



## THE BROADCAST MEDIA AND OPINION FORMATION OF OWERRI RESIDENTS ON BOOK HARAM CRISIS

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### ABSTRACT

This study ascertains the influence of the broadcast media exposure of Owerri metropolis residents that led to their formation of opinion on the Boko Haram terrorism and its attendant stigma against northerners especially those of the Muslim religion residing in the city. The study anchored on the agenda setting theory of the media reviewed several empirical studies and theories to achieve its objectives, using the survey design approach as its methodology with a sample size of 400 drawn through Taro Yamane formula findings of this study reveal among other things that radio and television information influenced residents of Owerri's perception of the crisis to a high extent, alongside other predisposing factors but concluded that the broadcast media were objective in its coverage and analysis of the insurgency. In line with the findings, the study recommended that while the broadcast media should continue to be objective in their reportage of the crisis, they should be careful with the type of news on Boko Haram they put out to the public, as well as the language and style of their presentation, considering their potency in influencing public opinion and attitude.

**Keywords:** Broadcast media, Boko Haram, Crisis, Broadcast media and opinion formation

### Introduction

The mass media is a potent social institution that has the cardinal responsibilities of informing, educating, entertaining and enlightening the public on critical issues that affect the society. In this responsibility, the mass media is ascribed with the awesome power that can make or mar, build or destroy. Inherent in this power of the media is the humongous potential of agenda setting, opinion molding, opinion shaping, and attitudinal change (Iheanacho et al., 2021). The core media carry out these cardinal functions in the cause of its coverage, reportage and analysis of events, issues and personalities within the society.

The society and the media however, operate on mutually beneficial partnership. Under the symbiotic relationship between the duos, the society creates and nurtures the media which in turn, modify and shape the society through a social responsibility obligation. Top of the social responsibility roles of the media are that of exposing the ills and rots of the society, crusading against injustice, galvanizing public opinion to set agenda for public discourse as well as propagating the cultural heritage of the society for meaningful integration of various segment of the people.

Harold Laswell, often quoted for his high regard to the press posited threefold typology of media functions in the society. He outlined these functions as “surveillance of the world to report on-going events, interpretation of the meaning of the events and socialization of the individuals into their cultural settings”, (Ijeoma 1993). Whether the mass media abuse its awesome power or that the power is misconstrued or overestimated by the public it serves is an issue yet to be resolved. But the media have occasionally received the nod especially in the course of its coverage of events in the society lime crisis situations where it is generally believed that they thrive most.

This is the prevailing situation in Nigeria, a multi-linguistic and diverse nation enveloped since 2009 by deadly crisis unleashed by a violent Islamic extremist group opposed to western ideology and culture known as Boko Haram. Prior to their emergence, the Nigerian nation provides a typical case study of a state with ethno-religious and cultural divergences which often play out into ethnic clashes and fratricidal wars. A peep into Nigeria's evolutionary history reveals that the country which enters into unholy alliance in 1914 in the name of amalgamation is indeed replete with centrifugal forces that have consistently threatened its corporate existence. The country as a matter of fact has witnessed several crisis of destructive magnitude after its civil war of 1966 that consumed millions of souls. The disparate antagonistic cultural groups inhabiting the country have failed to live in one accord. Thus, there was the Kafanchan religious uprising of 1987, the Maitatsin riots of 1981, Bauchi religious mayhem of 1991, Kaduna Sharia crisis of 2000, June 12 election crisis of 1993. It is believed that these bloody crises mostly in the northern region reared their ugly heads or created a fertile ground for the Boko Haram insurgency which is the mother of it all and which indeed, constitute the focus of this study.

The multiplicity of Nigerian ethnic groups and its attendant complexity, cultural and religious divergences did not help matters in rendering the country susceptible to trouble at the slightest provocation. The bloody crises enumerated above, in their specific occurrence posed great challenge to the media in its position as a watchdog and mirror of the society.

Given the divisive tendencies of the country, it is expected that the ideal press in its task of institution building will utilize its amazing potency to mitigate the degree of incompatibility among the divergent heterogeneous groups through the propagation of such programmes that will have unifying effects on people. To this role of the mass media in nation building, Herman and Chumsky (1998) stressed the potential of the mass media to inculcate individuals with "values, beliefs, and code of conduct that will integrate them into the institutional structure of the larger society". According to these scholars, "the media can systematically achieve its integration role even in societies characterized by major conflicts like sporadic political and religious upheavals". But Uwalaka (2000) observed that "in a complex multi-ethnic polity where perspective on critical national issues has become a function of multiple parochial group interest rather than shared command objectives, the position of the mass media to preserve the most treasured of the people's value is often precarious".

The author further argued that while some people have vigorously argued that the media have been able to rise above the narrow interest that have divided Nigeria among ethnic cleavages, others accuse the media of providing the impetus for the various conflicts through a deliberate systematic abuse of its awesome power.

The Nigerian mass media is certainly piqued by multiple controversies over its ability to scale the barrier of ethnic and parochial sentiments in its cardinal role of informing, educating and entertaining the public especially in a monumental national crisis such as the Boko Haram insurgency in perspective.

It could be rightly said that apart from the Nigerian-Biafran civil war, the present Boko Haram menace has spilt more blood and threatened the unity of the country more than any of the previous crisis mentioned above. Some analysts have even described the insurgency as "more than the civil war".

Since the outbreak of the insurgency in 2009 the conventional media, the broadcast media in particular have been abuzz with stories of atrocities committed by the terrorist group. It is not ruled out that the media have made fortunes out of the insurgency through sensational and screaming headlines wittingly or unwittingly. But through their daily coverage and reportage of the Boko Haram activities, the people of the country are adequately informed and sensitized of the identity, modus operandi of the terrorist group.

Also, through regular stories, news analysis, interviews, and news commentary of the media, the people are likely to have formed opinion and possibly drawn conclusion on certain issues surrounding the

insurgency. It is not ruled out however, that based on the activities and actions of Islamic extremists in the past, some people who are non-Muslims wrongly conclude that Islamic religion professes violence and terrorism as a result of which Muslims particularly those of Hausa-Fulani tribes face stigma outside their clime. Hence there is the proclivity among the people of other ethnic nationalities to stigmatize the people of Northern Nigeria particularly the Hausa-Fulani tribe who are predominantly Muslims suspected as members and sponsors of Boko Haram insurgency.

