

## ASSESSMENT OF SOUTHEAST RESIDENTS' PERCEPTION OF BROADCAST MEDIA COVERAGE OF "UNKNOWN" GUN MEN ATTACKS IN SOUTHEAST NIGERIA.

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### Abstract

*This study examined Southeast State residents' perception of broadcast media coverage of "unknown" gun men activities in Southeast Nigeria. The objectives were to: Determine the root cause of "unknown" Gun men activities in the Southeast Nigeria; ascertain the impact of the "unknown" Gun men activities on the Southeast Nigeria residents; find how effectively broadcast media has covered their activities; and ascertain whether broadcast stations have displayed high level of accuracy, truth and fairness in reporting the unknown gun men activities. The study was anchored on the Perception theory. Survey method was adopted. A sample size of 385 was drawn from a population of 1, 403,972 using the Australian Calculator. Multi-stage sampling technique was used. Findings revealed that bad governance is the root cause of the unknown gun men activities in Southeast Nigeria; unknown gun men negatively impacted on the residence; broadcast media have not adequately reported the activities of "unknown" gun men attacks in Southeast Nigeria, and that the broadcast media have not displayed high level of accuracy, truth and fairness in reporting the unknown gun men activities. It recommended that good governance is important to ensure national security; that since there can be no economic growth in Nigeria amidst insecurity challenges, there is need for the public to cooperate with government and security agencies to apprehend those behind the insecurity; the Nigerian broadcast media must imperatively recognize the surveillance function of the media; the broadcast media stations in Nigeria should embrace objectivity in their reportage of events.*

**Keywords:** Assessment, Residents, Perception, Media Coverage, "Unknown" Gun Men.

### Introduction

Southeast Nigeria has seen a surge in attacks by gun men targeting police and other security forces in the past few months in a region where separatist tensions are on the rise. The security situation in the Southeast region of the country is not abating. Almost on a daily basis, the region records cases of arson on security facilities, killing of security operatives and snuffing precious life out of innocent residents. Thus, there is minimal security to protect people. The security personnel themselves are not safe! They appear to have been cowed to submission. They now go to work on mufti and hole themselves in their stations until the close of duty.

The unknown gun men appear to be operating undeterred. They set public institutions on fire; seize arms and ammunition belonging to security men and kill them in the process. Nowhere is safe in Igboland now. From Enugu to Ebonyi, Anambra, Imo, and Abia state, residents now live in fear.

In all these, it is widely believed that the media especially the broadcast has not adequately covered the activities of these "Unknown" gun men. Research evidence has proven that in moments of crisis, there is more media consumption, especially television (Nielsen, 2017). People are desirous of getting timely and accurate information on the crisis, especially one which has brought great damage to socio-political environment. Of course, this does not preclude those who may be frightened by the crisis and seek other gratifications like entertainment for escapism. The media ranks first among other media genres that attract the audience in moments of crisis, besides the fact that it is an essential source of information to individuals on virtually every aspect of the society (Mosharafa, 2015).

The media are most effective in shaping opinions (Christenson, 2010). The media aid in enlightening, influencing and entertaining members of the public to participate actively in developmental activities. Information provided by the mass media goes a long way in influencing societal change in all aspects of life thereby enhancing the quality of lives either positively or negatively. The media can generate and escalate

conflicts through inciting coverage, inadequate reporting, none reporting etc., while conflicts can equally be resolved or managed by the mass media through objective, balanced, adequate, non-sensational, and surveillance reportage (Anyanwu, 2011).

The media needs to be accountable to society. The media also need to win the loyalty of their audiences, so accountability in one form or another is inevitable if public communication is to take place at all (McQuail, 2003). The knowledge that a medium's performance will be affected by knowing that it may be called to account and have to explain how it went about its work will raise the overall level of quality in news reporting. Thus, this study examined the Southeast Nigeria residents' perception of broadcast media coverage of activities of "unknown" gun men attacks.

### **Statement of the problem**

Every part of the country is currently feeling unsecured. No day passes that there are no killings and kidnappings for ransom by terrorists and bandits. Secondary students and university undergraduates are abducted; communities are sacked by bandits, rendering the residents homeless. Traveling on the highway has now become a risky venture. But the situation in the Southeast of Nigeria appears peculiar. The attacks and killings are targeted at security personnel and security formations. Scores of security operatives have been killed in the last couple of months, and police stations have been set ablaze. Many policemen are now scared to walk along the streets in their uniforms. It is believed that the broadcast media has not done enough reportage on the activities of the "Unknown" Gun men. This has deprived the people of the region of adequate information on the gun men's activities. It is also believed that the media, especially the broadcast, has not dug deep enough in carrying out investigative journalism in order to enlighten the residents who rely on them for information.

