

We Still Have a Sense of Responsibility: An analysis of Newspapers' Coverage of Boko Haram Abduction of School Girls in Chibok, Borno State

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Abstract

The mass abduction of school girls in Chibok, Borno State is perhaps the worst in the nation's security history after the Nigeria- Biafra civil war, and has consequently attracted global condemnation and domestic concerns in the media. No doubt, how the print medium, (Nigerian newspapers), which are caught between sensationalizing stories to boost sales and informing the people objectively, reported the abduction of over 200 girls in Government Secondary school in Chibok, Borno State prompted this research. Four newspapers were purposively selected for this study viz: *Vanguard*, *The Nation*, *The Guardian* and *The Sun*. Content analysis research method was used. The 120 publications of the four selected dailies between April 15 and May 14, 2014 (30 days) formed the population of the research. Four research questions were raised and findings revealed that Nigerian press gave the abduction story sufficient coverage in their reportage of the abduction. It was concluded that the Nigerian press fared well in the performance of their social responsibility functions given the level of prominence, balance and favourable coverage of the abduction story. It was recommended that the press should continue to ensure balanced and non-sensational reportage, particularly on issues of terrorism, kidnappings and similar criminal activities.

Keywords: *.Boko Haram .Mass Abduction .Chibok .Acts of Terror .Reportage*

INTRODUCTION

For over six years, Boko Haram terrorists have continued a reign of terror on Nigeria. Initially, it was seen as an Islamic group that sought to promote religious and political agenda. Today, the agenda of the deadly terrorist sect remains largely unknown, as Boko Haram has launched deadly attacks on Churches, Mosques, government establishments, security agencies; killing both Christians and Muslims alike. In Nigeria, peace and security have continued to be threatened by ethnic divides and sentiments as well as religious intolerance.

There is no doubt that Nigerian's plural nature contributes to the country's deepening ethno-religious contradictions. This plural nature creates a constant feeling of distrust between the component units and the fear of one ethnic or religious group dominating the other is rife. Adebayo (2011, p.58) notes that, "the unity of Nigeria will continue to elude us because of the variance in religious belief and ethnic divide".

Ethnic and religious issues are part of the most recurring issues in Nigeria. The issues have permeated the landscape since the colonial period and up till the present time when Boko Haram seems to have made issues worse.

Institutional efforts made to satiate these tendencies since 1960 have seen to be inadequate. The long years of military rule increased the gap of distrust as the elite deliberately employed state power to pursue primordial sentiments, thereby increasing the gap and intolerance in Nigeria. This may have prompted Ebiye (2009,p.22) to state that the current political cum religious battles are fuelled by certain quarters and

individuals who benefit at the expense of the state and citizens. According to the International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (2001,p.23), "numerous actors have a stake in the promotion of ethno-religious conflicts because the associated arithmetic of numbers underpinning the conflicts translates into jobs, contracts, the creation of local governments and states as well as representation in the National Assembly".

The emergence of Boko Haram (*Jama' atu Ahlis Sunna Lidda' awati wal-Jihad*) meaning western education is sin has added another dangerous dimension to the already threatened unity, peace and stability of Nigeria. So far, the sect has coordinated various attacks against government institutions, security agencies, the media and Christians. Today, their major target is the church. This prompted Efe (2012, p.4) to aver that Boko Haram is a war against Christians, not education as the sect has always claimed.

However, the current security challenge in the country orchestrated by Boko Haram sect, has made the surveillance function of the media more paramount to the contemporary society, as well as Nigerians. The mass media can play an effective role in bringing the insurgencies to the fore through adequate coverage. The surveillance function of the media must be effectively played, to warn people of an impending danger.

Statement of the Research Problem

Studies have shown that through adequate, balanced and objective reportage, audiences are better informed, enlightened and most importantly aware of global trends of terror. The abduction of over 200 girls in Government Secondary school Chibok, Borno State has attracted global condemnation and domestic worries. However, how the print medium (Nigerian newspapers) which are caught between sensationalizing stories to boost sales and informing the people objectively plays this role, is a matter of concern.

