



A Study of Newspaper Coverage of Crime in Nigeria

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ABSTRACT

This research A Study of Newspaper Coverage of Crime in Nigeria is born out of the zeal to investigate the role of Nigerian newspapers to cover vast crimes committed in the country. The study used combined research methods such as surveys and content analysis. Population of the study was raised from Delta state where a sample commensurate with the population representative were drawn. Findings review that some Nigerian newspapers because of political affiliation do not pay appropriate attention to reporting crime in the country as they should, while others do their social responsibility in giving adequate coverage of crime in Nigeria. The study concludes that there are imbalance in newspaper coverage reportage of crime in Nigeria because of ethnic and socio-political inclination. The study therefore recommends the employment of trained investigative reporters by newspaper organisations whether online or offline newspapers who can carry out diligent investigation on crime events in Nigeria. It also recommends that awards be given to best newspapers that adequately cover crime incidents in the country such as kidnapping, banditry, robbery and other types of crime. Such awards being given by Nigerian Newspaper Proprietors Association every year.

Introduction

The mass media fills the communication gap between the government and the governed. With this, the mass media especially newspapers, succeed in making coverage of crime in Nigeria their responsibilities. High coverage or publication of crime in Nigerian newspapers, without any doubt help in reducing crime and corruption. In the late 1980's, crime appeared to be on the decline. However, a new breed of crime has emerged, particularly from the Middle East countries, (Arata, 2019, p 52). It is important to note that the present day crime threat comes primarily from extremists who have established their own funding networks through traffic in drugs, private-business, independent wealth, charities and local financial support. Also these crimes had continued to be as ruthless as ever (Eze, 2021, p 67).

Obasi (2022:61) reported that recent years saw a proliferation of senseless act of crime. Some of these acts of crime, as reported in the Nigerian media. The activities of non-state-actors in our insecurity discourse are evidenced across the geopolitical zones, in every state and even in every community in Nigeria. From Borno to Katsina, to Benue and Anambra, the ugly stories are everywhere in the media. Reports from our zonal researchers show black moments in the Nigeria insecurity situation. Between 2015 to 2022, the country has lost well over one million, eight hundred and forty lives (1,800,040) in the hands of Boko Haram terrorists, Herders terrorists, Bandits and unknown gun men scattered across North East, North West, North Central, South East and South West.

These non-state-actors had within the period under review kidnapped over nine hundred and seventy six thousand (976,000) people and over one trillion naira paid in ransom. Many who could not meet up with their ransom demand still have their relatives held captive by their abductors- Boko Haram, bandits, herdsdmen and unknown gunmen across the forests in Nigeria.

Our study further revealed that over fifty three thousand five hundred and forty eight (53,548) schools at all levels were closed between 2015 to 2022 in Nigeria, as a result of insecurity, especially in the Northern part of the country and students forced

out of schools. Obasi (2022) continues that within the period 2015 to 2022, over three million people were displaced from their ancestral homes and forced into make-shift-homes, christened IDPs (Internally displaced persons) camps. Government facilities, especially military and police and individual farmlands, crops and houses were massively destroyed by these groups of human Nigerians. The nefarious activities of the heartless individual have plunged Nigerians into severe famine and hunger, and increased fear in the people.

In general, crime seems to exhibit less restraint than they did in the past. There are also new choices of weapons at the disposal of the crimes. According to Udoji (2001, p 66): "... We live in an age of unimaginable –rage and apocalyptic arsenals-unclear, chemical and biological". Extremists who want to make a greater impression are turning to the more lethal weapons that technology has made available according to Williams (2001, p 43).

In the Nigerian context, crime manifests in the form of religions wars, civil unrest's and ethnic wars etc. During such wars, the manner of senseless killings, the setting of such incidents, the provocative sectional reports in the media and the withdrawal attitudes of certain major groups in the group, often bear close resemblance's to the events that precluded the country's 1967-1970 Civil War (Igwe, 2005, p 41). The fallout's (refugees in their own lands, bereaved families, hapless victims, and shattered business) often provide old wounds and revoke memories of the fate that has been the consequence of such violent uprisings. In all cases after the dust had settled, with an anti-riot security men quelling the riots with Lunatic brutality that often escalate the death tolls, the victims are usually left their sorrows. Such dark events, which often occur in Nigeria, have created more destitute and socially disclosed victims than the Nigeria leadership has imagined (Aja, 2023, p 59).