The broadcast media has not effectively played its role in creating needed awareness through adequate coverage. The surveillance function of the media must be effectively played, to warn people of an impending danger. Through effective reportage, those perpetuating the crisis can have their perception changed, and peace loving Nigerians can equally avoid taking part in such a crisis. Considering that there are limited studies that have investigated the implications of the activities of "unknown" gun men in the southeast Nigeria, this research examined Imo State residents' perception of broadcast media coverage of the activities of "unknown" gun men attacks in Nigeria.

### **Objectives of the study**

The specific objectives were to:

1. Determine root cause of the activities of the "unknown" Gun men in the Southeast Nigeria.
2. Ascertain the impact of the activities of the "unknown" Gun men the residents of the Southeast Nigeria.
3. Find how effectively broadcast media has covered the activities of the "unknown" gun men.
4. Find out whether broadcast stations have so far displayed high level of accuracy, truth and fairness in reporting the unknown gun men activities in Southeast Nigeria.

### **Research question**

The following questions guided the study:

1. What led to the activities of the "unknown" Gun men in the Southeast Nigeria?
2. How do the activities of the "unknown" Gun men affect the residents of the Southeast?
3. How effectively has the broadcast media covered the activities of the "unknown" gun men?
4. Has broadcast stations so far displayed high level of accuracy, truth and fairness in reporting the unknown gun men activities in Southeast Nigeria?

### **Theoretical framework**

The study was anchored on the Perception theory. Perception according to Bovee, et al. (1995), cited in Agbo (2016) is the process of being exposed to a stimulus, paying attention to some degree, and then interpreting the received message. Hence, perception involves the process of exposure, attention and interpretation. So, for perception to take place there must be exposure to stimuli with certain level of attention paid to stimuli and finally the stimuli are interpreted by the audience (Ezinwa, 2014).

Perception theory explains the process by which individual selects, organizes and evaluates stimuli from the environment to provide meaningful experiences for self. The theory provides explanation on why audience reacts to particular message differently. This implies that the way a one audience views a given

message may differ from the perception of the message by another audience.

This theory is relevant to the study because people reacted differently to broadcast media coverage of activities of “unknown” gunmen attacks in Southeast Nigeria. Each audience or group of audience comes up with their own interpretation of the “unknown” gun men based on how the broadcast media reported it. Some viewed the reportage as good and efficient, while some others perceived the reportage as not too good or inefficient depending on their level of exposure and knowledge on the issue.

## Conceptual framework

### Activities of the unknown gun men in Southeast Nigeria

The concept “Unknown” Gun men are seemingly faceless group of people popularly labelled as the unknown gun men (Hannatu, 2021). Although the media, sometimes, tag them bandits or terrorists, apparently security agents seem to be reluctant in providing the true identity of these culprits or apprehending them. Hence, the onslaughts have continued unabated and the marauders, most often escape without capture.

Governor Dave Umahi of Ebonyi State had in an interview with Channels Television's Sunrise Daily on security issues in the South East Nigeria opined that the unknown gun men are not unknown. “From what is happening in Ebonyi State, where the youth go to attack the Army, the Police, and burn down INEC offices when these people confront the security agencies, they kill the security agents; sometimes the security agents will kill. We profiled them and saw that they were not “Unknown Gun men”. Apparently many of these criminals are known but perhaps due to “political correctness” or ineptitude on the part of our security personnel's, or reasons that are not known, their crimes are often dismissed and simply labeled as “Unknown Gun men”, denying their victims and families of the justice they deserve. The inability to apprehend these “Unknown Gun men” has undoubtedly led to the surge in crime and criminality across the country (Channels Television, 2021).