Newspapers have faced mounting criticisms as a result of their coverage of crisis and terrorism. Part of the problem is that newspapers want to make their stories attractive, and sensational. At the same time, they face the ethical demands of accurate, fair and balanced reporting. Creating a balance between these two demands has not been easy. This is in addition to other pressures such as profit motive, moral questions, ownership, threat to life and personal conviction about ethical reporting. The pattern of coverage given by Nigerian newspapers in the midst of the current Boko Haram's mass abduction of over 200 girls in Government Secondary school in Chibok, Borno State on April 14, 2014 has raised so many questions in the communication circle, thereby prompting this research.

Research Questions

The following research questions guided the study.

- (a) What volume of space was allocated to stories on Boko Haram's abduction of 234 girls from Government Secondary School Chibok, Borno State?
- (b) What was the level of prominence given to stories on Boko Haram's abduction of these girls?
- (c) To what extent did the newspapers adopt the use of pictures in their reportage of Boko Haram's mass abduction of secondary school girls in Chibok, Borno State within the study period?
- (d) Were the newspapers sensational in their interpretation of stories on Boko Haram's mass abduction of secondary school girls in Chibok, Borno State within the period of study?

Research Hypotheses

Hypothesis One

Ho: The Boko Haram's mass abduction of Secondary school girls in Chibok, Borno State in Nigeria were not adequately reported by Nigerian newspapers within the study period.

Hypothesis Two

Ho: The Boko Haram's mass abduction of secondary school girls in Chibok, Borno State was not given prominence by the Nigerian newspapers in their reportage within the study period.

Hypothesis Three

Ho: Newspapers did not make adequate use of pictures in their reportage of Boko Haram's mass abduction of secondary school girls in Chibok, Borno State within the study period?

Scope of the Study

The researchers restricted the study to national dailies of *Vanguard*, *The Nation*, *The Guardian* and *The Sun Newspapers*. The study covered a period of one month (30 days). It runs from 15th April 2014 to 14th May 2014.

Literature Review

Terrorism, Crimes and Violence Coverage by the Nigerian Mass Media

The state of insecurity in Nigeria today is such that it is not an overstatement to conclude that the Nigeria nation is under siege. And while the urban centres are more prone to crimes, neither the urban, the sub-urban nor the rural is immune to civil, ethnic, political and religious violence which, in the last decade or so, has plagued Nigeria and currently threaten to tear communities and ethnic groups apart.

The current spate of crime and violence in Nigeria dated back to the end of the Nigeria civil war when arms began to filter into unauthorized hands. The situation was exacerbated by prolonged military interregnum, its brute force and the violence that characterized it. The sacredness with which human life used to be held was soon thrown to the dogs. The situation was further compounded by Nigerian media's romance with foreign films which were generously laced with crime, violence and sex. The Nigeria home video, currently in vogue, is not better either in that it thrives on similar themes-crime, violence and sex.

Apart from widespread availability of untracked arms, crime and violence in the media, other causes of crime and violence include non-compulsory basic education (UBE is made compulsory only on paper), widespread poverty (with Nigeria ranking 13th last poorest of the poor nations on earth), lack of social security for the aged and the unemployed, child abuse, wife battering, disintegration of the nuclear and kinship family networks, gender insensitivity, availability of drugs and unprecedented widespread availability of alcohol which either comes raw as "ogogoro", "mmanyi-oku or kaikai", or disguised with herbs and called "inene or achicha" (icha-anyanya) or "oyibo-eze" (for the spinal cord), offered for cure for all ailments under the sun! drivers, touts, miscreant and armed robbers buy such drugs and alcohol and take them even when they do not have either money or time to eat food.