In the Nigeria case, usually after the fire-brigade approach of arresting the situation that ends with the inauguration of judicial panels and ad-hoc committees (whose white papers are a subject of controversy). The government reaction, at best is usually the pronouncement of policy statements that hardly ever translate into meaningful action. The victims have often had to carry their burden and their cross in perpetual life of agony. The so-called

rehabilitation and reconstruction measures often get drowned in the murky waters of Nigeria sectional and tribal politics (Adindu, 2009, p 46).

Objectives of the Study

1. To identify the roles of the Nigerian newspapers play in the war against crime.
2. To ascertain the impact of the Nigerian media as regards reducing the incidence of crime in the country.
3. To ascertain the effects of the print media in influencing the attitude of the masses towards crime.

Research Questions

1. What are the roles of the Nigeria newspapers play in the war against crime?
2. Do Nigerian newspapers impact on the effort in reducing incidents of crime in Nigeria?
3. To what level does the media influence the attitude of the masses towards crime?

Literature Review

In order to have a good and complete academically oriented work, it is required that there are inputs from already existing works as references. In this project work, which is aimed at analyzing the level at which mass media especially newspapers covers crime in Nigerian news in this country, primary and secondary data were used as part of the sources of literature review.

Simply put, communication for coverage is the overall deliberate effort to acquaint targets of development with the desired message of development. It involves deliberate, well desired and articulated communication codes aimed at bringing development messages to the knowledge of the development targets.

The primary motive of embarking on coverage communication is to create adequate awareness about the developmental projects meant to enhance the well-being of the inhabitants of a given society and by doing, sensitize their adoption of the project. Thus communication for coverage according to Edeani (2014, p 26) is “the use of all forms of communication in reporting, publicizing and promotion of coverage at all levels of a society”.

The mass media system of any nation wishing to develop, should provide a forum for collective discussion and the weighting of the various options in order to arrive at well considered decisions. In other words, to serve the ends of coverage, the media should provide “a market place for the exchange of comments and criticisms regarding public affairs”. A nation is here viewed predominately as a composition based on natural agreement between “ordinary people” and the quest for the wellbeing of these people. Suggestions for finding the “common good” have been very several, depending on the basic socio-philosophical stands taken. Attempts to reach the individuals in society, have in the past, necessitated the used of various media of communication with overall coverage as the goal. For example, quite interesting argumentation and counter-argumentation have been presented since the early 17th century on the linkage between the “common good”, which is what coverage should be all about, the individual, irrespective of his status and his location in the societal setting, and the state, concerning the so called cameralization in economics.

In cameralization, it was assumed that the “common good” was best achieved by strengthening the state, as out the readymade materials for the kind of rural programmes we would wish to offer. Should such programmes be made in the urban areas for the study of the peculiarities of the rural community? Or must they be drawn from the rural communities to achieve what he calls the ‘natural blending’?

Coverage information is critical in rural campaign not because it alone can solve problems, but because it is a critical part of helping the people understand why have problems, how they can get help and how they can contribute to improving their conditions. Media strategies for coverage of crime in Nigeria for instance cannot operate in a vacuum of institutional support. There must be agencies functioning in both urban and local areas to help the proposed change take place.

Competition from other mass media apart radio remains the most promising mass medium for effective coverage of crime news, if only because radio reaches people in their own language. Despite the suggested advantages of other low-cost communication media, the cost effectiveness of newspaper is still more promising.

Newspaper, in spite of the worrisome generalization that “mass media can do more than creating awareness regarding and coverage project, it has continued to wax stronger as a medium of the people. In the rural areas in particular, it is not unusual to see people tie a radio set around their waste while climbing trees. It is argued that “of all the mass media generally available to Africans, newspaper is the most widespread and accessible”.

Obviously, newspaper has over riding advantages over other media of mass communication. Some of these advantages are:

1. It exposed the youths and enable them to know how to read and write.
2. Ensuring easier storage and retrieval developmental information.
3. Breaks the barriers of distance, as its reach is amazingly wide and highly penetrating.
4. Breaks the barrier of power outage as it can easily be operated without light etc.

The television as a medium has not fared well as a medium of coverage communication because of its acute limited reach and being a date a highly urban affairs.

A participatory rural newspaper according to Kasoma (2013, p 14a), is a publication for and by the rural people containing news, views and advertisement for the rural community. A number of reasons account for this resolve; one, rural coverage according to Edeani (2015, p 1), is the core of national coverage. Two, in the light of the above and given the fact that a greater percentage of the masses live in the rural areas, a newspaper designed for the coverage process should have a rural coloration in operation, orientation and content wise.

