

Art, Storytelling, and Visual Communication in Human Rights Campaigns in Nigeria

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Abstract

This study examines the role of art, storytelling, and visual communication in the campaign for the fundamental rights and freedoms that every individual is entitled to, regardless of race, nationality, ethnicity, gender, religion, or social status. The study investigated the place of art, storytelling, and visual communication as a tool to raise awareness of human rights issues and ascertain whether the expressions of art have successfully generated empathy for those experiencing human rights violations, and also examined the strategies employed to leverage art, storytelling, and visual communication in mobilizing support for the campaign on human rights issues. A qualitative research method was employed, utilizing the library research method. The theoretical basis of the study was Social movement theory and the Affect theory. The findings revealed that art, storytelling, and visual communication are powerful tools for human rights campaigns. Furthermore, if art, storytelling, and visual communication are used for campaigns, the study believes that it will bypass language barriers and connect with the people on an emotional level, thereby raising effective awareness and inspiring people to take action. It concluded that despite persistent structural and institutional constraints, art, storytelling, and visual communication have the capacity to raise awareness, generate empathy, and stimulate civic engagement, underscoring their continued relevance. The study recommended that there is a need to strengthen the institutional support system, safeguard artistic freedom, and thereby foster community-based participatory practices for maximizing the transformative potential of the power of art in promoting human dignity, justice, and social change.

Keywords: Human rights, Art, Storytelling, Visual Communication, Campaigns

1. Introduction

Human rights campaigns are movements by groups of persons to raise or create awareness and advocate for the protection of the fundamental rights of every individual in society. Most times, these campaigns target a wide range of issues in society that have to do with the violations of the rights of the people, using different methods to pass their message through various channels of communication when the government fails to listen or pay them deaf ears. Art, storytelling, and visual communication are powerful tools in human rights campaigns. They have the ability to evoke emotions, raise awareness, and inspire action in a way that traditional forms of communication often can't. Through art, whether it's in the form of paintings, photographs, or multimedia installations, human rights issues can be brought to life, making them more relatable and urgent to the audience.

According to Nowak (2019),

... "Art had always been a means of freedom of artistic expression, of the fundamentals of human rights and human rights laws all over the world protect the arts against censorship and other measures aimed at restricting freedom of the arts. Furthermore, the universal language of the arts is the most powerful medium to communicate the universal values of human rights to a broad audience. Adding that arts touch more profoundly than the mere language of human rights, as the work of art speaks to our innermost feelings and emotions".

Citing Isichei (1997, p. 218), Adeola, Nyarko, - Okeowo, and Viljoen (2019) aver that the African arts have been one of the vehicles of continental civilisation. The information that is transmitted through the power of visuals has the stronger power of appealing to the sense of sight with great intentions to create meaning [4]. The work of art has become the mechanism for visual representation all over the world. It has become a means of historical preservation and communication of culture, feelings, power, and knowledge. In Africa, the work of art is a formidable expression of thoughts and a means of articulating reality in the form that simplifies truth and bolsters resolve to advance change. The potency of arts in human rights has been brought into light through various campaigns like the abduction of children by Joseph Kony in Uganda in 2012, the sale of migrants in Libya in 2017, and the Bring Back Our Girls Campaign in Nigeria in 2014.

Citing Freire (1970), Nussbaum (2011) affirmed that artistic expression and human dignity are deeply interconnected, shaping how societies understand and respond to human rights concerns. Noting is that art possesses a unique ability to communicate all aspects of the human condition that transcend through verbal language, fostering empathy and shared understanding across diverse social realities. Through the employment of emotional and symbolic engagement, artistic works, which in most cases are marked as abstract human rights, give clear directions to critical issues such as freedom, justice, and equality. Creating a feeling of immediate and personal involvement,

thereby strengthening public awareness and moral responsibility towards issues of human rights.

Historically, art has served as a vital medium for resistance and expression, particularly in contexts where direct communication is constrained by censorship or repression. Through symbolism and allegory, artists have articulated dissent and preserved collective memory, reinforcing art's intrinsic link to freedom of expression. Additionally, art functions as a historical archive, documenting experiences of injustice and educating future generations about past human rights violations. By presenting marginalized perspectives, art challenges dominant narratives and encourages critical reflection, contributing to the cultivation of societies grounded in respect for human dignity and universal human rights (UNESCO, 2013).

