
Assessing the Role of Mass Media in Reducing the Menace of Insecurity in North-East Nigeria

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ABSTRACT : *Terrorism refers an unlawful violence or any other unlawful harmful act committed against civilians by groups or persons for political or other ideological goals, a premeditated, politically motivated violence perpetrated against non-combatant targets by sub national groups or clandestine agents, usually intended to influence an audience. Since the emergence of Boko Haram terrorist group in the North-East Nigeria in 2002, human lives had been lost to their attacks in thousands. The killings have continued unabated until recently that they are being gradually overcome. Employing agenda setting theory, this study aimed at assessing the roles of mass media in reducing the menace of insecurity in North-East Nigeria. The study found among others that mass media can help to reduce the insecurity menace by articulation and pursuit of the national interests, conveying information to the people and security agencies, speaking out against societal ills and vices, providing informed criticism and viable alternatives to public policies on security matters and monitoring the performance of government security agencies and other concerned agencies. The study made additional recommendations on the roles that mass media can play in tackling insecurity in the region.*

KEYWORDS: assessing, mass media, menace and insecurity.

INTRODUCTION

The word “terrorism” originated from the reign of terror of Maxmilien Robespierre in 1793 following the French revolution (About.com, 2014). The term is better understood from the point of view of the person that is being represented (Terrorism Research, Undated). This is because to the victims of terrorism, the perpetrators are terrorists while to the perpetrators, terrorism is an act targeted at reforming or enforcing change. Radu (2002) also defines terrorism as ‘any attack, or threat of attack, against unarmed targets, intended to influence, change or divert major political decisions’ (Omede & Omede, 2015).

Since the emergence of Boko Haram in the North-East Nigeria in 2002, human lives had been lost to their attacks in thousands. The killings have continued unabated until recently that they are being gradually overcome. Their escalated activities created widespread insecurity among Nigerians, interrupt development activities, increased tensions between various ethnic communities, frighten

off investors and generate concern among Nigeria's northern neighbours (Eme and Ibietam, 2012 cited in Omede and Omede, 2015).

Many factors have been postulated as causing unrest in Nigeria. Some writers put their blames on the government while some others pass the bulk on parents. Other writers hold the youths as being responsible while others settle on the combination of these factors. Putting all these factors together will provide some of the following as responsible factors for the general state of insecurity in Nigeria. Namely: Unemployment, bad governance, lack of quality education or training, lack or inadequate basic infrastructures, corruption and corrupt practices of government officials, arrant poverty in the midst of affluence, perceived victimization, ethnic superiority, domination and exploitation, religious superiority, etc.

The mass media have the power and ability to contribute enormously to national security. They serve as watchdogs of the society, agenda setters and force multipliers through these functions mass media sensitize, enlighten and persuade members of the public to participate actively in developmental activities. This study aimed at assessing the roles of mass media in reducing the menace of insecurity in North-East Nigeria.

Objective of The Study

The main objective of this research is to assess the roles of mass media in reducing the menace of insecurity in north-east, Nigeria.

Research Question

What are the role of mass media in reducing the menace of insecurity in north-east, Nigeria?

Statement of the Problem

Nigeria is beset with many challenges social, political, cultural economic, religious and insecurity. Regardless of the type of challenges the mass media could play a vital role toward the problem of insecurity in Nigeria. George (2020) and Nasiru (2020) have pointed out some causes of insecurity in Nigeria which include corruption, unemployment, kidnapping, poverty ethno-religious conflicts, illiteracy, weak judicial system etc. Therefore, this study will examine the critical roles of the mass media in combating the upsurge of crimes which has led to a state of insecurity in North-East, Nigeria.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The study was anchored on the Agenda Setting Theory.

Agenda Setting Theory

The term agenda setting was coined by Maxwell McCombs and Donald L. Shaw in 1972 and first published in Public Opinion Quarterly (McQuail & Deuze, 2020). The theory describes the media as instruments which are used to influence public opinion by emphasizing on issue and through such emphasis make the public to consider the issues as important. The media do this by reporting certain issues frequently and, or giving prominence to them. This implies that the more a news item is promoted in the media in terms of frequency and prominence, the more important such news

item becomes to the audiences. In other words, the news media lead the public issues. Hence, as the media emphasize on the need to fight against insurgency and expose the heinous crimes insurgents commit, the people take them to be serious issues. Also, the more the government and those affected by the activities of the insurgents take it seriously.

Moreover, since the activities of Boko Haram in North-East Nigeria affect the people negatively, the media should expose the harm done to innocent Nigerian by these groups. The theory was also considered suitable for this study because since media have influence on the public, but can create mass awareness on the important issues concerning insurgency and how it can be used to stop the insurgents from winning the war.