As the bloodletting occasioned by frequent bomb blasts continued in quick succession in the streets of northern region, with a hovering cloud of tension alongside increasing insecurity in the entire country, some notable northern elites and leaders were indifferent and silent to the terrorist group and their deadly attacks. Others who were vocal resorted to either playing up ethnic sentiments or politicizing the Boko Haram insurgency. The veiled opinion of the northerners became predictable and noticeable during the government of Goodluck Ebele Jonathan, when the government was pressured by the said northern stance to treat the insurgents as ordinary militants like their counterparts in the southern region of the country and not to brand them as terrorists. But as the insurgency assumed more sophistication, with their established link with international terrorist groups and violent Islamic extremist groups in the Middle East, Saudi Arabia, Yemen, Lybia and Mali like AlQueda, and ISIS, the United States formally classified Boko Haram sect as terrorists with a ransom and sanction on the heads of their identified leaders and sponsors. Expectedly, this action of the US government elicited opposition from the northern region. The development from the north coupled with Nigerian government's indecisive position fueled atmosphere of suspicion about the real intention and target of the insurgents especially in the Southern region of the country dominated by Christians who believe that they are the prime targets of the deadly religious sect and who see their actions as the much-expected jihad conceived and planned long ago to exterminate Christianity and foist Islamism on the nation.

As the media continue to churn out news of horror attacks of the Boko Haram sect on daily and hourly basis and views on them, residents of Owerri metropolis like their counterparts in other cities of the country were glued to television and radio networks preferably the African Independent Television and state owned Orient Fm station whose signals are smoothly received in the areas. The newspaper stands were also usually clustered just like entertainment joints and motor parks where the Boko Haram insurgency constitutes the issue of the moment as well as agenda of public discourse and opinion ventilation.

With this scenario, the role of the mass media has come under critical scrutiny as it was the case with other turbulent crisis the nation has undergone in her chequered history, given the powerful and influential role of the media in opinion formation and attitudinal change. In this regards, the media have been accused of misinformation, distortion of facts, exaggeration of issues, celebration and glorification of terrorism, thus, leading to wrong perception of issues by the public members. This work is, therefore, set to investigate the extent the media exerted influence on Owerri residents on their opinion formation on critical issues about the Boko Haram crisis or the extent the residents relied on information from the media to form their opinion on the insurgency and stigmatize the people of the north.

### **Statement of the Problem**

The cardinal role of the media is to inform, educate, entertain and enlighten the public on issues in the society. In the cause of carrying out this responsibility in the case of the Boko Haram crisis, the journalist has received the nod. This calls to question as to whether journalists were actually guilty of biasing the minds of the publics by exaggerating facts and blowing situations out of proportion. Publicity is definitely the oxygen for terrorism and on the other hand, the media thrive on crisis and violence. How then can the media reconcile itself in this dangerous reciprocal position? Even while the media has the surveillance duty of reporting terrorism and informing people of dangers lurking around them, whether they are

cognizance of the popularity the terrorists enjoy from prominent space and airtime given to them by the media in the course of discharging its responsibility is a great cause for concern.

The broadcast media are reliable and major sources of information to residents of Owerri. There is the belief that whatever opinion drawn from the terrorist activities was influenced by what people heard from the radio and television. The recurring question then is whether only the message of the broadcast media could exert much influence on people's perception of social reality as is the case with the Boko Haram insurgency or whether there are other mediating variables that reinforced the information from the media to exert humongous influence on the mind of the audience.

Then even as the media have surveillance responsibility, they are occasionally seen to be guilty of celebrating or glorifying the activities of the insurgents just as the insurgents accuse the media of bias and misrepresentation of issues, leading to bombing of some newspaper offices by in the near past.

Again, in view of the potency of the media to shape and mold opinion, the question has been raised as to whether the Boko Haram menace itself gave rise to the residents' opinion and perception of issues or the mere reportage and portrayal of the crisis.

It is also believed that bias cannot be totally detached from the values of human nature and the journalist being human, is not value free and therefore, subjectively inclined hence the reportage of the BoKo Haram crisis cannot be detached from human bias.

## **Research Questions**

This study is guided by the following research questions:

1. To what extent do radio and television messages on Boko Haram crisis influenced Owerri metropolis residents' perception of the crisis?
2. To what extent do residents of Owerri metropolis think that the broadcast media messages were objective in the coverage and analysis of the Boko Haram crisis?
3. What are the factors factors that reinforced opinion formation of Owerri metropolis residents when they were exposed to the broadcast media message?
4. What is the opinion of Owerri metropolis residents on whether there were ethical violations in the language and style of the broadcast media messages that influenced their mindset?

## **Review of Related Literature**

### **Phenomenon of Crisis**

The Chambers 20<sup>th</sup> century dictionary defines the word crisis as "a crucial or decisive moment; a turning point; a time of difficulty or distress and emergency". Connotatively, the word encompasses violent demonstration, mass revolt, arms struggle, militancy, communal and ethnic clashes, political uprising, mob actions, civil disturbances and terrorism.

Corroborating the above classification of crisis, Ijeoma (1993,p.7) opined that a crisis is an event or development that disrupts normalcy pointing out that a crisis which upsets the status quo could be natural or man-made event that poses immediate and serious threat to the lives and property or the peace of mind of large numbers of citizens like coup d'etat, war, terrorist attack, a socio-economic and political upheaval.

Nigeria has indeed, witnessed a number of serious crises of alarming and destructive magnitudes which claimed several lives and properties. The country which managed to survive a civil war between 1966 and 1970 was later to be confronted with the Maitatsin Riot of 1981, Kafanchan Religious uprising of 1987, Bauchi Religious mayhem of 1991, ZangonKataf Religious riot of 1992, Kano Religious Riot of 1991, Kaduna Sharia crisis of 2000, June 12 1993 Political upheaval and the Boko haram crisis which has dealt a death blow on the country from 2000 till date. Handling religious and ethnic crises has been a big challenge to the Nigerian media and at every stage; they have come under serious criticism especially on its style and slant.

