

Nigeria in the Eye of the Foreign Media: X-Raying CNN and Al-Jazeera's Reportage of Insecurity in Nigeria

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Abstract

One of the contentious issues in international communication is the claim of negative reportage of the third world countries by the media of the developed worlds. Following this accusation, many scholars tried to proffer solutions to the problem without success. In this paper, we tried to examine how CNN and Aljazeera, the two leading cable networks in the world, report issues concerning Nigeria. To do this, the researchers analyzed the news contents of these stations for the month of May 2014 and came to the conclusion that only the bizarre were reported - Boko Harm attacks, kidnap of Chibok girls, corruption and ineptitude in government, etc. After a critical analysis, the researchers came to the conclusion that as long as leaders continue to do what is negative, the foreign media including the two studied, will continue to report us negatively. The paper is of the view that Nigeria is a brand that suffers from many brand negators such as political violence, armed robbery and the likes and therefore posits that to make the Nigerian brand work, these brand negators must be identified and addressed.

Keywords: *.International Communication .Diplomacy .News Reporting
.Globalization .Insecurity*

Introduction

International communication and diplomacy is now a big deal than it ever has been (Gudykunst, & Mody, 2002, p. 15). Perhaps, few decades ago, before the advent of the internet, international communication and diplomacy might not have aroused such great interest as to be subject of a great debate globally. However, countries can no longer hide away, tucked safely in a corner of the world, without the satellite of international media beaming on them, scratching off protection and safety for a new scoop that my project their media as truly international and touching every aspect of reality.

International communication is more essential than it has ever been in the past, (Hachten & Hachten, 1999, p. 2). In fact, it is a top priority for every country consequent upon the fact that a country cannot exist in isolation if it ever wants to prosper. Countries are interconnected like body cells in a lot of ways, an almost all the time, one cannot do without the other. In this respect, the relationship is often a symbiotic one. However, the disparity between developed and developing countries often sends developing countries out of their way in their bid to establish friendship and develop relationship with the developed countries.

Nowadays, the study of international communication is apt and countries, especially developing countries, are investing in foreign relations hugely, often compromising on the foundation of diplomacy. Accordingly, the role of the media is recognized by diplomats who use it to further their country's cause and reputation whenever possible. Let's examine the contextual meaning of international communication and perhaps why it is pertinent for countries to interact and relate on the global scene.

International communication is known by other names such as global communication or transnational communication. According to Wikipedia (2014), it is the communication practice that occurs across international borders. As pointed out in the abstract, the need for international communication was due to the increasing effects and influences of globalization on the world largely sponsored and championed by the new media. International communication concerns not just government relations but people to people relations and business to business relations on a global scale. It is pertinent to note here that every country needs international communication to survive; allegiances must be paid to boost economy and other pivotal sectors of the state. This is where diplomacy in international communication comes in.

International communication encompasses political, economic, social, cultural, and military concerns of nations. It embodies very important element and/or factor essential to a state's growth and development. One of the most important tools used in achieving international relations with neighboring countries is that of diplomacy and subtle propaganda. Bilateral trade agreements have been signed as a result of this. The supposition here is that countries must continue interacting with each other so as to survive in their respective economies.

Capturing the Scene

It is a popular assumption usually that foreign media report developing countries unfairly and with that, there is an imbalance of news. According to Udeze (2005, p 10), third world leaders saw as unacceptable a situation where the West determines what we see, hear and by extension our mode of life. They further argued that much of the stories about developing countries carried in foreign media are those of earthquakes, famines, civil wars and so on, (Udeze, 2005, p 11). It was then that a New World Communication Order was sought and this was aided by the UNESCO when it set up the MacBride Communication in 1976.

Disclosure from Wikipedia says that since the cold war officially ended in 1990, the intense relations of super powers halted with the collapse of the Soviet Union. More importantly, when international communications stepped into the information age, the convergence of telecommunications and computing and the ability to move all types of data-pictures, words, sounds-via the internet revolutionized international information exchange. Usually, as established earlier, news reports are one click away.