Globally, campaigns are launched to challenge the government/authorities to ensure the safety of the lives of the citizens or about a given law of the government. Using art as a social movement, protests or campaigns rely on various channels to bring the attention of the sufferings of the people publicly or to the world in general. Most media houses in developing societies are indeed selective about the stories they cover, and the degree of coverage they give to such stories is based on gatekeeping or ownership interest [11]. In Nigeria, issues of herdsmen, cost of living, bad roads, insecurity, healthcare, etc., are given less attention by the government; as such, protesters have taken different dimensions to make the voice of the voiceless heard.

Art serves as a powerful communication tool in human rights campaigns by translating complex issues into emotive and relatable forms. Through visual mediums like paintings, sculptures, and street art, songs, dance, and performance can convey the essence of human rights struggles, invoke empathy and understanding of the suffering of the people to the world. The work of art has a unique ability to transcend language barriers, reaching diverse audiences and fostering solidarity. Over the years, artists have used their craftsmanship to mirror and challenge societal norms, thereby provoking critical thinking and calling leaders to order, thereby empowering the marginalised communities to reclaim their narratives and seek global support and funding. Whether it's through protest art, exhibitions, or online platforms, art catalyzes social change by amplifying voices, advocating for justice, and inspiring collective action towards a more equitable world.

Mobilising society into actions of protest comes through various ways, but one of the most useful ways is the use of storytelling. Arts that tell stories intensify the call to action by all, both local and global audiences, especially when such issues are critical to the survival of the fundamental rights of individuals that have been abused. This emotionally driven activity plays a greater role by gathering support from members of the society who have empathy based on the nature of the abuse and thereby gives a voice to those whose rights have been violated, by helping to personalised and humanised the issues at hand. Daniel and Ndimele (2019) affirmed that when victims tell their story to the audience, such stories or issues of human rights abuses, most times, the actions are taken before the stories

are verified to validate the degree of credibility. If the channel of communication that is used to transmit the information is audio/visual, the message is not only seen to be relevant but a call to the intended audience for action.

By sharing the personal experiences of individual(s) that were affected and their human rights abuses, it creates empathy and fosters a deeper understanding of how these rights were abused. Storytelling has the power to educate, inspire, and motivate action as it illustrates the real-life impact of the violations of the rights and the resilience of those affected. Although today, there are various mediums of storytelling to the world, which include: documentaries, testimonials, written narratives, and multimedia projects. Storytelling ordinarily amplifies voices that might otherwise go unheard, empowering individuals to speak out and advocate for their rights. Furthermore, it engages audiences emotionally, encouraging them to reflect on their own values and responsibilities in upholding human dignity and justice, thereby building connections, driving awareness, and mobilizing communities towards meaningful change. Asemah et al (2021) noted that stories, when told, touch every aspect of the individuals and provoke the audience through the verbal expression into action.

Visual communication, such as posters, infographics, videos, etc., has a provoking ability as it engages both the eyes and the ear, thereby calling for quick and effective emotional reactions from a wider audience and engagement in mass demand for rights. Visual communication has creative approaches that can spark conversations because of both the verbal and visual involvement, create the atmosphere for social movements, challenge perceptions, and ultimately drive positive change in the realm of human rights. This is a result that effective communication takes place visually before, during, and after the communication [6]. The #EndSARs# movements were as a results pictures and videos of police brutality in the media space of how the Special Anti-Robbery Squad (SAR), a unit of the Nigerian Police, were illegally collecting, arresting, and violating the rights of citizens, such visual presentation provoked and led to what was seen as the biggest movement in Nigeria against an agency of the Nigerian government.

Art has long been recognised as a significant medium for articulating and advancing human rights principles, and its impact can be empirically observed across diverse sociopolitical contexts. Some studies examine the role of artistic expression in human rights advocacy by analysing documented cases of protest art, literature, music, and other creative forms that have contributed to awareness-raising, collective mobilisation, and resistance against injustice. Drawing on historical records, contemporary case studies, and relevant theoretical frameworks. Artists across cultures employ creative practices to challenge systemic oppression, amplify marginalised voices, and reimagine alternative social realities anchored in justice and equality. Communicative strategies, symbolic representations, and audience engagements through which art operates as a tool of advocacy. It has been proven that artistic practices function not merely as aesthetic expressions but as empirically verifiable catalysts for social consciousness, public discourse, and transformative social change.