The Boko Haram insurgency was first seen as militancy and was treated with kid glove by the successive governments until it metamorphosed to deadly global terrorist organization and became a big challenge to the Nigerian security outfits to the extent that they lost large number of their men and materials to the insurgents. In the words of Aghedo and Osumah (2012) “The Boko Haram insurgency in particular has put pressure on the nation’s security apparatus. The war has exposed the nation to continuous loss of human and material resources, which impacts negatively on the nation’s security and development.”

Corroborating the above view, Kabiru and Ibrahim (2016) stated that the emergence of Boko Haram has posed a serious challenge to the country’s national security even though there seems to be respite following the renewed attack by the military since the coming of Buhari administration in 2015. The prevailing insecurity to lives and property experienced cut across many facets that include, political, economic, and social and even the way people practice their religion (Okujagu in Wosu and Aganwo in Kabiru and Ibrahim (2014). Among the entire crises Nigeria has witnessed, the Boko Haram insurgency could be described as the mother of all crisis. This singular crisis in its catastrophic nature was next to the Nigerian civil war in terms of innocent blood wasted in the streets.

The media prided as a watch dog and the fourth estate of the realm are always the cynosure of all eyes during an outbreak of crisis as it is the case with the Boko Haram insurgency. This is not only because of very important role of the media in the area of information, education, surveillance, and status conferral but as a result of the awesome power of the media to influence thought and actions of men, set agenda, and shape opinion.

### **The Boko Haram Crisis in Perspective**

Boko Haram is a coinage from the Hausa and Arabic words respectively. While Boko means “animist western or otherwise non-islamic education”, Haram figuratively means ‘sin’. The term has therefore, been interpreted to mean “Western education is evil”, by different scholars and analysts. Underlying this literal meaning given to the words is ideological issue not remote from religious fanaticism, socio-political and economic factors. Boko Haram opposes not only western education but western culture and modern science, (News watch November 2009). The sect was said to have been in existence in Northern part of Nigeria as far back as 2002 but their nefarious activities became a public threat in 2009 during which suspected leader of the sect, one Alhaji Mohammed Yusuf was extra-judiciously killed by Nigerian security operatives.

Since then, the insurgency has assumed different dimensions that appear to have overwhelmed Nigerian security operatives. This could be explained from the fact that Nigerian government has adopted several security measures to contain the activities of the terrorist group including imposition of state of emergency rule in in the three of the most affected states of, of Bornu, Adamawa and Yobe, deployment of troops in the entire North East region, dialogue and probably, offer of amnesty but the recalcitrant terrorist sect remained adamant and continued to launch bloody, attacks on innocent citizens, killing, maiming and destroying lives and properties., thus putting the people of the country in helpless, hopeless and hapless position.

The sect leaders recruit and conscript jobless and seemingly frustrated youths in their fold train and indoctrinate them in false values and release them into the streets to kill, maim and destroy lives and properties as part of their agenda to overthrow the present system which they ideologically oppose. At the onset, the sect members were treated with kid glove by the Nigerian authorities who undermined their strength and sophistication but saw it as a mere revolt of the idle mind. Not until the true colour of the sect manifested in suicide bombing that the Nigerian security operatives became apprehensive of the dangers lurking around.

A look at the activities of the deadly and amorphous group reveals a frightening picture of terrorists acts. Take for instance the memories of the 2011 Christmas day bombing of St. Theresa Catholic Church Madala near Abuja in which more than twenty-five people were killed with thirteen cars burnt alongside nine buildings (The Nation 26<sup>th</sup> December 2011). The incident occurred few months after the August 26 2011 bomb blast at the United Nations building in Abuja which left scores of people dead. In June same year, a suicide bomber recruited by the sect 'sneaked into the convoy of a top police officer and bombed the Luis Edet house of Police headquarters Abuja killing about 11 people. The sect also struck at the Independent National Electoral Commission's (INEC) office in Suleja, killing scores of people (The Nation 26<sup>th</sup> December 2011). The media houses were not spared by the deadly group as the Kaduna offices of This day, Sun, Tribune and Moment newspapers were bombed on Thursday April 26 2012 (The Sun 27<sup>th</sup> April 2012: 3-10).

The terrorist group struck at Chibok Bornu state in 2014 and kidnapped more than two hundred secondary school female students. This singular operation by the sect sparked global outrage with several countries of the world sending men and material resources to complement efforts of Nigerian government to rescue the innocent girls. Till date the sect is carrying out it seemingly unending atrocities in the North East while the war is on-going between them and the military.

Then the Nigerian journalists are in the eyes of the storm regarding their style of presenting issues and realities in the on-going war. Their press has either been accused of celebrating the military or glorifying the Boko Haram atrocities by media critics. It is the belief of some critics that the media should not present a raw situation and should be meticulous of choice of words and language in reporting a potentially violent situation in other not to inflame passion for violence or misinform the public. It is further contended that national security should occupy the mind of the media as juicy and tempting as the stories of violence are. It is also believed that the media as a watch dog has the responsibility to inform people adequately on issues happening around them and by so doing they will equip the security with salient information they needed to perform their job. While the media should adequately report violent situations and while they feed fat on crisis reportage, a critical concern of observers is whether the media which accord prominent space and airtime to terrorism and violence is cognizant of the popularity the terrorist enjoy from such seemingly unconscious discharge of responsibilities. As it is said, publicity is the oxygen for terrorism. It is believed that the media cannot be propelled by economic factors to choose a cause of action against ethical conducts. In whichever way and from whichever standpoint the role of the media is viewed from, the social responsibility theory provides a lee way for the media at such critical moment of crisis.

### **The Mass Media and Crisis Coverage in Nigeria**

There has been raging controversy over the role of the media in a troubled society and this controversy has at different times assumed different dimensions. While many people advocate for a holistic coverage of crisis situations, others believe in censorship and hacking of unsavory events in other not to escalate the situation. Yet, many have called for a more robust cover age of national crisis without minding its radical consequences on the society. This school believes that the public has the right to know what is happening around them through the media. But media critics contend that national security must be

guaranteed before the right of free expression could be protected believing that if the society is consumed the media would also be consumed as it does not operate in the vacuum but within the societal framework.