METHODOLOGY

The study was based on descriptive method of research.

Target Population

The target population of this research were Media Professionals and they are about 1,300 media professionals in the study area.

Sample size determination

To determine the minimum sample size, Slovene' formula was used. Using this formula, the procedure for determining sample size for any research goes as follows: $n=N/(1+Ne^2)$. The sample size for the study was 300 respondents.

Sampling technique

The simple random sampling and purposive sampling were used in selecting respondents.

Method of data collection

The data of this research was collected using primary and secondary data. The primary source was the used of questionnaires while the secondary source was used of books, Journals, newspapers and other written materials.

Instrument of data collection

The main instrument of data collection was questionnaire.

Method of data analysis

Frequency counts and percentage distributions tables were used as method of data analysis for this study.

CONCEPTUAL CLARIFICATIONS

The Mass media

According to Danladi (2013) mass media are channels of communication that involve transmitting information in some way, shaped or formed to address a large number of people. Mass media refers

to the technologies used as channels for a small group of people to communicate with a larger number of people.

Nwolise (2010) opines that the media can also plead national security when carrying out a moral crusade against corruption, election rigging or looting of the nation's treasury. This is because national security includes the security of the economic resources of the nation and security of the state power whose control must be determined by the popular votes of the masses in whom political sovereignty resides.

The media is an important aspect through which the activities and policies of government are made known to the citizens and also a channel through which people opinions are brought to the attention of the government. The media, thus serve as a link between the government and the governed.

The Concept of Security

Security can be conceptualized as the knowledge and attitude members of a society possess regarding the protection of their lives and properties. Being security aware means that one understands that there is the potential for someone or people to deliberately or accidentally attack, steal, damage, or obtain information that will be to the detriment of the community and therefore being on the lookout for any sign of danger. The focus of security is centred on cultural, behavioural and attitudinal dispositions of societal members towards the protection of their lives and properties (Ezeah & Osayi, 2012).

The Concept of Insecurity

Insecurity, as the opposite of security, tends to affect human life and existence. As a general term, it refers to a state of being subject to fear, threat, danger, molestation, intimidation, harassment in all aspect (Achumba et al, 2013). Insecurity in Nigeria includes social problems like unemployment, poverty of opportunities and lack of basic amenities to enhance the survival of an individual (Boma, 2021).

From the above, security is of utmost importance in a nation. With adequate security, the growth and the development of the system are guaranteed. When security of lives and properties becomes the hallmark of a nation, nothing stands as a clog to wheel of the progress of the nation.

Role of Mass Media During Insecurity in Nigeria

Mass media are crucial in the achievement of society-wide objectives, be it in the area of social, health, political, educational, infrastructural or security development. Mass media is one of the most important institutions of socialization and indeed, the major cultural industry responsible for the distribution of ideas in the Nigerian society (Pate, 2011 in Nwabueze & Ebeze, 2013). The mass media impact on the society and determine dominant perceptions, values and attitude.

Several programmes for creating awareness on crime with a view to discouraging acts of insecurity exist in the media. Such crime specific programmes such as Police Diary on Radio Nigeria, Eagle on Radio sponsored on Radio Nigeria by the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC), several pages of newspapers dedicated to crime stories including non-crime specific pages that carry stories, political awareness radio and television programmes which sometimes sensitize the public against crime, the various jungles and promotional messages against violence regularly

running on most television and radio station; these are among the efforts being made by the media towards the utilization of publicity in sensitizing against acts that breed insecurity.

Moreover, the surveillance and correlation functions of the media are at the core of mobilization against acts of insecurity. The surveillance role says the media provide information to the society which is used in opinion moulding and attitude adoption. The correlation role says the media relate news and various happenings in the society to the individuals' life and environment. This is done through interpretation and explanation of the implications of happenings on the life and environment of the masses, including implications of acts that breed insecurity on the society. It is expected that through effective information, the society would gradually turn against such acts. Osadolor (2001) cited in Orhewere and Kur (2004) writes that the most critical role of the media should be in helping to prevent or at least attenuate the severity of conflicts. Publicity is critical in exposing and checking vices. As Joseph Pulitzer, the legendary journalist and creator of the Pulitzer prizes for excellence in journalism had said, "publicity may not be the only thing that is needed but it is the one thing without which all other agencies will fail" (Olayede, 2011, cited in Nwabueze and Ebeze, 2013).