1.1 Statement of Problems

All over the world, fair treatment, justice and freedom are core issues of the fundamental rights to human existence, accordingly Daniel, Wilson, and Ebere (2019) noted that in Nigeria, section 37, 38, 39, 40 and 41 of the Nigerian constitution affirmed that every individual has the fundamental right to life which is a natural gift, pointing that no one shall be deprived intentionally of life as every individual is entitled to personal liberty and freedom. But in Nigeria today, there are cases of human rights violations which are not limited to the abuse of such fundamentals of human rights but range from the physical beating of citizens openly, unlawful, arbitrary arrest or detention, random killings of humans by security agencies, bodyguards/aids attached to politicians, herdsman, etc. Furthermore, the less privileged are beginning to hold the position that the level of kidnapping or forcefully disappearances of individuals, suffering and hardship, inhuman, or degrading treatment/punishment by some individuals who are highly placed in government, the bad road network, etc., are beginning to look like a normal thing in the eyes of government and the members of the society.

These treatments have led to mental health issues, hardship, and life-threatening conditions, even for those in prison. There is discrimination in terms of job selections, as well as the lack of job creation to meaningfully engage the growing youth population, and other injustices in society. All these leads to an increase in the abuse of fundamental human rights and dignity in Nigeria. This study, therefore, seeks to underscore whether the use of art, storytelling, and visual communication can be an effective tool in the campaigns on the abuse and violations of the fundamentals of human rights in Nigeria, with South – South states in focus.

1.2 Objectives

The following objectives guided the study:

1. To investigate the place of art, storytelling, and visual communication as a tool to raise awareness of human rights issues in South–South, Nigeria.
2. Ascertain if the expressions of art have successfully generated empathy for those experiencing human rights violations.
3. Identify constraints for using art, storytelling, and visual communication to mobilize support for individuals with human rights issues.

2. Literature Reviews

According to the report of the European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights (2018), human rights campaigns can be effective and drive public movement only when the individuals who have been victims are standing behind the camera or stage to tell their stories by themselves. This was believed to be based on the fact that when the victims stand to talk about their abuse, the audience would tap into their emotions and thereby give the victims a voice. Such a voice that will provoke the cause for the demands of rights of others who may be going through the same fate. Adding that, people will only understand the level of abuse through anecdotes and personal stories, rather than statistics. Furthermore, the human face behind the evidence succinctly conveys messages and triggers emotions. It was

recommended that, since photos, videos, infographics, maps, and art produce compelling content that can provoke members of society into action, such content could be used to drive effective campaigns on issues of human rights.

Gupta and Jha (2022) examined the psychological power of storytelling. The study aimed to understand the efficacy of storytelling in comprehending complex concepts and abstract ideas, underscoring the potential tool in creating a participatory movement using the art of storytelling and how storytelling has been the authentic connection with their audience from the experience of an individual, creating understanding between the audience and the storyteller. Their study indicated how narration can help in the coherence of the ideas behind the activities, thereby leading reinforcing based on the emotional perception of how they relate the concept and the emotional state of the victim through his/her stories. Furthermore, the way the audience processes information that is complex in parts and accepts the call to action in their brain.

The study found that life-storytelling is a secure path that communicates the message to the audience in such a way that it not only engages the feelings, emotions, and attitudes but also the cognitive domain of the audience, which leads to a call for action. Furthermore, it concluded that storytelling was associated with diversified intent as it provokes awareness about the abused and victims of human rights, therefore calls for the protection of the fundamental human right as well as the right to life of people.

Bakut and Ejue (2017) examined how to integrate arts and popular culture in peace building and conflict management in Nigeria, looking at the role of the theatre. The study focused on the skill of the imaginary works of art, noting that visual arts such as painting, prints, posters, sculpture, and photography invoke feelings that are emotional in nature, which will lead to a call for action. The study concluded that art presents a means of energizing individuals into an imaginary state and being emotional in the pursuit of change. Furthermore, that visual art, music, theatre, sports centers, cinema, photography, dance, sculptures, etc. should be seen as instruments that can be used for campaigning on issues on the fundamentals of human rights as they have more effect to invoke the feelings that will drive change in society.