Recently, with the era of convergence, news about Nigeria is everywhere. Foreign media appear to have, in turn, developed interest in developing countries as long as the stories mostly depict them as dependent, backwards and in need of foreign aids, (Barratt, 1977). Minus the fact that Amnesty International has rated Nigeria among the top terrorist nations in the world, the now labeled terrorist group, Boko Haram, has remained a much talked about phenomenon especially in the foreign media. No thanks to Boko Haram and their kidnap of the Chibok girls, every child from Washington to Ibadan, London to Abuja has Nigeria on his/her lips. The international and local media are awash with the "bring back our girls" campaign.

With recent happening in the Nigerian polity, the country has been a source of news interest to foreign media as they continue to pry on scoops from both citizen journalists and their correspondents assigned to cover the Nigeria beat. The fact now is that Nigeria is on the frontline of international news; how this recent development impacts on its relations with nations will only be determined by the content and context of news stories and/or reports being carried about the nation.

With Nigeria equipped with its own type of media, the question is, what is being done now to salvage the growing spate of unfavorable reports about the country in foreign media? Currently, everywhere in foreign media, it appears the only news that sells about Nigeria has to be with or has everything to do with the Boko Haram sect or the state of insecurity in Nigeria and the inactivity of our government to manage and contain the issues.

International Communication from the Nigerian Perspective

In a wireless world, where gate keeping is becoming as old as time, countries are investing greater efforts in managing their international image and reputation. According to Ate & Talabi (2012), countries are fervently engaged in bridging the digital gulf as it is said, whatever is

online stays online. Marshal McLuhan has in 1964 predicted a global village wired by technology where the globe will become one village where everyone knows each and nothing is circumspect.

International communication from the Nigeria perspective is not an arm chair activity but a concerted effort which gulps millions of naira annually from the Nigeria government. For instance, Nigeria's relation with the United States of America has produced lot of dividends. As soon as the United States lifted the embargo of sanction it placed on Nigeria based on the nullification of the June 12,1993 general elections, the United States has come out to say that, "investing in people is the top U.S foreign assistance priority to Nigeria....and with this the prospect of mutual cooperation is very decisive...." (Wikipedia, 2014). The mutual cooperation mentioned here entails a great deal of good international communication and diplomacy, (Tehrani, 2007). As with all 'super-powers', the United States may decide to withdraw its 'assistance' from Nigeria once mutual cooperation proves indecisive or unattainable. The onus, therefore, lies on the Nigerian government to maintain this relationship and as a growing economy to, through international communication and diplomacy, seek linkages and partnership with more nations of the world on the basis of mutual cooperation.

International communication from the Nigerian perspective seems to be must work-out. It is no surprise then that the Nigerian government frequently worries about the country's image abroad. Gaining favourable sentiments from other nations is of utmost importance to the Nigeria nation as this may serve as a boost to the economy.

However, policy makers in the country always seem to perceive good international relations as giving press conferences, or engaging in public relations propaganda by telling the world all is well when it's not. Unfortunately, with the advent of the new media, nothing is hidden anymore and this is why it appears Nigeria is on the news everywhere in the foreign media. Subsequently, with the development of globalization, nothing can be hidden anyway especially not when it has to do with country-to-country relations.

In the face of the multifaceted challenges facing the country, Nigeria appears in need of foreign investors that will complement, improve or boost local production and output. Any image or credibility globally may scar the nation and scare off potential investors. Indeed, international communication is a very important aspect of Nigeria's national life and the country's leaders take it as a primary assignment to earn favourable reputation with the outside world.