In addition, the need for emphasis on conflict and terrorism reporting in the interest of the public is also essential. The media have been accused of contributing in worsening the state of insecurity and conflicts in Nigeria due to reportage primarily aimed at maximizing profit and increasing audience base. After an analysis of media coverage of diversity and conflict issues by various scholars, Pate (2011) listed out common practices adopted by the media which tend to contribute negatively to crises situations as follows – selective reporting of prejudicial stereotypes about groups and individuals, reporting inter group conflicts out of their fundamental sociological, economic, political and other contexts, shallow and episodic coverage, total blackout on some groups, individuals or community, use of inflammatory, misleading and sensational headlines to attract sales, publishing inflammatory statements against some people or groups as letters to the editor, attributing statements by individuals to groups making generalized statements not supported facts, etc.

More so, the mass media need to allot specific air time and space to reports on terrorism, kidnapping and other forms of crime capable of breeding insecurity. This is a way of emphasizing the negative impact of such acts on the society. The allotment of specific airtime and space to reporting terrorism, including sponsorship of reporters to embark on independent investigations of terrorist acts in the country were among the suggestions made by journalists in a study on how to combat terrorism through mass media strategies (Udoudo and Diriyai, 2012). This will provide the needed reinforcement of the negative impact of such crimes on the society. Just as Pulitzer (cited in Oloyede 2011) observes "get all these things (acts of terrorism and other acts of insecurity) out in the open, describe them, ridicule them in the press and sooner or later, public opinion will sweep them away".

On the other hand, citizens' journalism could play a vital role in the utilization of the mass media to combat insecurity in Nigeria. Citizens' journalism which is also known as public, participatory, civic or street journalism consists of active participation of members of the public in news gathering and dissemination. It has variously been defined as members of the public playing an active role in

the process of collecting, reporting, analysing and disseminating news and information (Glaser, 2007), a wide range of activities in which everyday people contribute information or commentary about news (Okorie, Oyedepo and Usaini, 2012); secular process of passing information (Salawu, 2012).

Likewise, the mass media should be utilized by ordinary citizens in exposing crime and sensitizing the public against acts of terror. The pertinence of citizens' journalism in combating crime was played out in the brutal murder of four students of the University of Port Harcourt (UNIPORTH) at Aluu, a community in Rivers State Nigeria. The recording of the clubbing and burning to death of the four boys was uploaded on the internet and in a few seconds the story went viral. The mass media further spread the story especially from the angle of the public outcry generated by the recorded murder. Cable News Network (CNN) has i-report programme where citizens journalists provide reports that conventional journalists could not get. Citizens' journalism makes everyone a reporter. The 2009 presidential election in Iran underscored the pertinence of citizens' journalism where virtually every Iranian that had a handset became a reporter and sent stories and pictures of the post-election violence across to the world through conventional media such as CNN, BBC FOX News etc. This was after President Ahmadinejad had banned foreign media from operating in the country and also attempted to block internet access in the country (Nwabueze, 2009). The ordinary citizen can also contribute in exposing acts of insecurity through the numerous phone-in programmes on radio and television, the internet media, social media, etc.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

S/N	ITEMS	SA		A		D		SD		SA&A	
		Freq.	%	Freq.	%	Freq.	%	Freq.	%		
1	Media play important role in increasing public awareness and collecting views and information on security issues.	138	46	98	32.7	48	16	16	5.3	78.7	
2	Mass media convey information to the people and security agencies on activities of insurgents.	100	33.3	119	39.7	54	18	27	9	73	
3	Mass media provide informed criticism and viable alternatives to public policies on security matters.	77	25.7	141	47	49	16.3	33	11	72.7	
4	The media monitor performance of security agencies.	51	17	133	44.3	75	25	41	13.7	61.3	
5	Mass media helps to checkmate human right	27	9	79	26.3	120	40	74	24.7	35.3	

	abuses during security operations.									
6	Mass media provide a reliable and efficient pre-warning information dissemination system before and during a disaster.	69	23	138	46	56	18.7	37	12.3	60
7	Mass media pre-warning plays an important role in reducing losses and ensuring the safety of humans.	63	21	140	46.7	63	21	34	11.3	67.7
8	The mass media allot specific airtime to reports on terrorism, kidnapping and other forms of crime.	37	12.3	75	25	128	42.7	60	20	37.3
9	Newspapers dedicate pages to crime stories to sensitize the public on security issues.	48	16	82	27.3	127	42.7	42	14	43.3
10	Citizens' journalism played a vital role in the utilization of the mass media to combat insecurity.	99	33	111	37	66	22	24	8	70
11	The mass media is utilized by ordinary citizens in exposing crime and sensitizing the public against acts of terror.	64	21.3	107	35.6	73	24.3	56	18.7	56.9
12	Ordinary citizens contribute in exposing acts of insecurity through phone-in programmes on radio and television, the internet media, social media, etc.	57	19	66	22	100	33.3	77	25.7	41
13	Mass media served as an instrument for the dissemination of false and inflammatory messages and values that do not promote respect or dialogue and discussion.	31	10.3	84	28	66	22	119	39.7	38.3