Adeola et al (2019) investigated art, human rights, and the law in Africa. The study was aimed at examining the intersectionality and the importance of the arts in African expression. This was based on the fact that the arts have been used over time by African in campaigns on issues about human rights and the law. They believed that art has emerged as one of the richest ways to extensively engaged leaders of society. Noting that convergence art and visual expression have become a significant point in the fight against the abuse of the rights of individuals in African societies.

The study indicated that art was one of the richest points of African history, which served as the vehicle for the transmission of ideas and continental civilisation. Noting that African art and storytelling were a medium of communication first to showcase culture, feelings, powers, and knowledge. Furthermore, issues about human rights campaigns, art was used to express thoughts, articulate reality in a simplified, truth and bolster in resolving

advanced changes in African societies. It concluded that visual and performing arts communicate information in a powerful way that can be achieved during human rights campaign programmes, and it therefore recommended that art can be used today to teach/encourage children to express themselves at all times.

Iqbal (2023) examined art and human rights using advocacy through creative expression. The aim was to investigate the relationship between art and human rights advocacy by analysing how creative expression functions as an effective tool for advancing social justice causes. Adopting an interdisciplinary and empirical approach, the study draws on qualitative case studies, documentary analysis, and existing literature to examine historical and contemporary artistic practices engaged with human rights issues. The analysis focuses on specific instances where artistic interventions have influenced public awareness, generated empathy, and stimulated civic engagement and activism. By interrogating the mechanisms through which art communicates human rights narratives, such as symbolism, emotional resonance, and public participation, the study demonstrates how artistic practice operates as a form of social intervention. The findings highlight the capacity of art to challenge structural injustice, amplify marginalised voices, and contribute meaningfully to the promotion of dignity, equality, and freedom within diverse sociopolitical contexts.

Natakwa (2024) examined the role of art as a powerful medium for the expression and transmission of ideas, messages, information, advocacy, and protest across diverse creative forms, including poetry, music, dance, drama, graffiti, painting, drawing, and craft. Although human rights are inherent and universally recognised, their realisation has been uneven over time. While legal frameworks seek to address these gaps through formal mechanisms for the protection and enforcement of rights, artistic practices constitute an important complementary pathway for advancing the realisation of human rights. The study shows that art has demonstrated the capacity to inspire social change, foster empathy, stimulate civic action, and raise awareness of human rights concerns by providing platforms through which activists, advocates, and marginalised groups can articulate lived experiences, narratives of violation, and demands for justice.

Nyamari (2024) examined the role of visual arts in social movements. The aim was to explore how the visual arts contribute to social movements. The study used a desktop research approach. The findings highlight both contextual and methodological gaps in current scholarships regarding the role of visual arts in social movements. Furthermore, the study also indicated that visual arts have a significant impact on social movements by acting as effective tools for message communication, crossing linguistic and cultural boundaries, and evoking strong emotional responses from diverse audiences. The study concluded that visual arts help shape identity and promote collective cohesion within movements by fostering a shared sense of purpose among participants while also attracting new supporters.

The study indicated that the strategic deployment of visual arts, particularly through digital and social media platforms, can substantially enhance the visibility,

circulation, and global reach of social movements, facilitating broader public awareness and transnational engagement. This study further strengthens the notion that the visual arts play a central role in framing social and political issues, contesting dominant narratives, and mobilizing collective action.

Ophori (2024) examined the contemporary Nigerian visual art with the Nelson Edewor's sculpture. Edewor's sculptural series *Ivri* (1997–1999) offers visual documentation of the socio-environmental degradation experienced by communities in the Niger Delta as a result of oil exploitation. Through stylized human forms engulfed by oil barrels, the sculptures symbolically represent the impoverishment, marginalization, and psychological dislocation of local populations within polluted environments. The use of mortar composed of sand, cement, and water reflects material choices that are empirically tied to themes of endurance, decay, and human vulnerability. The study aimed to look at several artists who have consistently employed socially engaged artistic practices to address societal challenges and contribute to community consciousness. Although direct engagement with lived realities, artists have used visual art as a medium to expose social injustices and stimulate critical reflection on political, environmental, and economic issues affecting Nigerian society.