**On April 6, 2021, the unknown Gun men attacked both the headquarters of the Imo State Police Command and the Correctional Service Centre in Owerri, and set 1,844 inmates free (Aytogo, (2021). As if that was not enough, they attacked the police headquarters in Owerri and also burnt the Ehime Mbanzo Police Station.** Even with the creation of Ebube Agu security outfit by Southeast Governors in Owerri on April 11, 2021, the unknown gun men have not slowed their tempo. On April 12, 2021 another attack took place at Otuebu and Obodo Ocha villages in Ohaukwu local council of Ebonyi State, six persons were reportedly killed while several others sustained serious injuries. Two days after, the gunmen attacked and killed three operatives of the Safer Highway Patrol team at Nwezenyi junction in Izzi, Ebonyi State. The Ebonyi State Police Public Relations Officer, Mrs. Loveth Odah, who confirmed the incident, stated that the assailants, who were in convoy, disguised as mourners and when flagged down at the checkpoint, opened fire on the officers before setting their vehicle ablaze (Akpa, 2021). **On April 24, 2021, the Country home of Governor Hope Uzodimma of Imo State was attacked by the unknown gunmen (Premium times, 2021).** On May 30, 2021, unknown Gun men assassinated the former Political adviser to former President Goodluck Jonathan, Ahmed Gulak at Obiangwu Junction in Ngor-Okpala Local Government Area of Imo State on his way to Sam Mbakwe Airport to catch a flight to Abuja (Channels Television, 2021). The next day being May 31, the Chief Provost of Nigerian Immigration Service Command, Okiemute Mrere was murdered along Owerri – Port Harcourt Road in Imo State (Nkwopara, 2021). A Police station located at Orji in Owerri, the Imo State Capital was attacked by the unknown gun men on May 25, 2021. They were seen shooting sporadically at the police station and finally razed it on fire (Alozie, 2021). On June 3, 2021, seven persons under the name “Unknown Gun men” invaded the Orji area in Owerri and its environs and allegedly killed three persons in different locations (Alozie, 2021). In September, 2021, Unknown gun men said to be numbering over seven, attacked Ajali Police Station, in Orumba North LGA, Anambra State, killing five policemen, and setting the station ablaze (Nwaiwu, 2021). These are some of the recent attacks, crimes and murders that cut across Southeast Nigeria and are being perpetuated by a seemingly faceless group of people popularly labeled as “Unknown” Gun men.

The effect of the activities of the Unknown Gun men is so evident. The spate of fear that has enveloped millions of Nigerians, especially the people resident in Southeast, due to the protracted acts of these “Unknown Gun men” is unprecedented. Inter-state travelling by road has become a nail-biting experience with thanksgiving prayers and celebrations when travelers safely reach their destinations. While intra-state movements are filled with caution and anxiety with many looking above their shoulders. Even when under lock and key in our homes, the fear is palpable due to the menace of “Unknown Gun men.” Ugoji (2021) commenting on the effects of the unknown gun men says the security situation is indeed very dire at the moment, even when many undiscerning people try to downplay it. The Global Terrorism Index (GTI) covering events in 2019/2020 ranked Nigeria in 3<sup>rd</sup> place, describing the country as being one of those that could be classified as in a 'state of war'. In the Global Peace Index ranking of 2020, Nigeria ranked 147<sup>th</sup> out of

163 countries, compared to in the previous year. Businesses are being destroyed and investors are scared of coming into the country to invest and those already here have begun relocating.

### Empirical Review

Funmi (2011) evaluated “The factor of accuracy in Nigerian broadcast media”. The study showed that private owned media have been more objective than government owned media in their coverage of crisis. Apuke (2016) studied “Exploring the issues in media ownership and control in Nigeria”, the study reveals; the interest of the owner affects media operation, that the type of ownership pattern determines the level of freedom and efficiency of the organization. It suggests that both private and government media should be allowed to practice freely without this influence. Okoli, as cited in Chime-Nganya, et al (2017) confirmed that unlike NTA, Channels Television was always reporting the crisis in their daily reports. Confirming Okoli's revelation, Aka (2011) study found that the media, particularly the broadcast media gave different dimension of coverage to the Niger Delta crisis.

Seimo (2010) carried a perception based study in the area of media and security challenges and found out that broadcast media did not effectively perform the surveillance role in the Niger Delta crisis. He notes that there are enormous benefits derivable from the surveillance function of the media, which includes strengthening the security of the region in media coverage of the crisis and pointed out that the Nigerian media displayed insensitivity to security of the region in media coverage of the crisis.

Maxwell (2010) as cited in Udeze and Chukwuma, (2013) in the study of “Audience assessment of Broadcast media surveillance and national security in Nigeria” corroborated Siemo's findings when the study observed that the media, particularly the broadcast media, have not adequately contributed to the security of Nigeria. He lamented that despite the overwhelming potentials of the media to strengthen national security, the Nigerian broadcast media are yet to satisfactorily play such responsibility.

In similar study by Nwafor (2010), it is revealed that the mass media can contribute to national security, but have failed to maximize such ability for the benefit of Nigerians. Nwafor opines that when the media the media present security reports such as threats of some possible attacks by some violent groups, the citizens, the security agents and others involved will move to avert the danger.