Crime and violence make news reports juicy; they are sensational, dramatic, and a times, colourful. Since media owners are in business to make profit, and since crime and violence sell newspapers and programmed ratings to soar, no media operators are likely to spew out a juicy rape, bank robbery, murder or a monumental fraud. To that extent, crime and violence are not only attractive but they are also tempting to media operators. Crime and violence enjoy lavish space and time for some other reasons; they are ridiculously easy to cover. An unadventurous reporter may choose to silt art a police

desk, monitor police radio, while occasionally telephoning smaller police stations in the community to check for new developments. At the approach of the deadline, the reporter calls the newsroom to dictate any newsworthy occurrence for the day.

This approach to the coverage of crime and violence is deficient in many ways. Here, because the reporter works hand in glove with the police, crime reporting, according to Sandman, Rubin and Sachsman (1976, p.412), almost invariably favour the official viewpoint. Since the reporter is unlikely to meet face-to-face with the accused, the suspect's protestations of innocence or accusation of police brutality often go unreported. The reporter is also denied the knowledge of underlying causes of crime or the motives for a particular crime. He is also most likely to fail to critically examine the fact that many criminal acts today are a reflection of social unrest... or political repression, of joblessness, and systematic exclusion from "the good life". Such factors are adequately covered by the media.

The focus on the bizarre, the dramatic, as well as dependence on police sources often leads to disproportionate emphasis being placed on arrests rather than on trials. News of arrests and convictions are dramatic and one-off, news of trials, on the other hand, is more demanding on the reporter and is only of interest to the audience if the trial is juicy and of critical significance to them. Thus, a suspect's acquittal or dropped charges are hardly newsworthy and often go unreported.

The use of police or court officials is also faulted for another reason: it often leads to de-contextualized reporting, one in which the reporter denies the audience the necessary background to put the story in context. The reporter is likely to fail to ask: Was it (the crime) the act of an isolated offender or was it part of an organized effort citizens should be aware of? Are there social or community pressures in play? How many such incidents have there been, and to what effect? What should readers be aware of? What can each of us do? (*Newswatch* March 1999).

In making a case for the symbiosis between religion and crisis, Hector (2005) argues that the mere fact that religions claim divine favour for themselves, over and against other groups, this sense of righteousness leads to violence (crisis) because conflicting claims to superiority, based on unverifiable appeals to God, cannot be adjudicated objectively.

But one fact that cannot be argued is the tremendous harm that religions do to the society. The religious leaders have continued to use violence to promote their goals.

However, the rhetorical question posed by Nwangwu (2000) "did God mandate these folks to kill in His name? Or, are some religions truly the opium of the masses; and, if I may say, the narcotic of the elite"?

Over the years, religion has remained a core, largely divisive part of the ethnic and political structures in Nigeria. The Bible and Quran have turned the means of playing the divide and conquer strategy in the geopolitics of Nigeria.

The activities of Boko Haram became more worrisome when on December 24, 2010 the sect stormed some churches including the victory Baptist church at Dala-Alamderi and shot to death the resident Pastor, Rev. Bulus Marwa, *The Sun* (2011, p.11). The rampaging gunmen also set the Church of Christ in Nigeria (COCIN) in Ruwan Sati ablaze.

Theoretical Framework

The first theory upon which this research is anchored is the **Agenda Setting Theory**.

The Agenda Setting Theory helps in the understanding of the effects of mass media content on individuals particularly target audience. This theory explains the effect of the media on culture and society. It describes the powerful influence which the media can have in determining not only the issues that members of the society talk about, but also how they talk about them. The media can place pictures in their minds Okenwa (2000).

From the pronouncement of this theory, one can easily establish its relationship with the study at hand. The way and manner Nigerian newspapers covered the Boko Haram

insurgence in the North, particularly the abduction of over 200 girls from Government Secondary School in Chibok, Borno State is a direct consequence of their attempt to perform this role. The import of this theory is brought to the fore with the global attention and domestic concerns about the abduction of the school girls. No doubt, Newspapers reportage sets agenda for the reading audiences.

