----------------	-----------------	------------------	--------------------

---

Do you think the way the girl child is portrayed on Instagram is a reflection of what girls do in the society?	Always so	62	20.6%
	Rarely so	209	69.6%
	Never so	29	9.8%
		<b>300</b>	<b>100%</b>

**TOTAL**

Do you think the way the girl child is portrayed on Instagram is dignifying to them?	Always so	12	4.1%
	Sometimes	146	48.5%
	Rarely so	108	36%
	Never so	34	11.4%
	<b>300</b>	<b>100%</b>	

**TOTAL**

Do you think	Always so	104	34.5%
girls are used	Sometimes	153	51%
for sex	Rarely so	25	8.4%
appeal on	Never so	18	6.1%
Instagram			
especially			
when it			
comes to		<b>300</b>	<b>100%</b>
selling a			
product or			
service?			
<b>TOTAL</b>			
How would	Positive	35	11.8%
you generally	Negative	119	39.5%
describe the	Not sure	146	48.6%
way the girl			
child is			
portrayed on			
Instagram?		<b>300</b>	<b>100%</b>
<b>TOTAL</b>			

**Source:** field survey, 2024

Table 4 shows that 20.6% of the students who filled this survey think that the way the girl child is portrayed on Instagram is always a reflection of what girls do in the society. 69.6% of the

students opined that it is rarely so, while only 9.8% of the students said it is never so. It also shows that 48.5% percent of the students think that the way the girl child is portrayed on Instagram is sometimes dignifying to them. 4.1% of the students think their Instagram portrayal is always dignifying to them, 36% think it is rarely so, while 11.4% think it is never dignifying to them. Furthermore, the table shows that 34.5% of the students think that girls are always used for sex appeal on Instagram especially when it comes to selling a product or service while 51% of students think it is done sometimes. However, 8.4% of the students think they are rarely used as sex appeal on Instagram while 6.1% opined that it never happens. Table 4 above shows that 11.8% of the respondents describes the portrayal of the girl child to be positive on Instagram, 39.5% says the girl child is portrayed negatively on Instagram while 48.6% of the students opined that they aren't sure about how the girl child is portrayed on Instagram.

## **Discussion of Findings**

The first research question (1) seeks to find out: What is the level of awareness of NnamdiAzikwe University undergraduates on the Child Right Act?The results show that few students at NnamdiAzikwe University know about the Child Rights Act (35.9%). However, a good number (64.1%) have not heard of it before. Among those unaware, many (61.5%) are learning about it for the first time, some (17.3%) aren't interested, and others

(21.2%) have different reasons for not knowing about it. When it comes to studying the act, only a small percentage (4.3%) do it regularly. Surprisingly, a large group (40.6%) has never studied it. Most students feel pretty aware (56.8%), while some think they are moderately aware (34.8%), and a few feel they have low awareness (8.4%). In simple terms, some students know about the Child Rights Act, but there are quite a few who don't. The study suggests that efforts could be made to make more students aware and interested in learning about children's rights. Also, encouraging students to study the act more regularly might help improve overall awareness and understanding. This suggestion supports the recommendation of Ogugua and Linda (2021) in their study that the provision in the Nigerian Constitution should be amended to be inconsonance with the Acts and Laws on who is a child in Nigeria. The child Right Act and laws should be implemented and also the frequent training of the judicial officers on guaranteeing provisions of the Child Right Act 2003 and laws of various States and making the document available to the public should be encouraged. On FGD, interview reveals that while some undergraduates are familiar with the Act, many lack a comprehensive understanding of its implication.