Formal and iconographic analyses of selected works from the *Ivri* series revealed consistent visual strategies employed to communicate social critique. The distorted bodily forms and organic articulation of petroleum pipelines in human poses function as symbolic devices that foreground the entanglement of human suffering with extractive industrial processes. These visual elements tactically demonstrate how artistic form is mobilized to interrogate governance failures, corporate exploitation, and the collusion between political leadership and multinational oil companies.

The study further examined the socio-cultural implications of these artworks, drawing on audience interpretation and contextual analysis to assess their potential in fostering civil awareness and communal reflection. Findings revealed that Edewor's sculptures serve not merely as aesthetic objects but as visual narratives that document injustice and provoke discourse on environmental rights and social accountability. By exposing the human cost of oil exploitation, the artworks contribute to broader conversations on environmental justice and community empowerment in contemporary Nigeria. The study concluded that the analysis of Nelson Edewor's sculptural practice underscores the capacity of socially engaged visual art to illuminate structural inequalities and encourage critical civic consciousness. Such artistic interventions remain relevant tools for confronting the socio-cultural and economic challenges associated with multinational oil exploration in Nigeria. The works draw from everyday experiences and collective struggles, thereby situating art within broader socio-political discourse.

Adie, Utang, Idu, and Owokor (2025) examined the concept of creative resistance and the role of art activism in advancing social justice. The study investigated whether and how art activism has emerged as a dynamic force for

social change, employing artistic expression to challenge systemic inequalities, stimulating critical public dialogue, and inspiring collective action. The authors traced the historical development and theoretical foundation of art activism while analysing its diverse strategies, including street art, performance activism, digital media practices, community-based art initiatives, and institutional critique. The study further assessed the impact of creative resistance on community mobilization and public discourse, and identified key constraints such as censorship, commercialisation, and sustainability challenges. Finally, it explored future directions for activist art, highlighting the growing significance of emerging technologies and transnational artistic collaborations in reshaping the contemporary landscape of social justice advocacy.

Annet (2025) examined the relationship between art and activism, focusing on the role of artists within social justice movements. The study explored how artists have historically occupied central positions in struggles for social justice by deploying creative practices to amplify marginalised voices, challenge entrenched systemic inequalities and foster collective healing. It analysed the evolution and continued relevance of art as a form of activism, highlighting artists' roles as cultural catalysts in movements ranging from anti-colonial resistance to contemporary campaigns for climate justice and racial equity. Adopting a multidisciplinary approach, the study engaged relevant theoretical frameworks and global case studies to assess the transformative potential of artistic forms such as street art, performance art, and digital expression. The study revealed key challenges confronting artist activists, which included censorship, creative burnout, commodification, and institutional exclusion. It further emphasized community engagement and participatory practices. The study concluded that art functions not only as a reflective mirror of society but also as an active instrument for reimagining and reconstructing social realities. In the context of the digital age, the study further states that artists continue to redefine the boundaries between aesthetic expression and political action, compelling societies to confront both historical injustices and future possibilities for a more equitable social order.

2.1 Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework was hinted at in the social movement theory and the Affect theory. These theories were at a stage of synthesizing ideas from different approaches, tackling neglected problems, defining scope conditions, and devising new research agendas. Although much social movement theory has been developed through studies of movements in Western countries, research is increasingly conducted in other parts of the world, and theories are beginning to incorporate this work as well as to deal with the globalization of social movements. Key areas of social movement theorizing include movement organization, political opportunities and processes, culture, and social psychology.

The use of art as a medium for human rights advocacy can be theoretically understood through critical theory, which views cultural production as a site of power struggle between dominant institutions and marginalized voices. From this perspective, state censorship and legal

harassment of artists in Nigeria reflect the state's attempt to maintain ideological control and suppress counter-hegemonic narratives that challenge human rights violations. Art, as a form of critical consciousness, threatens dominant power structures by exposing injustice and mobilizing public awareness, thereby attracting regulatory and coercive responses from authorities.

Social Movement Theory provides a useful framework for understanding the role of art in human rights advocacy and social justice movements. Polletta and Jasper (2001). Central to this theory is the idea that social movements are sustained through collective action, shared meanings, and strategic mobilization of resources. Artistic expression functions as a symbolic and communicative resource that transforms individual grievances into collective concerns, thereby facilitating mobilization and participation.