Another theory that explains the situation at hand is the *Framing theory*. The Framing Theory says that the way media people frame words in their reportage impacts on public understanding of the issue and consequently determine their responses. According to scholars, some journalistic framing of issues affect public perception. The use of words or phrases like; genocide, ethnic cleansing, humiliate, worst terrorist attack, bombardment, shelling etc, have some effect in the line of communication (Umeh 2010). The theory suits this study appropriately. The way newspaper readers see acts of terrorism is largely dependent on the choice of words by the publishing newspaper houses.

Methodology

Content analysis research method was used to evaluate newspapers' coverage of the Boko Haram mass abduction of secondary school girls in Chibok, Borno State.

In all, the systematic technique of content analysis will paint a vivid, insightful, clear and graphical picture into the newspapers' reportage of the Boko Haram mass abduction of secondary school girls in Chibok, Borno State.

A code sheet was designed specifically for the study. The researchers also recruited the assistance of three other independent coders who used the coding instructions to code the manifest contents for the study. This was to establish the reliability of the collected data through inter-coder reliability test.

Population of the Study

The population of the study encompasses the cumulative summation of all the national dailies published in Nigeria between April 15, 2014 - May 14, 2014 (30 days or one month). The period encompasses the heat of newspapers' reportage Boko Haram mass abduction of over 200 secondary school girls in Chibok, Borno State, just as the abducted girls are still in their captivity. However, in consonance with the selected dailies (*Vanguard*, *The Guardian*, *The Nation* and *The Sun*), the population of the research is 120. Within the study period, each daily published 30 editions totaling 120 editions for the one-month study period. Therefore, the cumulative editions of 120 publications were used as the study population. The researchers decided to study the entire population since the population size is not too large. By implication, the sample size is 120.

Units of Analysis/Content Categories

The units of analysis of this study are: News, Editorial, Feature, Cartoon, Letters to the Editor /Opinion Articles and Pictorial Illustrations.

In this research, the elements used in the analysis have been content categorized into: Placement, Volume, Direction, Balance and Sensationalism.

Data Analysis and Results

Table I: Units of Analysis

Newspapers	News	Editorial	Feature	Cartoon	Letters/Opinion	Pictorial illustrations	Total	%
<i>Vanguard</i>	42	2	9	6	26	36	121	16.4
<i>The Guardian</i>	71	1	22	4	33	65	196	26.6
<i>The Nation</i>	83	2	13	8	41	79	226	30.7
<i>The Sun</i>	68	1	16	4	39	66	194	26.3
Total	264	6	60	22	139	246	737	100

Percentage of agreement among the three coders: 90.94%

Research data coded as presented in Table I shows that a total of 737 data units as it relates to Boko Haram's mass abduction of over 200 secondary school girls in Chibok, Borno State were published by the four selected newspapers within the study period. *Vanguard* published a total of 121 data units on Boko Haram's mass abduction of over 200 secondary school girls in Chibok, Borno State -based issues; *The Guardian Newspaper* published 196 data units; *The Nation* published 226 data units while *The Sun Newspaper* published 194 data units.

Of the 121 data units published by *Vanguard Newspaper*, 42 were news stories; 2 were editorials; 9 were feature stories; 6 cartoons; 26 were opinion articles, while 36 pictorial illustrations were used. *The Guardian Newspaper* published a total of 196 data units in all. From this statistics, 71 issues were news stories; 1 was editorial; 22 were feature stories; 4 were cartoons, 33 were opinionated articles, while 65 pictorial illustrations were used. Of the 226 data units published by *The Nation Newspaper*, 83 issues were news stories based; 2 were editorials; 13 were feature stories; 8 were cartoons, 41 were opinion articles, while 79 pictorial illustrations were used. For *The Sun Newspaper*, total 194 data units were published. From this statistics, 68 issues were on news stories, 1 editorial issue; 16 features stories; 4 cartoons and 39 opinion articles and 66 pictorial illustrations.