The Nigerian State and Foreign Media

As result of the importance the Nigeria government places on international communication, it has elected to vote over 300million naira to 'fight' foreign media in what authorities term recent 'propaganda' of the foreign media about Nigeria, (Premium Times, 2014). Another state official calls it negative publicity on Nigeria in the foreign media and revealed that the government is ready to wage the war as according to the Minister of Information, Labaran Maku, it was to enable the country respond to the negative publicity about the country in the foreign media.

Nigeria has recently come under fire from the foreign media for its perceived inability to curb the activities of the acclaimed terrorist sect, Boko Haram. Currently, it is bad news at home and abroad, (Udeze, 2005, p. 73), as the Nigeria local media also glamorizes the activities of the terrorist sect in their front-page news reporting about these activities.

The Nigeria state and foreign media will not really be said to have had a symbiotic relationship whether now or in the past. For instance, these events gave rise to the New World Information and Communication Order debate. It appears that stories from Nigeria have to be bad, sensational or obscene to find its way into foreign media content. There is rather very little literature exploring the existing or non-existing relationship between the Nigeria nation and the foreign media.

It was in a bid to have a global voice for itself that some top Nigeria media have gone international in an attempt to "....tell our story with our own voice". What is rather puzzling about the foreign press is whether they ever cared to tell the Nigerian story by employing the Nigeria angle, investigating and hearing from owners of the story and not just reporting on the face value for largely western audience who are forever hungry and eager for more lurid stories.

Critics of foreign media's depiction of Nigeria have faulted the press over there getting and exploring just one angle of the story without bothering for balance. Primarily, the basic plea of these critics is for a balance reporting. According to them, it shouldn't always be bad news from Nigeria. Purposefully, for the foreign media to lay claims to balanced reporting of Nigeria is for them to also report our good aspects, our tourism attraction and the strides our government is making; not just to hold the axe high on Nigeria, ready to cut open whenever a bad news crops up.

The downside of this depiction of Nigeria by the foreign media is that, if it is bad and it is happening in Nigeria, then 'the government is not capable, the nation is in need of foreign help' but if it is bad and it is happening in the West, 'the government is capable and is swinging into action.' Unfortunately, this picture which may not be palatable to such patriots appears to be reality. In most instances, the government spokespersons tend to put their mouths in motion before the brains are geared. Hence for every situation, the problem lingers on after one government spokesperson or the other has come out to proclaim to the world that "we are on top of the situation".

Under-reporting, Over-reporting or Misrepresentation: The Nigeria Case with the Foreign Media

The three focal points in this sub-theme can be argued depending on individual's stand and conviction. Is Nigeria being under-reported abroad? Perhaps, and this will be so when one chooses to make a case for the fact that foreign content about Nigeria is not balanced and is often one-sided to suit the house style of individual foreign media organizations. Being under-reported here could mean, Nigeria not being covered in all its regards and then an aspect is harped upon at the expense of other aspects. In this case, Nigeria can be said to under-reported by the foreign media.

In making a case for over-reporting, one may chooses to come from the angle of over-flogging of issues of which all media are guilty especially when the agenda is bad news. For instance, the case of the Chibok girls has been in the foreign media for so long, as they continue to harp on and glamorize the issue, calling the Nigeria government incapable of quelling the violence. One of the most obvious manifestations of over-reporting of developing nations like Nigeria could also stem from a one-sided perception and angle to a story which is pursued vigorously, often developing in new creative twists to suit the house style of individual foreign media houses. This is true with the vultures reporting model of Udeze & Nwosu, which argues that as long as the carcass remains, the vultures will continue to circle and feed on it. When it is finished, they will disappear and continue to search for a new corpse (event) to feed on.

Subsequently, in misrepresentation, one may make a case for the propaganda tools of misinformation and/or disinformation which is usually hinged on a deliberate intent to misrepresent. With misrepresentation, foreign media may get all angle of a story but still choose to tell it the way it suits them with an attempt made for it to serve their purpose.