Thus, the media appear to be at a dilemma given its watchdog constitutional role, and social responsibility obligation to national security.

It is certain that the media feed and thrive on crisis, while terrorism on the other hand thrives on the media. The most violent story in the media has the capability of attracting largest audience and this turns to be a commercial fortune for the media on its air time and space. In time of crisis, the society looks to the media for information and opinion formation. According to Kabiru and Ibrahim (2016), “the media naturally are attracted to conflict, crisis and war and publicity is the oxygen of terrorism”. Corroborating this view, Nnane (2015) noted thus:

Terrorism thrives on media publicity globally. This is because, through consistent media coverage especially news framing, the media either wittingly or unwittingly help to drive fear about such terrorist groups into people thereby working towards the desires of such terrorist groups.

The author concluded that there is no gainsaying the fact both the Nigerian media and the international media has been having a field day in the coverage of the insurgency in Nigeria.

Thus, the press has often found itself in a paradoxical situation owing to a number of issues which permeate the media-society nexus. Take for instance, the society creates nurtures and sustains the media with the bulk of revenue generated in most media organization coming from the government but the media is expected to mirror and expose the ills of the society. Yet, it is stated that national security should take primacy in the journalist’s mind. According to the media critics, “national security must first be guaranteed before subordinate values such as free expression can be protected” (kabiru& Ibrahim 2016).

Noteworthy in this dilemma of the press issue is the fact that freedom of the press is the watch word of a democratic society but the journalist faces and contends with a number of operational hurdles, limitations and restrictions inform of laws, censorship and repressions. The journalist as a matter of fact is occasionally denied unencumbered and unfettered access to information. It could be said that the society imposes responsibility to the media to the extent that political order and interest permit.

Imagine the fact that the journalist is also guided by his professional ethics against bias, slanting and distorting of facts but he must abide by the editorial policy of his or her media employer which sometimes negates ethical standard and norms of professional practice. One must not ignore the important fact that media outlets are not non-profit concerns meaning that the journalist is an economic man. By implication, either the print media space or broadcast media space must be sold to the public to yield revenue for the survival and continued operation of both the media employer and its journalist employee. This imposes a task for the journalist to comply with the market forces of demand and supply.

Even as the journalist remains an economic man, he or she faces public outrage and sanction against sensationalism. The journalist therefore, strives to balance the readers’ interest and demand with his professional ethics. In the end, his output may be at disequilibrium with popular expectation. In the course of carrying out his watchdog role, the journalist may risk his job or even his life. These are few glaring cases of environmental forces which the journalist battles with in his daily routine job.

In the case of the Boko Haram crisis which constitutes the focus of this study, the Nigerian press has found itself in this very difficult situation given the geo-political and ethnic composition of the entity with its attendant primordial tribal sentiments. The Nigerian state posits a case study of complete multi-ethnic polity with cultural and linguistic divergences. The entity was founded on ethnic attachment. The disparate antagonistic groups inhabiting the country were joined into unwholesome alliance in the white man political equation of 1914 known as amalgamation pioneered by Lord Fredric Lugard. Ever since this

ill-fated arrangement, the various components have failed to live in one accord, while events in the polity have tended to polarize along ethnic cleavages.

Given the country's centrifugal tendencies, it becomes incumbent on the ideal press in its task of institution building to mitigate the degree of variance and incompatibility among the divergent heterogeneous groups through the propagation of such programmes that will have unifying effects on the people. Most unfortunately, the powerful forces of ethnocentrism, tribalism and religious affiliation impose deep constraint on the potentialities of the press to achieve this salient national objective as Uwalaka (2000) rightly observed that the Nigerian press was totally encapsulated. In the paradigm of ethnic cleavage against the Backdrop of national expectation even to the extent that political persuasion of most individual were shaped by the above mentioned factors.

The question has often arose as to whether the Nigerian press, given its cultural attachment could be objective in its analysis of critical issue of National importance. Uwalaka noted that while some people have vigorously argued that the media have not been able to rise above the narrow interests that have divided Nigeria along ethnic cleavages, others accuse the media of providing the impetus for the various conflicts through a deliberate systematic abuse of its awesome powers. The position of the Nigerian press is piqued by multiple controversies over its ability to scale the barrier of ethnic and parochial sentiments in its cardinal role of informing, educating and entertaining the public during a monumental national crisis.

This situation is corroborated by the fact that the Nigerian press reflects the opinion, ideology and aspirations of the elites that own them. Historically, each of the regionally oriented pre-independence political parties that emerged in the political scene exercised reasonable control over one newspaper or another with which the politician owners charted their political causes. As a matter of fact, the National council of Nigerian citizens led by Dr. Nnamdi Azikiwe had the West African pilot in its control; the Action Group led by Chief Obafemi Awolowo used the Nigerian Tribune to further its political ideas. Awolowo later, through his amalgamated press acquired chains of Newspapers including the Daily Express. The Northern people's congress was not left out in the terrain as the party used "The Citizen" to espouse the Northern political agenda. Mention must also be made of Herbert Macaulay one of the foremost nationalist who published the Lagos Daily News which sooner than later, closed shop.

Ownership of the country's existing media has been polarized along tribal line. Therefore, the press in Nigeria is not isolated from the socio-cultural value of the country's geo-political make-up. The situation is such that each media sees and interpret national event from its interjected cultural prism. "However, it must be said that recourse to primordial sentiment is not a bad thing neither is it a bad idea if an ethnic group decides to set up organizations and structures such as business outfits, newspapers, and radio and television stations to advance its interests. Where the problem lies is when the projection of sectional values conflicts with larger values particularly in a federation", (Center for Free Speech 1999:19).

Modern Nigerian press seems not to have departed from the antics of pioneer journalism. Thus, the old tribal sentiment, ethnic beliefs and loyalties injected into the mass media in the colonial era through political alliances have continued to reinforce and manifest themselves in contemporary journalism. At best, the newspapers serve as megaphones for the propagation of ideals, wishes, passions and propensities of ethnic nationalities they belong to. Each paper sees and interprets national issues from its interjected cultural prism, a situation that is further exacerbated by interplay of political and economic forces.