Okoro and Okechukwu (2012) on the Boko Haram terror attacks supported the earlier positions of which suggest that the Nigerian broadcast media have not effectively played the surveillance function in their reportage of Boko Haram insurgencies in the Northern part of Nigeria. Adeyemi (2011), has also reached similar conclusions that instead of just reporting these attacks, the media should thrive to secure national security by adopting the investigative approach to uncover and thwart their plans and where it is extremely difficult to abort the plans, proper alternative measures could be put in place to minimize the effect on the people and the nation. However, studies have revealed that the government of Nigeria finds it difficult to collaborate with the media to achieve a sane national objective because of the mutual suspicion between the two (Maxwell, 2010; Ugwu, 2010).

Mukhtar, et al. (2017) examined the link between bad governance and perpetuation of insecurity in Nigeria. Using theoretical arguments, the paper holds that the current security challenges that bedeviled Nigeria are attributable to injustice, corruption and selfish governance by the leadership class. The insecurity that persist across most part of the country is aggravated by the apparent failure of the leadership to address key issues affecting the country such as poverty alleviation, employment generation, resource allocation, infrastructural development etc. **Ngbea and Ngbea (2016) in their study stated that insecurity has grown high as a result of bad governance. They addressed the link between insecurity and bad governance, explained the constraints on development and suggested ways under which these obstacles could be surmounted to enhance development.**

### Research methodology

Survey method was adopted for this study. **Survey designs are procedures in quantitative research in which investigators administer a survey to a sample or to the entire population of people to describe the attitudes, opinions, behaviours, or characteristics of the population (Creswell, 2012).**

Abia, Anambra, Ebonyi, Enugu and Imo are the five states of Southeast of Nigeria. The 2021 projected population of study according to National Bureau of Statistics of Nigeria is 22,052,021 people and population of the select LGAs put at 1,403,972. The Australian Calculator as provided by the National Statistical Service (NSS) was employed (NSS, 2012) to determine the sample size. A sample size of 385 was got, at confidence level of 95 percent, precision level of 0.05 (5%) and an estimate of variance (proportion) of 5% (0.5). Data was collected through questionnaire. Multi-stage sampling technique was used for the survey.

<b>Southeast States</b>	<b>Select LGAs</b>	<b>Select LGAs Pop.</b>	<b>Proportion Distributed</b>	<b>Questionnaire Returned</b>
Abia	Aba South	574,881	158	155
Anambra	Onitsha North	169,360	46	46
Ebonyi	Abakaliki	201,324	55	55
Enugu	Enugu South	266,353	73	71
Imo	Orlu	192,055	53	53
<b>TOTAL</b>		<b>1,403,972</b>	<b>385</b>	<b>380</b>

A total of 385 copies of questionnaire were distributed to residents of the selected five Local Government Areas in Southeast Nigeria. 380 were returned. Tables were used to show representation of the data collected through questionnaire. For the analysis, the percentage and Likert scale mean value method were adopted. The research questions were answered using the mean score benchmark of 2.5 for a 4-point scale.

**Data presentation and analysis**

**1. Root cause of the unknown gun men activities in Southeast of Nigeria?**

<b>Options</b>	<b>Responses (F)</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>X</b>	<b>FX</b>
Strongly agreed	140	36.8	4	560
Agreed	152	40	3	456
Disagreed	53	14	2	106
Strongly disagreed	35	9.2	1	35
<b>Total</b>	<b>380</b>	<b>100</b>		<b>1,157</b>

Mean =

The first objective of this study was to determine the root cause of the activities of the “unknown” Gun men in the Southeast Nigeria. Table 1 showed that the mean value of 3.04 was greater than the decision point of 2.5, hence positive. It revealed that bad governance is the major cause of the unknown gun men activities in Southeast of Nigeria.

**2. Impact of the “unknown” Gun men activities on the residents of the Southeast Nigeria.**

The second objective was to ascertain the impact of the activities of the “unknown” Gun men on the residents of the Southeast Nigeria. A research question was raised to achieve this objective. The responses (Table 2) showed the mean value of 3.02 which was greater than the decision point of 2.5, hence positive. It revealed that the activities of the unknown gun men affect the residence of Southeast Nigeria negatively.