Whether the case is that of under-reporting, over-reporting or misrepresentation, it spells a deliberate case of imbalance in global data transfer which can injure the reputation of a less powerful country in the eye of its global partners and even contemporaries. It is more like cultural imperialism, where a more powerful culture subtly or forcefully imposes its ways, norms and values on a less visible culture with an aim to subjugate and rule.

The Third Worlds have Erred: Raising Justifications for Nigeria's Crucifixion

To a large extent that we most times try to drown out with sentiments, the third world has indeed erred and pessimists may like to believe we deserve exactly what we are getting. Sometimes, to have good press is to have good governance. Just like Udeze (2005, p. 105) highlighted, good governance creates enabling environment for peace and stability. According to him, third world leaders and people should avoid doing negative things in order not to incur negative press upon themselves. This position was re-echoed by a U.S Senator in August 2014 in a meeting between the United States President, Barack Obama and 50 African Heads of State. The Senator had pointedly told the African leaders that they are the cause of poverty, disease and crime in Africa because money coming from international donors to address these challenges is, most often than not, hijacked for personal and selfish use of the rulers.

However, in a country like Nigeria where corruption appears to be ripe and impunity given opportunity to thrive, negative press may continue to be the order of the day if nothing is done quickly to nip corruption in the bud. According to Islam (2002, P. 5), the media report with a purpose - a reason and often times, something - a happening or an event, provides this purpose and reason that the media need to report. The media have a right to tell and report things as it is without colourings and prejudice. Therefore, when the third worlds appear not to be meeting up to standards, however bad, it is the media's duty to report and their right to tell, (Islam, 2002, P 5).

Justifiably therefore, when Nigeria is not doing well, or considered insecure by other countries, it is the right of the foreign media to report this without prejudice. In essence, why blame the media when news events and facts can speak for themselves? It is needless, therefore, to totally crucify the foreign media and exonerate Nigeria and other developing countries especially when the right things have not been done.

Sobowale (1987) describes the state of affairs in Nigeria when he said the media of any country is the mirror of that country. Put simply, when there are unpardonable inefficiencies in local media, the foreign media will then do the job of reporting local affairs perhaps, with a stilt to suit their own house-style and pattern for news judgment. Hawk (1992, P. 3) implored the African media to sit up in their responsibility of being agents of change and development than allowing news room's corruption rip them apart. In talking about the *African Media Image*, Hawk stresses integrated efforts in telling the African story, the African way. In a nutshell, Nigeria should not be expected to be reported in the good light when it has not done some of the fundamental things essential to be seen as a viable democracy. Therefore, it appears necessary the regular checks and balances form the foreign media.

Nigeria in the Eye of CNN and Al-Jazeera: The Bizarre is the News

The Cable News Network (CNN) owned by Ted Turner and Al-Jazeera, the Doha Qatar broadcasting station, report on the Nigerian belt. Some of these reports they carry run deeper than straight hard news to in-depth live commentaries and documentaries about the situation or perceived situation of things in Nigeria. Recently on the Chibok story, these media even run advocacies that carry hash tags with "bring back our girls". The CNN and Al-Jazeera news network being internationally reputed are often perceived as flawless in their news and facts presentation. Often times, if it comes from CNN or Al-Jazeera, then it appears to be a writ, a sacred writ.

However, some of the reports carried by these media of recent may be damaging to Nigeria's image abroad regardless of the truthfulness of the facts and the innocence of the intention. In the face of Nigeria's ongoing efforts at building international relations, these reports may have shortchanged the nation in its bid at garnering international apathy and friendliness.

Let's examine some of these reports - only the major headlines.

Nigerians demand better government response to schoolgirl

CNN - by [Mariano Castillo](#)

(CNN) - Nigerians staging a daily protest in the capital said Saturday... The most recent Boko Haram attack killed at least 310 people in a town.

Book Haram: Why terror group kidnaps schoolgirls, and what...