Since political independence, violent crisis of destructive magnitude has continued to re-enact itself on the country's political landscape. In time of every crisis, the public looks to the media for information and opinion formation. It is believed that the slanting, framing and language of presentation of news story can go to a large extent to determine the escalation or de-escalation of the crisis. The media



certainly thrive on conflict and violence. This is because such conflict and violent stories are juicy, sensational, attractive and very interesting to narrate. Reporters hardly afford to miss such juicy stories that can market their newspapers or attract large audience to their stations.

With the eruption of the Boko Haram crisis, the media is facing another task of defending its neutrality and objectivity. Accusation and counter accusation have greeted the manner the press has handled the reportage of the insurgency with one school believing that the media is guilty of propagating and disseminating ideas that condone or promote violent extremism. Another accusation is that since the media is imbued with the potency of shaping culture, influencing opinion and attitude of the people, they are responsible for opinion formation and attitude of the people on the insurgency. This view was corroborated by Neuwirth (2006) in Ajilore and Akarue (2015) who believed that as long as the general public derives its perception of the wider reality through the media, it takes every media report as truth especially when the major media all sing a similar tune. In their analysis, the media scholars noted that when the media is mentioned the views have generally centered on the symbiotic relationship between the media and terrorists and the conclusion is often that without the “oxygen of publicity”, there will be little or no incentive for terrorism to thrive.

Media critics have further averred that media narratives have inadvertently played into the hands of these blood thirsty extremists and help them achieve their ultimate goals of undermining the government and pressuring it to concede grounds to the sect. Goldstein and Pavehouse (2010) as quoted by Ajilore and Akaure (2015) believe also that the media coverage of terrorist activities only unwittingly plays into the fundamental philosophy and ultimate objective of terrorism as modern tactics of political struggle.

In the final analysis, it is generally believed that if the media should strictly adhere to laid down ethics, and the tenet of social responsibility in the reportage of crisis, the degree of bias, sensationalism and distortion of facts will be mitigated and the public stand on a better pedestal to make informed opinion and judgment of any issue.

### **The Broadcast Media and Opinion Formation**

By radio and television broadcasting, we mean that aspect of mass communication that involves a simultaneous transmission of information, ideas, knowledge, belief etc. to a dispersed and heterogeneous audience through the electro-magnetic spectrum or airwave (Agbanu and Nwamuo 2009). Broadcasting is very effective in transmission of information and messages to both the literate and illiterate segment of the population as it can be done in local languages and dialects.

The broadcast media here comprises the radio and television. Each possesses unique attributes and distinct features that distinguish it and appeal to the audience. For instance, the radio breaks the barrier of illiteracy and is accessible to the wider segment of the populace. The radio is believed to have an edge over other media of mass communication in that it is both a blind man’s medium and a busy man’s medium. The television has audio-visual quality and uses both motion picture and still photograph to complement its story. The combination of sound and vision in the television makes it a very powerful and interesting medium that captures the attention and interest of the audience. The effectiveness of the broadcast media is also underscored by their ability to break the barriers of distance between the sender and receiver of the message.

The radio through its various programmes like, news commentary, news talk, news analysis, talk shows, issues of the moment, newspaper review etc. exert much influence on the manner and way the audience forms opinion and the way formed opinion can be changed. Such various programmes have proven to be effective tools for moulding of attitudes and opinions, shaping public perception of reality and even effecting social and behavioral change in the society.

The radio and television are indeed veritable sources of discernment, motivation and socialization in different spheres of the lives of the citizens. Through its daily reportage of news, news analysis, news commentary, news talk, phone-in programmes, talk shows, documentary, and interviews, the broadcast media not only set the agenda but provide the greatest channel for the citizens to ventilate their views and opinions on any national issue. It is based on this important opportunity provided for the citizens that the mass media is seen as a market place of idea especially when it comes to opinion formation. For the media to enhance public opinion, it must serve as a market place of idea. In other words, the media must be an unbiased broker of public opinion which must make available to the people knowledge or information on any topic (Alozie, 2012).

The broadcast media through agenda setting mould and influence public opinion, on any issue of importance. According to Alozie (2012), “the mass media sets agenda for public debate and discussion by interviewing the leaders, publishing their stories and igniting the fire for public debate and discussions on the issue raised in the stories”. The broadcast media role in opinion formation and attitude change include that of status conferral in which it confers status and bestows legitimacy on leaders and issues.

Although the mass media potential in exerting influence on the people in opinion formation and attitude change is not in doubt, however, the media function among the nexus of other mediating influences. That is to say that formation of opinion is also influenced by some mediating variables such as the existing pre-disposition of the people which Alozie (2012:43) identified as “the family, school, church, friends and colleagues’.one must not rule out such influences from interpersonal communication, group discussion, opinion leaders and even rumour mongering.

Such influencing factors manifest during crisis and combine with the mass media message to exert tremendous influence on the people and the Boko Haram crisis cannot be an isolation.

## **Theoretical Framework**

### **The Social Responsibility Theory**

This theory is an offshoot of the libertarian that confers much freedom on the press. In other words. This normative theory which explains how the media should operate in a given system of social values was fallout of the case against libertarian theory of the press which came under attack for being too idealistic (Baran 2004). The theory as elaborated by (McQuail 1987) posits that: Media should accept and fulfill certain obligations to the society. Media can meet these obligations by setting high standards of professionalism, truth, accuracy and objectivity. Media should be self-regulating within the framework of the law. Media should avoid disseminating material that might lead to crime, violence or civil disorder or that might offend minority groups. The media as a whole should be pluralistic, reflect the diversity of the culture in which they operate and give access to various point of view and rights of reply. The public has a right to expect high standards of performance, and official intervention can be justified to ensure the public good Media professionals should be accountable to society as well as their employers and the market” Capturing the import of the social responsibility role of the press to the society, Alozie (2009, p.57) says thus “The social responsibility theory stands for a free press with responsibility to the society. It wants the journalist to exercise self-control or be controlled by the society. Journalists or members of the press should therefore, put in place certain measures of professional decorum”. Elaborating explicitly on this theory, Nworgu (2011) stated thus: “Under this theory, the press is expected to be socially responsible for its contents. Hence it is supposed to present accurate and impartial account of the day’s events. There should be a balance presentation and facts must be crosschecked. The press is allowed to criticize the government constructively. The right to publish should not be used to criticize and tarnish the image of others unduly but where the press fails to be responsible and accurate in its report, the state will be forced to intervene”.