Framing theory, a key component of Social Movement Theory, explains how art simplifies complex social problems and renders them emotionally resonant and culturally accessible. Through visual imagery, performance, music, and digital creativity, art frames injustice in ways that resonate with broader audiences, enhance public awareness, and stimulate moral engagement [19]. These frames help movements articulate goals, assign responsibility, and propose alternatives, strengthening their capacity to influence public discourse.

Art also plays a crucial role in the construction of collective identity, which is essential for sustaining social movements. Shared artistic symbols and narratives foster a sense of belonging and solidarity among participants, reinforcing commitment to movement objectives [18]. In restrictive political environments, art offers alternative spaces for resistance, enabling movements to persist despite censorship and repression.

Within this theoretical perspective, art is not merely expressive but strategic. It contributes to resource mobilization, enhances movement visibility, and supports the continuity of resistance over time. Social Movement Theory, therefore, underscores the significance of art activism as a powerful mechanism for advancing human rights and social transformation.

Affect Theory provides a useful framework for understanding how emotions, bodily responses, and intensities shape human perception, interaction, and social action. Rooted in the philosophy of Baruch Spinoza, affect is conceptualized as the capacity of bodies to affect and be affected, emphasizing relationality and embodied experience rather than purely cognitive processes. This perspective challenges rationalist models of human behavior by foregrounding emotion as central to the creation of meaning and the initiation of action.

The modern development of Affect Theory is largely attributed to Silvan Tomkins, whose psychological model identified core effects as primary motivators of human behaviour [21]. Tomkins' work highlighted the immediacy of affective responses, suggesting that emotions often precede conscious thought and guide interpretation and decision-making. This insight has been influential across disciplines, including communication, cultural studies, and social psychology.

Overall, Affect Theory underscores the centrality of emotion and embodiment in social life. It offers a valuable

lens for examining how artistic and communicative practices operate not merely through persuasion or information, but through affective force, shaping how individuals and communities experience injustice, solidarity, and the pursuit of human dignity.

3. Methodology

The qualitative research method was employed through the library research approach. Citing George (2008), Ochonogor and Nwachukwu (2024), the library research involves systematically identifying and consulting relevant sources that provide factual information, scholarly evidence, and expert opinions on a research problem. It is a core component of most research methodologies, as researchers often rely on existing literature or access digital repositories to examine books, academic journals, memoirs, archival records, and other documented materials to build theoretical foundations, gain contextual understanding, and gather empirical support for their studies.

4. Presentation and Discussion of Findings

Artistic expression has long played a central role in human rights advocacy in Nigeria, serving as both a reflective and mobilizing tool. Through mediums such as visual art, theatre, music, and digital storytelling, artists have documented social injustices, highlighted marginalized voices, and created spaces for dialogue and civic engagement. These practices operate on multiple levels, combining emotional resonance with symbolic representation to make abstract rights-based issues such as freedom from oppression, gender equality, and environmental justice both tangible and relatable for audiences.

This answers objective one: (To investigate the place of art, storytelling, and visual communication as a tool to raise awareness of human rights issues in South-South, Nigeria). This aligned with Iqbal's (2023) submissions that art and human rights use advocacy through creative expression. His study shows that art has been used for advocacy, and creative expression functions as an effective tool for advancing social justice causes. Iqbal created specific instances where artistic interventions have influenced public awareness, generated empathy, and stimulated civic engagement and activism by interrogating the mechanisms through communicating human rights narratives, such as symbolism, emotional resonance, and public participation. The study demonstrates how artistic practice operates as a form of social intervention. Iqbal believed that art has the capacity to challenge structural injustice, amplify marginalised voices, and contribute meaningfully to the promotion of dignity, equality, and freedom within diverse sociopolitical contexts. Based on the submissions of Iqbal, one can say that the place of art, storytelling, and visual communication as a tool has raised awareness of human rights issues in South-South, Nigeria. Also, Natakwa (2024) affirmed that art plays a powerful medium that has been used for the expression and transmission of ideas, messages, information, advocacy, and protest across diverse creative forms, including poetry, music, dance, drama, graffiti, painting, drawing, and craft.

Although human rights are inherent and universally recognised, their realisation has been uneven over time. Theoretically, the Social Movement theory noted that through visual imagery, performance, music, and digital creativity, framing of injustice in ways art have resonate with broader audiences, enhanced public awareness, and stimulates moral engagement.