For research question two(2) which sought to examine the adherence of Instagram influencers to the Child Rights Act, the research question provided valuable insights into students' engagement with the platform and their perceptions of influencers' roles in shaping the portrayal of the girl child. On

the Instagram Penetration, A significant 87% of students at UNIZIK reported having an Instagram account which implies the widespread use of the social media platform within the surveyed population. This reveals that the platform is not just prominent but it plays a huge role in influencing the lives of these undergraduates. On the usage patterns, the frequency of Instagram visits varied among respondents while 39.7% reported visiting their Instagram handles always, 32.9% did so sometimes, 17.1% rarely, and 10.3% had never visited the platform. This diversity in usage patterns prompts the need to investigate the factors influencing the students' levels of engagement with the popular social media platform. As regards the awareness of influencers, a substantial 87.6% of surveyed students confirmed their awareness of Instagram influencers which indicates a robust influencer culture within the university community. However, 6.7% were unsure about who influencers are, and 5.7% claimed not to know them, suggesting potential areas for further clarification or evolving definitions of what constitutes an influencer. The survey also delved into the students' perceptions of the impact of Instagram influencers on the portrayal of the girl child where it revealed that a significant 74.9% of respondents acknowledged the substantial role influencers play, whether positively or negatively, in shaping societal views of the girl child on Instagram. In contrast, 6.5% disagreed with this perspective, and 18.6% expressed uncertainty about the influencers' influence on the portrayal of the girl child. Most importantly, this research and analysis

uncovered that only 12.4% of the undergraduate students believe Instagram influencers portray the girl child correctly through their posts. This figure is meagre compared to the 34.9% who disagreed with this notion, and a substantial 52.7% expressing uncertainty about whether the girl child is portrayed rightly or not. This uncertainty brings out the complexity of the relationship between Instagram influencers and societal perceptions of the girl child. These findings are in consonant with the study of Flynn F. (2020) "Exploring Adolescent Girls' perceptions of their social media use. The study explores the social media habits of 14-17 year old girls in Ireland, as well as their perception of how social media affects their lives. In this study, a number of concerns relating to social media were also reported, including cyber-bullying and anonymity online, fake content, addictive potential, digital footprint, and social pressure of social media. Interview (PGD) revealed mixed perceptions about the responsibility of Instagram influencers in adhering to child rights. Some were expressing concerns about exploitative or inappropriate content, while others commend some influencers who portray the girl-child in a positive way.

Research question three (3), sought to provide answers on the perception of Nnamdi Azikwe University undergraduates on the portrayal of the girl child on Instagram and the survey provided insightful responses to key questions. The survey asked if students believe the portrayal of the girl child on Instagram truly reflects what girls do in society and the findings from the respondents reveal that 20.6% of respondents think it always

reflects reality, while a majority of 69.6% believe it rarely does. Only 9.8% feel it never mirrors real-life actions.

Regarding the dignity of the portrayal, 48.5% of students think it is sometimes dignifying, with 4.1% believing it is always dignifying. On the flip side, 36% feel it is rarely dignifying, and 11.4% think it is never dignifying to the girl child. The survey also delved into whether students think girls are used for sex appeal on Instagram, particularly in selling products or services and the results from the survey showed that 34.5% believe it always happens, 51% think it occurs sometimes, 8.4% feel it rarely happens, and 6.1% believe it never happens. When asked to describe the general portrayal of the girl child on Instagram, 11.8% of respondents perceive it as positive. A significant 39.5% see it as negative, and 48.6% of the students express uncertainty about how the girl child is portrayed on the platform. This is in tandem with what Mariska, Daalmans and Doeschka (2016) findings in the study "The direct effect of manipulated Instagram photos on body images on adolescent girls in which results showed that exposure to manipulated Instagram photos directly led to lower body image. Especially, girls with higher social comparison tendencies were negatively affected by exposure to the manipulated photos. On this research question number 3, interview on FGD highlighted concerns about the objectification and sexualization of the girl child on Instagram, with participants expressing unease about the prevalence of such images and their impact on young girl's self-esteem and well-being. This study therefore will guide

educational institutions, NGOs and government agencies in designing awareness programmes aimed at promoting child rights and fostering a positive portrayal of the girl child on social media such as Instagram and adherence of influencers to child rights principles.