Thus, the Nigerian newspaper environment has witnessed the birth and demise of a number of circulated newspapers e.g. Community Concord, Udoka etc. The snag with such publications that were christened community newspapers is that they have urban coloration in terms of their operational base and their content. In spite of the limitations of Nigeria newspaper pointed out, a newspaper plays a number of functions in the coverage process:

Playing traditional functions of informing, education, persuading and entertaining the masses; Providing

better interpreted or-in depth developmental stories that place coverage issues and facts in greater perspective; ensuring easier storage and retrieval developmental information etc. There is no point arguing the fact that the traditional media are indispensable tools of disseminating information about social and rural coverage programmes.

In fact, the emergence sophistication and wide use of the mass media have not taken and may never take the place of the traditional media in development process. The traditional media can therefore, play a number of coverage functions like;

Mobilizing grassroots support for active participation in crime coverage; Aiding in innovation diffusion and adaptation as people especially rural dwellers tend to accord greater credibility to information reaching then through such media etc. On the need for coverage in the grassroots, a former president of Tanzania, Dr. Julius Nyerere writes, “while others try to reach the moon, we are trying to reach the villages. In his own observation, Okoye (2023, p 34) states that effective rural coverage is necessarily predicated upon understanding the rural people, the rural environ and the interaction of the rural systems brought about by the rural agencies of which newspaper is one. The way the newspapers discharge these function determines what contributions they make towards national coverage.

Kelvin (2022, p 68) points out that, in Nigeria, there are problems of inadequacy in the news coverage of agricultural and crime projects when compared with other projects and sections of our economy. In his assessment of the role of the mass media in the coverage of national crime news, Jerry Gana (2011, p 12) pin-points that the government recognizes the crucial role the electronic and print media can play in the coverage for social order. Owumi (2023, p 29) while writing on the “Role of Modern media and Newspaper in development communication” asserts that the print media has much to do in achieving coverage noting that well trained reporters and editors can gather the information that the national population needs.

Assuming communication is that relevant to the coverage process as indeed, then there is need to ‘bring news to printing areas’ as well (Levi C. Nwodu et al). This would mean saturating the entire nation’s mass media with coverage news, information

and programmes from the nation. This would again mean that it is not enough to include crime issues from the rural areas in the content menu of the mass media in the country but also to have a heavy presence of mass media organizations in the rural areas. This is the only way rural coverage can be part of the setting of a realistic agenda for crime coverage and by extension, participate actively in carrying out the agenda so set by them.

Digwu (1990) and Idowu (2011) cited in Maxwell 2022 pg. 89 study on “the Relative Amount of crime coverage news” reveals that a whopping imbalance exists in the coverage of rural news in the newspaper. Oplor in a study on “Mass Communication and modern coverage in Nigeria” discovered that the decentralization of the mass media is a sure way of guaranteeing national security in times of crises, pointing out that there can be no progress unless beneficial change occurs at the local level. Digwu explaining more on the result of his study noted that news about crime coverage accounted for only seventeen percent (17%) of the stories found in Nigeria newspapers. In the analysis, crime coverage carried by the nation’s newspaper show that about forty-one point two percent (41.2%) were unfavourable, forty point two percent (40.2%) favourable and eighteen point six percent (18.6%) were neutral.

The research conducted by Sobowale on “Influence of ownership on Nigerian Newspaper Coverage on National Issues” indicates that more crime news were carried by municipal newspapers than other mass media of communication. Furthermore, greater percentage of the insignificant crime coverage news found in Nigerian newspapers was not coverage oriented.

Obasi and Omeje (2021, p 5), in his study of “Communication in crime coverage” was not far from the point when he noted that lack of media resources such as man power, transportation and communication equipment was mainly responsible for low coverage of crime by newspapers in developing countries like Nigeria.

Oskigbo (2013, p 113) in his work “News Flow in balance: Qualification of Nigeria Press Content” notes that out information officers including newspaper managers have not done well enough in sensitizing the people towards the crime coverage in

the nation which constitute the center of coverage programmes. Prominent among the scholars on the role of communication in crime coverage is Lasswell who stated that information is indispensable in every system considering the fact that it serves the purposes of surveillance, correlation and education.

Roseberg (2019, p 146) in his own contention maintains that it is not exposure to mass media of information but the content of the message that can influence knowledge gain. In the place of the print in development, Dele Giwa (1983, p 104) affirmed that the newspaper, the most recognized within the family of the print media are credited with such roles as providing outlets for news information education and entertainment. Schramm (1973, 214) cited the newspaper as a channel for informing, motivating, persuading, instructing and providing a means of collective participation in government.

Jerry Gana’s (2004, p 18) assessment of the “Role of the Coverage of crime News in Nigeria” leaves nobody in doubt that adequate coverage of crime programmes or projects is the basis for greater productivity economic growth and industrialization of a nation.