In all, there were a total of 264 news stories, 6 editorials, 60 feature stories, 22 cartoons and 139 opinionated articles and 246 pictorial illustrations used in buttressing the issues published on mass abduction of the Chibok secondary school girls within the study period.

Table II Placement of News Stories

Newspapers	Front page	Inside page	Back page	Total
<i>Vanguard</i>	22	17	3	42
<i>The Guardian</i>	34	30	7	71
<i>The Nation</i>	51	22	10	83
<i>The Sun</i>	41	19	8	68
Total	148	95	21	264
Percentage %	56.1	36	7.9	100

Percentage of agreement among the three coders: 96.30%

Table II above shows that the four selected newspapers published a total of 264 news stories on the mass abduction of the Chibok secondary school girls within the study period. Out of the total publications, *Vanguard Newspaper* published forty-two (42) news stories; *The Guardian* published Seventy-one (71) news stories. *The Nation Newspaper* published a total of eighty three (83), while *The Sun Newspaper* published a total of sixty eight (68) news stories. Further, out of the 42 news stories published by *Vanguard Newspaper*, 22 were published on the front pages, 17 were published in the inside pages, while the back pages carried 3 news stories on the mass abduction of the Chibok secondary school girls between April 15 and May 14, 2014 (Study period).

Out of the 71 news stories published by *The Guardian Newspaper*, 34 were published on the front pages, 30 were published in the inside pages, while 7 were published on the back pages. More so, a breakdown of the 83 news stories published by *The Nation Newspaper* revealed that the front pages carried 51 news stories, the inside pages carried 22 news stories while the back pages carried 10 news stories. From the 68 news stories published by *The Sun Newspaper*, the front pages have 41, the inside pages have 19 stories while the back pages had 8 news story on the mass abduction of the Chibok secondary school girls -based news stories.

In all of these, 148 or 56.1% of the news stories were published in the front pages of these Dailies, 95 or 36% of the stories were place inside the pages, while 21 representing 7.9% were placed at the back pages.

Table III: Volume of News-Adequacy

Newspapers	0"-15"	16"-30"	31"	Total
<i>Vanguard</i>	2	9	31	42
<i>The Guardian</i>	14	5	52	71
<i>The Nation</i>	21	6	56	83
<i>The Sun</i>	14	4	50	68
Total	51	24	189	264
Percentage	19.3	9.1	71.6	100

Percentage of agreement among the three coders: 92.59%

The table above shows that 51 or 19.3% news stories published by the four selected newspapers as it relates to the mass abduction of the Chibok secondary school girls issues within the study period is between 0-15 inches, 24 or 9.1% are between 16-30 inches, while 189 or 71.6% are between 31 inches and above. A breakdown of the 42 stories published by *Vanguard* newspaper shows that 2 were between 0" and 15"; 9 were between 16"-30"; 31 of such stories were 31" in size and above. A breakdown of the 71 stories published by *Guardian* newspaper shows that 14 were between 0" and 15"; 5 were between 16"-30"; 52 of such stories were 31" in size and above. A breakdown of the 68 stories published by *The Sun* newspaper shows that 14 were between 0" and 15"; 4 were between 16"-30"; 50 of such stories were 31" in size and above. Therefore, it can be inferred that a sizeable volume was given to the Boko Haram's mass abduction of over 200 Secondary school girls based news stories.

Table IV: Placement of pictorial Illustrations

Newspapers	Front page	Inside page	Back page	Total
<i>Vanguard</i>	14	19	3	36
<i>The Guardian</i>	50	15	0	65
<i>The Nation</i>	49	27	3	79
<i>The Sun</i>	43	17	6	66
Total	156	78	12	246
Percentage	63.4	31.7	4.9	100

Percentage of agreement among the three coders: 97.96%

Presentation of data in the above table shows that, from a total of 246 pictorial illustrations as it relates to the mass abduction of the Chibok secondary school girls were published by the four selected newspapers, *Vanguard* placed 14 of such pictures in the front pages, 19 were placed inside pages, while 3 were placed on the back pages. *The Guardian* placed 50 on the front pages of their publications, 15 pictures were placed on the inside pages and none was placed on the back pages. *The Nation* placed 49 on the front pages of their publications, 27 were positioned on the inside pages, while 3 were placed on the back pages. Also, *The Sun* published 43 and 17 on the inside and back pages respectively, while 6 were placed on the back pages of their publication.