Based on the findings of this study, the researchers recommended that universities and other higher institutions should incorporate courses on the right of children at 100 level of study to sensitize students on the possible way of portraying children especially the girl child on social media; social media network should provide censor and ban any inappropriate content that portrays or affect children negatively; the existing laws that protect children from exploitation should be implemented and monitored strictly to ensure that they are not violated; Instagram influencers should portray the girl child more on professional career settings rather than in a sexualized way. Though, Instagram influencers are doing this in the quest to promote the various products and services of brands that they work for, however, it is expected that they should portray the girl child in such a way the users and other girl children can see and know they can achieve their life's goal in career choice. The study also recommended that parents and guardians should refuse consent to advertisers who will portray their girl child inappropriately on social media including Instagram, in the name of making them "the face" or "ambassador" of a product or service.

## References

- Amirikpa, F. (2010). The Girl-child and women in a third world environment: Abibliographical overview. *Human Studies*, 33(3), 321-328
- Banet-Weiser, S., Press, A., & Turkle, S. (2019). Social media and teenage girls: A critical perspective. *Girlhood Studies*, 12(1), 7-17.
- Child. (n.d.). In Wikipedia. Retrieved from <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Child>.
- Van Doorn., & Duffy, B. B. (2020). Young women, social media and gender: Exploring diverse identities in Australia. *Journal of Gender Studies*, 29(5), 576-591.
- Eisenberg, N. (2016). *Moral, social, and personal identity development in middle childhood*. New York: Wiley.
- "How Instagram and TikTok Influence Children's Behavior." (n.d.). Retrieved from <https://www.apa.org/monitor/2019/06/social-media-children>.
- "How Instagram and TikTok Influence Children's Behavior." The American Psychological Association, [www.apa.org/monitor/2019/06/social-media-children](http://www.apa.org/monitor/2019/06/social-media-children)

- Manic, S. (2020). Childhood development: An investigation to discover the development in children in early stages of life. *International Journal of Science and Research*, 9(6), pp. 355-359.
- Flynn, L. (2020). Exploring adolescent girls' perceptions of their social media use. MA, University of Limerick. Frankfort-Nachmias, C ., et al (2018) "Research Methods in the Behavioral Sciences"
- Francesca G. et al (2021). Instagram sexualization: when posts make you feel dissatisfied and wanting to change your body. *Science direct* :<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.bodyim.2021.06.005>.
- Hall, S. (Ed.) (1997). *Representation: cultural representations and signifying practices*. Sage Publications, Inc; Open University Press.
- Mariska, H., Daalmans, J. P., & Doeschka, J. (2016). The direct effect of manipulated Instagram photos on body image concerns among adolescent girls. *Body Image*, 17, 120-129.
- Mass Communication Theory. (2017). In N. J. Wasko, M. M. Chen, A. B. Vos, M. S. Banerjee, & R. Schroeder (Eds.), *International Encyclopedia of Media Studies* (2nd ed., pp. 1337-1340). Wiley-Blackwell.

Ogugua, S., & Linda, E. (2021). The Human Right Conception of Children in Nigeria: A Critical Assessment of the Nigerian Child Rights Act. Rheinische Friedrich-Wilhelms-Universität Bonn.

Steinberg, B. (2017). Sharenting: Children's privacy in the age of social media. *Connected Learning Lab*, 3(6)

UNICEF (2018). *Influencing the influencers: A call to action to promote girl's right and gender quality*, New York: Basic books

World Health Organization. (2004). *World report on child injury prevention*. Geneva: Author. Retrieved from [who.int](http://who.int).

Nweke, Chinyere Felicia, Okoli, Ogechukwu N., Chiaghana, Chiazor and Obi, Evelyn Chinwe are Lecturers in the Department of Mass Communication, Nnamdi Azikiwe University.