CNN International - May 5, 2014

[Nigerians protest after girls' abduction](#)

KPRC Houston

[News report claims Nigerian military knew about kidnapping hours before...](#)

CNN. Com

Exclusive: Amnesty International stands by our claims, Nigeria's...

[Amnesty: Nigeria warned of Boko Haram raid at girls school, failed...](#)

CNN International - May 9, 2014

Abuja, Nigeria (CNN) – What did the Nigerian government know about the The most recent Boko Haram attack killed at least 310 people in a...

How Boko Haram imperils Nigeria's future

CNN-

(CNN) – I think of myself as an “impatient optimist.” There are times, however, when it’s harder to muster the optimism, and the impatience takes...

Can US apply lessons learned from War on Terror’ in Nigeria?

CNN – May 9, 2014

(CNN) The leadership of Boko Haram must think they have hit the ... Until recently I would have said the only surplus in that part of Nigeria.

Zain Asher on Nigeria kidnappings: Education is choice between life

CNN – May 9, 2014

(CNN) – As a Nigerian, and as somebody who has been blessed... kidnapped in April, 56 boys at a boarding school were also recently killed.

Book Haram attacks Nigerian village used by military in search for...

CNN – May 8, 2014

Abuja, Nigeria (CNN). Boko Haram launched a grisly attack in a Nigerian village in an area that troops had been using as a base in the.

Nigeria's government defends its actions as more girls are abducted

CNN – May 6, 2014

Abuja, Nigeria (CNN). Nigeria defended its response to the. In recent years, the group has stepped up its attacks, bombing schools, ...

'I will sell them,' Boko Haram leader says of kidnapped Nigerian girls

CNN – May 5, 2014

(CNN) Fears for the fate of more than 200 Nigerian girls turned even more. In recent years, Boko Haram has carried out dozens of attacks,

Playing dead allowed Houston man to survive Boko Haram

CNN

Houston, Texas (CNN). Ikenna Nzeribe was the sole survivor after assassins from Boko Haram stormed his Nigerian church in 2012, just 60...

Man plays dead, survives Boko Haram massacre

WJXT Jacksonville-May 9, 2014

Explore in depth (14 more articles)

Nigeria abductions: 6 reasons why the world should demand action

CNN – May 7, 2014

(CNN). One year ago this month, Boko Haram’s leader Abubakar Shekau... The kidnappings, he said, were retaliation for Nigerian security...

The above are just some of the news headlines about Nigeria from CNN recently. Let us check those from Al-Jazeera: the headline online...

Nigeria villagers kill Boko Haram fightersaljazeera.com – 12 hours ago

The AP news agency was told that at least 10 armed men were detained. It was not immediately...

Source: Al Jazeera and AP. Email Article.

Nigeria villagers kill dozens of suspected Boko Haram...

Al Jazeera America – 8 hours ago

Boko Haram Fighters Killed by Villagers in Nigeria

Nigeria – Al Jazeera – News

www.aljazeera.com/category/country/nigeria

video obtained by AFP news agency says girls will not be released until Boko Haram prisoners in Nigeria are freed. Africa Last updated: 12 May 2014 15:36...

Boko Haram – Al Jazeera – News

www.aljazeera.com/category/organisation/boko-haram

Boko Haram 'to sell' abducted schoolgirls. Armed group claims responsibility for kidnapping 276 girls in Nigeria and threatens to "sell them in the marketplace"

Al Jazeera / P.M. NEWS Nigeria

www.pmnewsnigeria.com/tag/al-jazeera/

The Nigerian government has slammed slanted and misleading media reports on the... Qatar-based Al-Jazeera news network's mobile service was hacked on...

Inside Story – Who are Nigeria's Boko Haram? *Aljazeera...

www.gidilounge.com/.../inside-story-who-are-nigerias-bokoharam-aljaz

Nov 8, 2011 - *Aljazeera News*.... TAGE: Africa, Aljazeera, and Anthony Goldman, Boko Haram, David Zounmenou, gidilounge video, inside story, institute for...