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14	Mass media carryout selective reporting of prejudicial stereotypes about groups and individuals.	39	13	85	28.3	60	20	116	38.7	41.3
15	Mass media use inflammatory, misleading and sensational headlines to attract sales.	40	13.3	108	26	74	24.7	108	36	39.3

Source: *Field Survey, 2023*

From the above table, majority of the respondents (78.7%) agreed that media play important role in increasing public awareness and collecting views and information on security issues. This may not be unconnected with the fact that the respondents are media professionals and it is in tandem with the assertion of Nsude (2022) that media play important role in increasing of public awareness and collecting views, information and attitudes toward certain issues. In addition, most of the respondents (73%) agreed that mass media convey information to the people and security agencies on activities of insurgents which showed that the mass media assist in conveying required information during insurgency activities in the North-east. Moreover, the results indicated that majority of the respondents (72.7%) agreed that Mass media provide informed criticism and viable alternatives to public policies on security matters. More so, many respondents (61.3%) agreed that the media monitor performance of security agencies in the North-east Nigeria. This will assist in checkmating the activities of the various security agencies in the region. These views are similar to those of Ngige, Badekale & HammanJoda, (2016) that the mass media convey information to the people and security agencies with a view to letting them know some of the activities of insurgents through investigative journalism and provide informed criticism and viable alternatives to public policies on security matters as well as monitor the performance of government security agencies and other concerned agencies.

On the other hand, few respondents (35.3%) agreed that mass media helps to checkmate human right abuses during security operations which is in contrast to the opinion of Ngige, Badekale & HammanJoda, (2016). However, majority of the respondents (60%) agreed that the mass media provide a reliable and efficient pre-warning information dissemination system before and during a disaster. Similarly, most of the respondents (67.7%) agreed that mass media pre-warning plays an important role in reducing losses and ensuring the safety of humans. These agreed with the suggestions of Nsude (2022) that the mass media should provide a more reliable and efficient pre-warning information dissemination system which could improve public emergency responses, and enable people to evacuate and take protective measures before and during a disaster.

In contrast, few respondents (37.3%) agree that the mass media allocate specific airtime to reports on terrorism, kidnapping and other forms of crime which is among the suggestions made by journalists in a study on how to combat terrorism through mass media strategies (Nwabueze & Ebeze, 2013). Likewise, only few respondents (43.3%) agreed that newspapers dedicate pages to crime stories to sensitize the public on security issues. This is also in contrast to the findings of Nwabueze & Ebeze (2013) that several pages of newspapers dedicated to crime stories. Conversely,

majority of the respondents (70% and 56.9%) agreed that citizens' journalism played a vital role in the utilization of the mass media to combat insecurity and that the mass media is utilized by ordinary citizens in exposing crime and sensitizing the public against acts of terror which agrees with the opinions of Nwabueze & Ebeze (2013).

However, only marginal number of the respondents (41%) agreed that ordinary citizens contribute in exposing acts of insecurity through phone-in programmes on radio and television, the internet media, social media, etc. which contrasts the opinions of Nwabueze & Ebeze (2013) that ordinary citizen can also contribute in exposing acts of insecurity. Similarly, only limited number of the respondents (38.3%) agreed that mass media served as an instrument for the dissemination of false and inflammatory messages and values that do not promote respect or dialogue and discussion. This view contrasts with that of Nsude (2022) that mass media can become an instrument for the dissemination of false and inflammatory messages and values that do not promote respect or well-tempered dialogue and discussion.

More so, only few respondents (41.3% and 39.3%) agreed that mass media carryout selective reporting of prejudicial stereotypes about groups and individuals and that the mass media use inflammatory, misleading and sensational headlines to attract sales. These views contrasts those of Pate (2011) who opined that some mass media indulge in selective reporting of prejudicial stereotypes about groups and individuals and use of inflammatory, misleading and sensational headlines to attract sales, publishing inflammatory statements against some people or groups.