Research data point to the fact that 156 or 63.4% of the pictures were strategically positioned on the front pages of the publications for possible attention grabbing and attraction to the stories, 78 or 31.7% of the illustrations on the mass abduction of the Chibok secondary school girls issues were placed inside the pages of their publication. But 12 or 4.9% of such illustrations were placed at the back pages.

Testing of Hypotheses

All the four hypothetical statements were tested using chi-square statistical tool.

Test result for hypothesis one: Since the calculated value (15.0518) is greater than the critical value (12.592), the research hypothesis was accepted. It therefore means that newspapers used sufficient space in their publications of the Boko Haram's mass

abduction of Secondary school girls in Chibok, Borno State within the study period. The research hypothesis received statistical support of the data collected as used for the test.

Test result for hypothesis two: Since the calculated value (12.861) is greater than the critical value (12.592), the research hypothesis was accepted. It therefore means that Newspapers gave prominence to stories on the Boko Haram's mass abduction saga within the study period.

Test result for hypothesis three: Since the calculated value (19.4692) is greater than the critical value (12.592), the research hypothesis was accepted. It therefore means that Nigerian dailies sufficiently used pictures in the reportage of the Boko Haram's mass abduction of over 200 Secondary school girls in Chibok, Borno State within the study period.

Test result for hypothesis four: Since the calculated value (15.0518) is greater than the critical value (7.815), the research hypothesis was accepted. It therefore means that Newspaper publishers were not sensational in their report of the Boko Haram's mass abduction of over 200 Secondary school girls in Chibok, Borno State within the period of study.

Summary of Findings

Key findings of this study are hereunder summarized.

1. Evidence from the statistical analysis showed that Nigerian press gave sufficient space to the Boko Haram's mass abduction of over 200 secondary school girls in Chibok, Borno State between April 15 and May 14, 2014.
2. It was found that prominence was given to the Boko Haram's mass abduction stories within the study period. Hence, the international sympathy and domestic concerns attracted by the abduction.
3. Evidence in the research data proved that newspaper publishers of the Boko Haram's mass abduction of over 200 secondary school girls in Chibok, Borno State were to a great extent balanced in their reportage. There was fairness in the reportage of all related issues.
4. Newspapers indeed used pictures effectively in their reportage of the Boko Haram's mass abduction of the over 200 school girls in Chibok, Borno State. These, the researchers believe helped in arresting attention, sustenance of the interest of the reading publics, as well as promotion of believability during the study period.

Conclusion

It was reasonably concluded that the Nigerian press has fared well in its social responsibility functions, based on the prominence, balanced and favourable coverage given to the Boko Haram's mass abduction of over 200 secondary school girls in Chibok, Borno State within the study period.

Recommendations

The following recommendations were made.

1. The press must be seen to be responsible at all times most especially in burning national issues. The Nigerian press must continue to understand that it owes everybody the duty to be socially responsible at all times. In this regard, they should continue to be balanced and non-sensational in their reportage, particularly on acts of terror, kidnappings and wickedness of Boko Haram insurgents.
2. The researchers advocate for observance of conventional photojournalistic ethical standards by Nigerian newspapers. This is premised on the statistical revelation of picture usage by the newspapers. The idea of using photographs in their raw forms offends ethical standards.
3. Also, it is highly recommended that the mass media, especially, the print, should go beyond mere reportage of such insurgencies through news stories. They must

understand their co-relational function and must therefore delve into analysis and consequences of Boko Haram onslaught against the Nigerian state, particularly the vulnerable school girls in the North through the effective use of editorial piece.

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