Al Jazeera English – YouTube

www.youtube.ng/user/AljazeeraEnglidh

At Al Jazeera English, we focus on people and events that affect people's lives. News Thumbnail... Missing girls parents abandoned' by Nigeria government.

Culture Shock Nigerians in America – (Video) Al Jazeera

Cultureshocknigerians.com News

Posted in News (Video) Al Jazeera Covers Joblessness in Nigeria... founder Omoyele Sowore recently appeared on Al Jazeera to discuss Nigeria's high...

In most of these headlines, there appears to be uniformity in the language of reporting. Through all the recent headlines, there seems to be not one 'good' story about Nigeria appearing anywhere. The language of news gave voice to Nigeria as needy and incapable of taking care of itself; a state in need of foreign intervention. The question now is, what potential friendly nation reading all these about Nigeria online will ever venture to cross its border and come in and invest?

The bad story trend did not just begin of recent, merely that the authors want to explore recent headlining of news about Nigeria in foreign media. It is always bad news about Nigeria and Nigerian government primarily because of the level of corruption prevalent in the nation. There are two, simply as ways the foreign media present the Nigerian state: one as needy and unorganized and two, simply as incapable of helping itself. Western pessimists may perhaps be asking themselves; "so Nigeria why in the world did you ever let your colonial masters go? You can't do this on your own!" As a result of negative depiction of Nigeria in the foreign media, Nigerians in diaspora no longer have faith in their own nationality.

Another trend is the one perpetrated by the Nigerian journalists themselves when they cull news stories about their country from foreign media. Is it not bizarre that a local television station will claim to have seen a news story first on CNN then adopts it as it is without questioning? The foreign media, we believe, should have been in the place of borrowing content and programming about Nigeria from the local media and not the other way round.

There is no disputing the fact that these reports in the foreign media are about Nigeria to a very large extent, however, what happens to the concept of news balance? Why is news about Nigeria in foreign media always lopsided? There is a need to beg for moderation and balance in reporting, it should not just be bad news all around with no sense of good teasers for at least the good developing stories.

Recommendations

Most often than not, it is usually a case of "You've had your history, let's have ours!" Nigeria is about 54 years since her independence and can in no way compare with the developed worlds. Her story is quite different; likewise her opportunities and her threats. Development is in strides and as it

popularly intoned, "Rome was not built in a day". Speculatively, this appears to be the fallback of developing countries like Nigeria. Inasmuch as it is true that Nigeria's kind of history may not unfold as that of the United States, the United Kingdom or any other developed country, the country should not completely rely on its young democracy as excuse for misbehavior and corruption. A man that still crawls at the age of 54 is either a cripple for life or a mischievous old fool. Neither of the two has any hope of things improving for him.

Nigeria's international image is currently in a shaky department and all hands must be on deck to ensure that the right communication, whether in newscasts or diplomatic relations, is passed across internationally at all times. Nigeria in the eye of foreign media is not looking very bright currently; in fact, it appears like a gorilla war zone that should scare off investors and potential friends, as seen in the few headlines from these two international media giants.

With the spate of happenings locally, the Nigerian government must not just pursue a favourable word of mouth image hinged upon propaganda but must swing into action and take back the loose reins of its polity by curbing the violence and illegalities taking place in the country. As a brand, Nigeria has so many brand negators that keep rubbishing her image. The best way forward is to deal a decisive blow on these negators which include bad governance, corruption, kidnapping, advance fee fraud, armed robbery, political violence and the newest of them all, religious violence and terrorism. Until these are addressed adequately by the Nigerian leadership, both international and local media will continue to be awash with negative stories about Nigeria thereby driving investors away. This no doubt, endangers development of any kind.

There may not be a total eradication of bad news abroad; however, efforts should be made to minimize bad news abroad as it is unhealthy for a developing economy like Nigeria.

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