### **The Agenda Setting Theory**

This theory enhances comprehension of media effects on the individual particularly the target audience. The theory focuses on the effect of the media on culture and the society, thus describing the powerful influence which the media can exert in determining not only the issues members of the public talk about but also how they talk about them (Nkwam-Uwaoma et al., 2021). Wimmer and Dominik (1975, p.355) cited in Oparaeke (2014) stated that the theory examines the relationship between media priorities concerning the relative importance of news topics. Folari (1998, p.680) outlined the elements involved in agenda setting to include, “the quantity and frequency of reporting as well as prominence given to the report through headline display, pictures and layout in newspapers, and timing on radio and television”

### **Empirical Review**

Udeze and Chukwuma (2013) study revealed that the broadcast media are not effective in the discharge of their surveillance function. In line with the findings, the study recommends amongst others that the Nigerian broadcast media must, as a matter of necessity, contribute to the security of the country by effectively playing the surveillance role. Hyacinth (2017) this study was conducted to find out the perception of the television audience on how the Nigerian Television Authority (NTA) and the Channels Television have so far reported the abduction of over 200 female students at Government Girls Secondary School in Chibok, Borno State of Nigeria. The survey research method was used to carry out the study while the questionnaire served as the measuring instrument. The residents of South-East Nigeria constituted the population of the study from where a sample of 384 was drawn using the creative research systems online sample size calculator. Multi-Stage sampling technique was used to select specific local government areas, wards and households that were studied. Findings revealed that NTA’s reports on the abduction of the Chibok school girls are often in favour of government while Channels Television’s reports on the abduction are often balanced. The credibility level of NTA’s reports on the abduction of the Chibok school girls was rated low while that of Channels Television was highly rated. Based on the findings, it was recommended amongst others that the Nigerian Television Authority (NTA) must wake up and endeavour to properly give account of the girls’ abduction. The report must be devoid of ethnic, religious or political sentiment. Doing this will fundamentally lead to believability, which will consequently raise the credibility level of the reports.

Mustapha-Koik(2019)study revealed that in Nigeria, constraints on reporting about terrorism are multi-faceted: they come from the terror groups, the media owners and security agencies/government. Further findings also revealed that based on the lack of security and organisational support, the reporters covering the Boko Haram crisis have become less committed following perceived personal risks from their reporting.

Kente and Sheyigari (2021) study established that Nigerian media dominantly use news frames: peace neutral and mixed frames. The successes, most of which were attributed to the way and manner in which media handles them. The study blamed the media on several occasions for flaming the conflict, particularly regarding the nature of their reportage. The study also addressed the critical question; that the Nigerian media can play a critical role in resolving and or addressing insurgency in Nigeria. Adopting the media framing theory, it, therefore, recommends the optimization of positive frames to promote the peace media initiative which forms the critical plank of positive media interventions.

Udoh (2017) in a study found that Nigerian newspapers are, to a great extent, mono aesthetic in their coverage of Boko Haram activities, and needs to ensure an aesthetic equilibrium for them to create more impact in the peace process. Edogor et al. (2015) Users’ perception of crisis portrayals on social media: A study of Boko Haram insurgency in Nigeria. This paper examined the users’ perception of crisis

portrayals on social media using the Boko Haram insurgency in Nigeria as an example. Survey research design was applied with 300 respondents as the sample; multi-stage sampling technique was used to select the samples and questionnaire was the instrument of data collection. The study found that users perceive the portrayals of the crisis on social media as excess and over-blown, especially on Facebook by mostly users between 15 and 35 years old. Based on the findings, the paper mainly recommends more social media education and barring of youngsters of certain age from the use of Facebook in Nigeria.

Olanrewaju et al. (2021) study investigated how Nigerian newspapers contributed to sensitizing and sustaining public attention on the issue of the schoolgirls that were abducted by the Boko Haram group in Chibok, northeastern Nigeria. The study analyzed the direction/slant, frequency, and prominence of news stories, feature articles, editorials, special reports, interpretative articles, and news analysis on the abduction as published in three major Nigerian newspapers. Using the content analytical technique, the study found that there was no day in the period under investigation that the issue of the abducted Chibok girls did not get attention in the press. The study also found that the press discharged its corporate social responsibility by setting and sustaining public consciousness on the injustice and inhumanity of the abduction. Furthermore, a connection was established between the unrelenting crusade mounted by non-governmental organizations, especially the #BringBackOurGirls movement, for the release of the abducted girls, sustained public interest provided by the Press, and the eventual government action that culminated in the release of 164 out of the 276 girls initially abducted. This study, therefore, recommends continued publicity by the media in its role as a social crusader to ensure that the remaining Chibok and other abductees are rescued from their Boko Haram abductors.

## **Research Methodology**

The research design shows how the researcher organized his approaches for data collection. It also shows the plan on how to carry out inquiries on the topic. Research design stipulates how the information related to research problems would be gathered and analyzed. Based on this the descriptive survey method was employed for the study. It is found to be the most suitable option because survey research focuses on people and their opinions and attitudes.

## ***Population/Sample Size***

The population of the study comprises adult residents of both sexes from 18 years and above made up of public servants, professionals, and traders etc., who reside in Owerri metropolis. This gives an estimated population of 983,350 people according to National Population Commission, in Owerri. The sample size was drawn from this population. A sample is precisely a part of the population. In social science research; samples are used in place of population especially when the said population is large. This is because when it is objectively done, sample can represent the population and it goes a long way to sustain validity of findings as well as validity of measurement. Also, as a result of the largeness of the population size, the researcher opted for selection of a manageable and representative sample size that will produce result that will stand the test of time.