SUMMARY OF THE FINDINGS

The following are the role of mass media in combating insecurity in the North East Nigeria:

1. Mass media increases public awareness and collecting views and information on security issues, convey information to the people and security agencies on activities of insurgents provide informed criticism and viable alternatives to public policies on security matters as well as monitor performance of security agencies in the North-east Nigeria.
2. Mass media does not helps in checkmating human right abuses during security operations.
3. Mass media provide a reliable and efficient pre-warning information dissemination system before and during a disaster and the pre-warning plays an important role in reducing losses and ensuring the safety of humans.
4. Mass media does not allocate specific airtime to reports on terrorism, kidnapping and other forms of crime nor does it dedicate pages to crime stories to sensitize the public on security issues.
5. Citizens' journalism played a vital role in the utilization of the mass media to combat insecurity and mass media is utilized by ordinary citizens in exposing crime and sensitizing the public against acts of terror.
6. Ordinary citizens do not contribute in exposing acts of insecurity through phone-in programmes on radio and television, the internet media, social media, etc.
7. Mass media do not served as an instrument for the dissemination of false and inflammatory messages and values that do not promote respect or dialogue and discussion nor does it carry out selective reporting of prejudicial stereotypes about groups and individuals or use inflammatory, misleading and sensational headlines to attract sales.

CONCLUSION

The issue of insecurity in Nigeria (North-East included) has become prevalent. To overcome this menace, the efforts of all stakeholders are indeed imperative. In this sense, the media plays a prominent role despite various atrocities being committed against the media in crisis situation. Crisis becomes escalated or has its tempo reduced based on the information that flows from the media. The media therefore has a duty to perform to minimize crisis in a political system.

The media attention is one of the most important vehicles for terrorists to communicate with their audiences. It is free, it widely broadcasts their capabilities, and through media, terrorists can easily gain recognition. It also forms an important platform for terrorist groups to follow their political objectives. Without capturing airtime, the terrorist group would have no place in public or political debates. Airtime is oxygen for terrorists. The North-East Nigeria has no doubt witnessed and is still witnessing several forms of internal security disturbances in every corner of the nation. One of such insecurity is occasioned by the Boko Haram insurgency devastating the North-East part of Nigeria. Since the inception of the group, however, the group have successfully launched attacks that have claimed lives and properties worth billions of Naira, most of which were attributed to the way and manner in which media handles them (Hamid and Baba, 2014). The mass media are blamed in several occasions on inflaming the conflict, particularly regarding the nature of their reportage. Sharifi (2015) observed that the journalists have not fully grasped how much terrorists benefit from exploiting their reporting. Journalists must maintain impartiality and independence in the midst of competing and diverse narratives. They must also remember that serving the public interest is the ultimate goal of their daily work. Parity in their reporting has never been as vital as it is now.

RECOMMENDATIONS

As recommended by Nwabueze and Ebeze (2013), the media and the general public must rise to the challenge of combating rising insecurity in the nation by embarking on communication based approaches that would effectively stigmatize such acts in the society. While the journalists and other media workers are urged to engage in responsible journalism committed towards discouraging the acts of insecurity in the nation, the public should step-up the use of citizens or civic journalism through the mass media as a way of complementing media workers' role in exposing and combating insecurity in the nation (Ngige, Badekale & HammanJoda, 2016).

In supporting the above view, Shettima (2015) argued that the challenges posed by the media in exposing security strategies is because the security agencies have refused to take the media into confidence. Shettima (2015) claimed that worst mistake one in authority can make is to disregard or underrate the capacity of a journalist to know what the man in authority tries to hide. Therefore, "as long as you want to hide, the journalist wants to expose". Shettima (2015) concluded by stating that it the best approach to take a journalist into confidence by treating him or her as a partner rather than an opponent. The media, on its part, must respect such confidence. Media practitioners should be more constructive in their critical appraisal of actions taken by individuals or groups, including government officials, especially when such actions are presumed to be in the national or public interest. Furthermore, neither the mass media nor the government should behave as if it has a monopoly of understanding and in protecting the national interest. Both government officials and

media practitioners are bound by the constitution to protect the interest of the nation and both should work together in this regard.

To effectively perform its role, the Media must be independent. This does not mean absence of government involvement but rather that the Media should be given the freehand to perform within the ethics of the profession even when they are owned by private individuals. Finally, the Media must deliberately work to improve upon its performance criteria so that it can restore the confidence reposed in it by the generality of media users and the media should adopt a more positive approach to newsgathering. It should take greater pains to investigate reports and should avoid the temptation to regard as gospel truth whatever comes from top government officials who should always be held accountable for their actions. Such accountability must include being asked to account for unfulfilled promises made to the people (Ngige, Badekale & HammanJoda, 2016).

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