**1. Extent of broadcast media coverage of the Unknown Gun men on Southeast Nigeria.**

The third objective was to ascertain the extent of broadcast media coverage of the activities of the “Unknown” gunmen in Southeast Nigeria. The responses (Table 3) showed the mean value of 2.29 which was less than the decision point of 2.5, hence negative. It revealed that the coverage is low. The activities of the unknown gun men in Southeast Nigeria are not adequately covered.

**2. Broadcast stations level of accuracy, truth and fairness displayed in reporting the unknown gun men activities in Southeast Nigeria.**

<b>Options</b>	<b>Responses (F)</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>X</b>	<b>FX</b>
Very high level	35	9.2	4	140
High level	91	24	3	273
Low level	198	52.1	2	396
Very low level	56	14.7	1	56
<b>Total</b>	<b>380</b>	<b>100</b>		<b>865</b>

$$\text{Mean} = \frac{\text{FX}}{\text{F}} = \frac{865}{380} = 2.28$$

The fourth objective was to ascertain broadcast stations level of accuracy, truth and fairness displayed in reporting the unknown gun men activities in Southeast Nigeria. The responses (Table 4) showed the mean value of 2.28 which was less than the decision point of 2.5, hence negative. It revealed that the perception of the residence is that the broadcast media have not displayed high level of accuracy, truth and fairness in reporting the unknown gun men activities in Southeast Nigeria.

**Discussion of findings**

The first finding was that bad governance is the major cause of the unknown gun men activities in Southeast, Nigeria. This finding was supported by Mukhtar, et al, (2017) and **Ngbea and Ngbea (2016)**. Mukhtar, et al (2017) held that the current security challenges that bedevilled Nigeria are attributable to injustice, corruption and selfish governance by the leadership class. **Ngbea and Ngbea (2016) held that insecurity has grown high as a result of bad leadership and governance.**

The second finding was that the activities of the unknown gun men affect the residence of Southeast Nigeria negatively. This finding was supported by Udoh (2015) who stated that fear and distrust on government is much; that what the current trend of violence is imprinting on the psyche of Nigerians is that the government security apparatus is incapable of guaranteeing the safety and security of its people. This, therefore, has impact on the general human security of the people as the situation promotes fear, limits the peoples' ability to develop economically.

The third finding was that the broadcast coverage is low in the opinion of the residents. The activities of the unknown gun men in Southeast Nigeria are not adequately covered. The finding showed that the broadcast

media have not played their surveillance functions in their reportage of the activities of “unknown” gun men attacks in Southeast Nigeria. This finding is supported by Maxwell (2010) as cited in Udeze and Chukwuma, (2013), Seimo (2010), Okali (2011) and Okoro and Okechukwu (2012). Seimo (2010) carried a perception based study in the area of media and security challenges and found out that broadcast media did not effectively perform the surveillance role in the Niger Delta crisis. Okali (2011) stated that the Nigerian media have not done well in discharging their surveillance role, particularly in the Boko Haram crisis. The third finding also agreed with perception theory as used in the work. This account to the differences in the way the audience perceived or reacted to broadcast media coverage of activities of “unknown” gun men attacks in Southeast Nigeria.

The fourth finding was that the residence of Southeast Nigeria believes that the broadcast media have not displayed high level of accuracy, truth and fairness in reporting the unknown gunmen activities in Southeast Nigeria. Oputa (2011) affirmed the above that objectivity was not observed in media coverage of the Niger Delta crisis.

### **Conclusion**

No doubt the activities of the Unknown gun men have impacted negatively on the residence of South-eastern States of Nigeria. The media with its social responsibility is expected to play a significant role in deescalating the ongoing unknown gun men issue/crisis in Southeast Nigeria. The study affirmed that broadcast media have not played their surveillance functions in their reportage of the activities of “unknown” gun men attacks in Southeast Nigeria. It was concluded that the broadcast media has not displayed accuracy, truth and fairness in reporting the unknown gun men crisis in Imo State of Nigeria.

### **Recommendations**

In line with the findings, the following recommendations are hereby made:

1. Good governance is important. To ensure national security, a healthy national partnership must exist between the media and the government.
2. There can be no economic growth in Nigeria amidst insecurity challenges. Thus, there is need for people to cooperate with government and security agencies by giving useful information that could be used to arrest those that are behind all insecurity challenges.
3. The Nigerian broadcast media must imperatively recognize the surveillance function. “Environmental scanning” should be carried out to detect impending dangers and notify the audience accordingly.
4. Broadcast stations in Nigeria should embrace objectivity in their account of events. They must carefully report the “unknown” gun men crisis in Southeast Nigeria in such a manner that will not glorify the activities of “unknown” gun men.

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