Some researchers have the misconception that the size of a study population from which the sample is drawn determines the adequate sample of the study. This is not exactly correct because what is most important is that the sample selected should be an optimum sample", Ojo (2012, p114). An optimum sample for a study according to the author is the sample which fulfils the requirement of an efficiency, representativeness, reliability and flexibility. No rigid number is prescribed for an optimum size of a population as the nature of the problem is a deciding factor. Based on the nature of this study; therefore, the sample size used is 400. In determining the sample size for the study, the researcher depended on Yaro Yarmane mathematical sample size.

### ***Sampling Techniques/Measuring Instrument***

The study adopted the simple random sampling technique. This is because probability sampling allows equal representation of every member of the population. This means that in this sort of sampling, all elements stand on equal chance of being selected. Also, the possibility of classification error is eliminated in this method of sampling. Based on the nature of the study and the survey research method employed, the researcher relied on the questionnaire as the measuring instrument in this study. Also, the measuring instrument provided an opportunity for the researcher to further have one-on-one interaction, and interview with the respondents and this aided final analysis of the study's findings. The said questionnaire contains both close-ended and open-ended questions but of which were structured in a manner to elicit valid response from the respondents.

### ***Reliability and Validity of the Instrument***

Reliability of the instrument deals with the consistency of the instrument in measuring what it is out to measure while validity refers to the instrument's validity or relevance to the study. It is believed that a measuring instrument in addition to its reliability must yield valued result. Certainly, the questionnaire and oral interview are well known effective and valid instruments of data collection especially for survey research of this nature. To prove the reliability and validity of the instruments used, a pre-test was carried out at Orji, Owerri where twenty of the questionnaires were distributed to television viewers at a viewing center and the response was quite encouraging.

### ***Method of Data Collection and Analysis***

The research instrument (questionnaire) was personally administered by the researcher to the randomly selected samples in the population and retrieved them after they will fill by the respondents. Data collected from the questionnaire will then be collated, and analyzed accordingly. The research questions raised will be tested. Simple percentages and tables will used in the data presentation.

### ***Data Presentation and Analysis***

This section dealt with the collation, classification and presentation of the statistical data collected from the respondents to the administered questionnaire, which was the researcher's main instrument of data collection. Accordingly, the analysis was done with the use of simple frequency tables and percentages. This exercise was in no doubt in conformity with the out-head objectives of the study. 400 copies of the questionnaire were distributed by the researcher and all were retrieved and used for the analysis of this study.

**Table 1: The Extent radio and television messages on Boko Haram crisis influenced Owerri metropolis residents’ perception of the crisis.**

Options	SA	A	D	SD	Mean	Decision
I listen to radio messages/news on Boko Haram	177	196	18	9	3.4	Accepted
I watch to TV messages/news on Boko Haram	201	181	17	1	3.5	Accepted
I think Boko Haram messages they receive from the broadcast media make them feel the northern are behind it	194	199	7	-	3.5	Accepted
I think the messages do show that muslin are not quick to condemn the activities of Boko Haram group	273	127	-	-	3.7	Accepted
I think that Boko Haram sect is a terrorist group	400	-	-	-	4.0	Accepted
I think the military are not fighting professionally to tackle the issue	346	54	-	-	3.9	Accepted
I think there is a political aspect to Boko Haram activities	400	-	-	-	4.0	Accepted
<b>Grand mean</b>					<b>3.7</b>	<b>Accepted</b>

Source: Field Survey, 2023

**Weighting Scale: Very Low (1.0-1.6); Low (1.7-2.2); Moderate (2.3-2.8); High (2.9-3.4); Very High (3.5-4.0).**

*Decision Rule: If the average mean is from 1.0-1.6, the researcher decides that the extent radio and television messages on Boko Haram crisis influence respondents perception of the crisis is Very Low; if the average mean is from 1.7-2.2, the researcher decides that the extent radio and television messages on Boko Haram crisis influence respondents perception of the crisis is Low; if the average mean is 2.3-2.8, the researcher decides that the extent radio and television messages on Boko Haram crisis influence respondents perception of the crisis is Moderate; if the average mean is 2.9-3.4, the researcher decides that the extent radio and television messages on Boko Haram crisis influence respondents perception of the crisis is High; and if the average mean is from 3.5-4.0, the researcher decides that the extent radio and television messages on Boko Haram crisis influence respondents perception of the crisis is Very High.*

Table 9 revealed that with an average mean of 3.7, the researcher decides that the extent radio and television messages on Boko Haram crisis influence respondents’ perception of the crisis is very high. This implies that radio and television messages on Boko Haram crisis influence residents of Owerri metropolis perception of the crisis is very high extent.

**Table 2: The Extent Residents of Owerri Metropolis think that the broadcast media messages were objective in the coverage and analysis of Boko Haram crisis**

Options	SA	A	D	SD	Mean	Decision
I think media messages were objective in the issue of Boko Haram	166	195	39	-	3.3	Accepted
I think media messages were just recounting the responses of people they interviewed which are not objective in most cases	183	131	10	76	3.1	Accepted
I think media messages were just giving official account which were not the true situation of things on ground	237	143	20	-	3.5	Accepted
I think media messages are slanted/bent to suit the intention of the media outfit	155	201	41	3	3.3	Accepted
I think media message are not out to project the views of politicians	176	131	90	3	3.2	Accepted
<b>Grand Mean</b>					<b>3.3</b>	<b>Accepted</b>

Source: Field Survey, 2023

Table 2 indicated that with an average mean score 3.3, a high extent resident of Owerri metropolis think that the broadcast media messages were objective in the coverage and analysis of Boko Haram crisis. This means that residents of Owerri metropolis to a high extent metropolis think that the broadcast media messages were objective in the coverage and analysis of Boko Haram crisis.