Theoretical Framework

The study shall be guided by the social responses theory and developmental media theory. The social responsibility media theory was inspired by the Huttchins commission on freedom of the press in 1947 in the United States of America. This theory is of the premise that media is responsible to the people by serving as their consequence and protect the right and privileges of every member of that society the media find itself.

This is seen as the watchdog function of the media whereby the media is given freedom with responsibility to serve the society. The theory postulated six functions for the press which is to serve the political system by making information discussion and consideration of public affairs generally accessible; to inform the public to enable it to take self-determined action; to protect the right of the individual by acting as watch dog over system; to provide good entertainment which is in line with the culture.

Research method

For this, combined research methods was adopted. The study method is a form of Survey and Content Analysis research in which data are collected using questionnaire instruments from different sub-groups which were sampled. The method also provided the researchers opportunity to content analyse crime publications published in the selected newspapers within a period specified by the study duration because it provides data for research very quickly as well as eliminates the problem of looking for same respondents at different times.

Study Population

The target population was selected from Delta State that acted as the study area were a total number of 807 staff of the publishers of the punch, guardian, champion and the vanguard newspapers in the South-South Zone. The sample size of 160 staff of the selected Nigerian newspapers was determined by using the Taro Yamane Formular. Considering the nature, purpose and scope of the study, a suitable instruments of questionnaire and inter-coder were employed to solicit data for the study.

Discussion of findings

The findings review that the Majority of the respondents (40%) stated that they came across media publications/reports on crime since the past five years. Also the respondents stated that such media publication/reports have informative content (as noted by 22% of them) are up-to-date (as noted by 10% of the respondents) and clear and easy-to-read (as noted by 28% of the respondents).

Data analysis made in this study revealed that the roles of the Nigeria media coverage of crime in Nigeria has exposed the dangers of crime through their publication (as noted by 70% of the respondents) exposing the hideouts of the crime (as noted by 30% of the respondents) and making a total coverage of all crime occurs (as noted by 100%) of the respondents). Data analysis made in this study also show that Nigeria media had made position impact in reducing the incidence of terrorism (as noted by 78.65% of the respondents). Also, all the respondents (100.00%) stated that the impact of the Nigeria media towards reducing the incidence of crime include the following: inducing public condemnation of crime through their

activities and discouraging terrorists from using Nigeria as their hideouts.

Majority of the respondents (80%) stated that the Nigeria media had encouraging public support for the war on crime. Also a greater proportion of them (20%) agreed that the Nigeria media could be further improved to enhance their efforts in the war on crime. In addition, majority of them agree that the strategies for making the Nigerian media more effective in the Crusade against terrorism includes the reduction of the cost of printing materials through the addition of subsidies (as noted by 80% of the respondents) and the improvement of the nation's broadcasting equipment such as transmitters and satellite (as noted by the 20% of the respondents).

Conclusion

On the basis of the above findings, the researcher concludes that the Nigeria media plays significant roles in mass media coverage of crime in Nigeria. Some of those roles include the following:

1. The publication/reporting of information and up-to-date news on the dangers of crime.
2. The making of compassionate appeals to the terrorism to desist from such devilish acts.
3. The exposing of the hideouts of some notorious terrorists.

The researchers also conclude on the basis of the research findings that the Nigerian newspapers had through their activities, made positive impact as regards reducing the incidence of terrorism and other criminal activities. This it has done in many ways. One is that their activities had induced public condemnation of terrorism. Two is that they had through their activities and campaigns, discouraged terrorists from using Nigeria as their hideouts.

They also concluded that the efforts of the Nigerian newspaper on the war against terrorism and other criminal activities could be further improved or enhanced through the adoption of certain approaches and strategies. One of these strategies is the reduction of the costs of printing and publishing materials by the government through subsidies and tax reductions. The other approach/strategy is the improvement of the nation's broadcasting infrastructure.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, the researchers made the following recommendations:

1. The government should reduce the cost of printing/publishing materials include paper (of all types), ink printing press, lithographic equipments, electronic computers etc. this they (the government) could do through the addition of subsidy to the cost of printing materials or the reduction of the import duties being charged on them.
2. To train investigative journalists who will carry diligent investigations into criminal elements in the society and expose them before they hatch their crimes. Also, give award to best investigative crime reporter of the year by the Nigerian Press Council.
3. Intensive efforts should be made by the media houses to ensure that they reports up-to-date news on terrorism, banditry, kidnapping, oil theft and other heinous crimes in Nigeria.

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