Objective two: (Ascertain if the expressions of art have successfully generated empathy for those experiencing human rights violations). Theoretically, the Affect Theory provides a useful framework for understanding how successful art have generated emotions, bodily responses, and intensities that shape human perception, interaction, and social action. The theory conceptualized the capacity of bodies to affect and be affected, emphasizing relationality and embodied experience rather than purely cognitive processes. This perspective challenges rationalist models of human behaviour by foregrounding emotion as central to the creation of meaning and the initiation of action. Furthermore, Annet (2025) affirmed that the relationship between art and activism has created empathy for social justice movements. Adding that art had historically occupied central positions in struggles for social justice by deploying creative practices that have amplified the marginalised voices, challenged entrenched systemic inequalities, and fostered collective healing. It has evaluated and continued the relevance of art as a form of activism and cultural catalysts in movements ranging from anti-colonial resistance to contemporary campaigns for human rights violations, injustice, and racial equity in the form of street art, performance art, and digital expression.

Objective three: (Constrain for using art, storytelling, and visual communication to mobilized support for individuals with human rights issues). This is aligned with Nowak's (2019) position that art has always been a means of freedom of artistic expression, of the fundamentals of human rights, and human rights laws all over the world protect the arts against censorship and other measures aimed at restricting freedom of the arts. Similarly, Nussbaum (2011) affirmed that although artistic expression and human dignity are deeply interconnected, fostering empathy and shared understanding across diverse social realities, these have been constrained by censorship. Furthermore, Adie et al. (2025) noted that the impact of creative resistance on community mobilization and public discourse, and identified key constraints such as censorship, commercialisation, and sustainability challenges. Adding that the growing significance of emerging technologies and transnational artistic collaborations is also reshaping the contemporary landscape of social justice advocacy. Annet (2025) pointed out that the key challenges confronting artists included censorship, creative burnout, commodification, institutional exclusion, non-community engagement, and participatory practices. Noting that boundaries between aesthetic expression and political action compel societies to confront both historical injustices and future possibilities for a more equitable social order

5. Conclusion

This study examined the role of art, storytelling, and visual communication in human rights campaigns in South–South Nigeria, with a specific focus on awareness creation, empathy generation, and mobilization, as well as the constraints confronting these practices. Findings from the discussion reveal that artistic expression remains a vital and effective tool in human rights advocacy. Through diverse creative forms such as visual art, theatre, music, and digital storytelling, artists have successfully translated complex and abstract human rights issues into accessible and emotionally resonant narratives that stimulate public awareness and civic engagement. This confirms that art, storytelling, and visual communication play a significant role in raising awareness of human rights issues in the region.

The study further established that artistic expressions are capable of generating empathy for individuals and communities experiencing human rights violations. Drawing on Affect Theory and supported by empirical and theoretical insights from Annet (2025), the findings demonstrate that art operates at an affective level, evoking emotional and bodily responses that foster identification, solidarity, and moral engagement. By amplifying marginalized voices and humanizing experiences of injustice, art contributes meaningfully to collective healing and social consciousness within human rights movements.

However, the findings also indicate that the use of art as a mobilization tool for human rights advocacy is constrained by several factors. Censorship, commercialization, sustainability challenges, creative burnout, and institutional exclusion significantly limit the reach and impact of artistic interventions. While human rights frameworks formally protect freedom of artistic expression, practical realities in Nigeria and similar contexts often undermine these protections. Nonetheless, emerging technologies and transnational collaborations present new opportunities for expanding the scope and effectiveness of artistic activism.

In conclusion, art, storytelling, and visual communication remain powerful instruments for advancing human rights advocacy in South–South Nigeria. Despite persistent structural and institutional constraints, their capacity to raise awareness, generate empathy, and stimulate civic engagement underscores their continued relevance. Strengthening institutional support, safeguarding artistic freedom, and fostering community-based participatory practices are therefore essential for maximizing the transformative potential of art in promoting human dignity, justice, and social change.

6. Recommendations

The study recommends strengthening the institutional support system to safeguard artistic freedom and encourage community-based participatory practices. This will help maximize the transformative power of art in promoting human dignity, justice, and social change.

Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare that there are no conflicts of interest.

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