**Table 3: The factors that reinforced opinions formation of Owerri metropolis residents when they were exposed to the broadcast media message**

Options	SA	A	D	SD	Mean	Decision
The political comments of some politicians reinforces the opinion of the people to suit whatever political believe they already have	199	168	14	19	3.4	Rejected
The actions of the military and other security outfits are also factors that influence the opinion of people	221	120	42	17	3.4	Accepted
The “I Don’t Care” attitude of some political leaders also reinforces the perception of the people	301	99	-	-	3.8	Accepted
The economic effect of Boko Haram activities is part of the factors that affect the opinion of the people	294	110	-	-	3.8	Accepted
<b>Grand Mean</b>					<b>3.6</b>	<b>Accepted</b>

Source: Field Survey, 2023

Table 3 revealed that with an average mean score 3.6, there are other factors that reinforced opinions formation of the respondents when they were exposed to the broadcast media message. This implies that there are other factors that reinforced opinions formation of Owerri metropolis residents when they were exposed to the broadcast media message, these factors are political comments, actions of the military and other security outfits, attitude of some political leaders and economic effect.

**Table 4: Opinion of Owerri metropolis residents on whether there are ethical violations in the language and style of the broadcast media messages that influence their mindset.**

Options	SA	A	D	SD	Mean	Decision
Broadcast media outfit do adhere to the ethical principles of journalism by reporting Boko Haram activities	89	311	-	-	3.2	Accepted
Broadcast media outfit at times will not caution the people they are interviewing when they make unethical comments	139	261	-	-	3.3	Accepted
Some broadcast media outfits do not care about the sanction from NBC when reporting Boko Haram activities	8	38	208	146	1.7	Rejected
<b>Grand Mean</b>					<b>2.7</b>	<b>Accepted</b>

Source: Field Survey, 2023

Table 4 revealed that with an average mean score 2.7, there are no ethical violations in the language and style of the broadcast media messages that influence their mindset. This implies residents of Owerri metropolis affirm that there are no ethical violations in the language and style of the broadcast media messages that influence their mindset.

### Discussion of Findings

Result from data analysis revealed that with an average mean of 3.7, radio and television messages on Boko Haram crisis influence residents of Owerri metropolis perception of the crisis is very high extent. By implication this means that the messages broadcasted by radio and television in regards to Boko Haram crisis to a very high extent influence the perception Owerri metropolis residents in regards to the crisis. Specifically, data gathered revealed that with a mean score of 3.4, residents of Owerri metropolis listen to radio messages/news on Boko Haram. Also, with a mean score of 3.5, residents of Owerri metropolis listen to TV messages/news on Boko Haram. Furthermore, with a means score of 3.5, residents of Owerri metropolis think that Boko Haram messages they received from the broadcast media make them feel the Northern are behind it.

Similarly, with a mean score of 3.7, residents of Owerri metropolis think that the messages do show that muslin are not quick to condemn the activities of Boko Haram group. Also, with a mean score residents of Owerri metropolis think that Boko Haram sect is a terrorist group. Further data revealed that with a mean score of 3.9, residents of Owerri metropolis affirm that the military are not fighting professionally to tackle the issue. Also, with a mean score of 4.0, residents of Owerri metropolis see Boko Haram activities as being political.

Results from data analysis revealed that with an average mean score 3.3, residents of Owerri metropolis to a high extent think that the broadcast media messages were objective in the coverage and analysis of Boko Haram crisis. Specifically, with a mean score of 3.3, Owerri metropolis residents affirm that media messages were objectives in the issues of Boko Haram. Also, with a mean score of 3.1, Owerri metropolis residents think media messages were just recounting the responses of people they interviewed which are not objective in most cases. Furthermore, with a mean score of 3.5, residents of Owerri metropolis affirm that media messages were giving official account which were not the true situation of things on ground.



Similar finding revealed that with a mean score of 3.3, residents of Owerri metropolis affirm that media messages are slanted/bent to suit the intention of the media outfit. Also, with a mean score of 3.2, Owerri metropolis residents concur that media messages are out to project the view of politicians.

Data analysed revealed that with an average mean score 3.6, there are other factors that reinforced opinions formation of Owerri metropolis residents when they are exposed to the broadcast media message, these factors are political comments, actions of the military and other security outfits, attitude of some political leaders and economic effect. Specifically, with a means score of 3.4, residents of Owerri metropolis affirm that political comments of some politicians reinforce the opinion of the people to suit whatever political believe they already have. Also, with a means score of 3.4, residents of Owerri metropolis affirm that military and other security outfits are factors that influence the opinion of people.

Similarly, with a means score of 3.8, residents of Owerri metropolis affirm that the “I Don’t Care” attitude of some political leaders also reinforce the perception of the people. Also, with a means score of 3.8, the economic effect of Boko Haram activities is not part of the factors that affect the opinion of the people. This implies that residents of Owerri metropolis are the economic effect of Boko Haram activities is not part of the factors that affect the opinion of the people.

Data analysed revealed that with an average mean score 2.7, residents of Owerri metropolis affirm that there are no ethical violations in the language and style of the broadcast media messages that influence their mindset. Specifically, with a means score of 3.2, residents of Owerri metropolis affirm that the broadcast media outfit do adhere to the ethics principles of journalism by reporting Boko Haram activities. Also, with a means score of 3.3, Owerri metropolis residents concurs that broadcast media outfit at times will caution the people they are interviewing when they make unethical comments. Furthermore, with a means score of 1.7, Owerri metropolis residents agrees that broadcast media outfits do not care about sanction from NBC when reporting Boko Haram activities.

## **Conclusion**

The researcher concludes that broadcast media messages on Boko Haram crisis to high extent influences audience perception of the crisis. Also, the researcher concludes that broadcast media messages are objective in coverage and analysis of Boko Haram crisis and there are no ethical violations in the language and style of the broadcast media messages.

## **Recommendations**

In line with the findings of this research and conclusion drawn it is recommended as follows:

- i. Broadcast media should be careful with the type of news regarding Boko Haram crisis they put out to the public due to the fact that it influence the perception of the audience.
- ii. Broadcast media outlets should continue being objective in their coverage and analysis of Boko Haram crisis.
- iii. Broadcast media should dycext some of these factors that can influence the opinion of Owerri metropolis residents.
- iv. Broadcast media should continue broadcasting messages that don’t violate the ethics of the profession.

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