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Mass media relevance in combating insecurity in Nigeria

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Abstract

This work examines the critical role of the mass media in combating the upsurge of crime which has led to a state of insecurity in the country, especially in the North, South Eastern and South Southern parts of the country. This discourse adopts the qualitative approach in appraising the correlation between the mass media and the insecurity in Nigeria with emphasis on practical measures relevant in this direction. The recommends that journalists should be trained regularly on terrorism and conflict reporting to always keep them abreast of modern techniques that could be used in ensuring effective use of the mass media in combating insecurity in Nigeria.

Keywords: Mass media, Insecurity, Terrorism, Conflict reporting

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1. Introduction

... there is not a crime, there is not a dodge, there is not a trick, there is not a swindle, there is not a vice which does not live by secrecy. Get all these things out in the open, describe them, ridicule them in the press and sooner or later, public opinion will sweep them away.

(Pulitzer, cited in Oloyede, 2011, p. 64)

Joseph Pulitzer the Hungarian-American newspaper publisher who established and endowed the Pulitzer prizes to honour excellence in journalism (and American literature, music and drama) understood very well the pertinence of the press in any society as a result of which he made the comment above used here as a prelude to this discourse. The press which here to refer to both print and electronic mass media, constitute a major pillar that shapes, nurtures and builds the society. The traditional roles of the mass media in any society which are to inform, educate and entertain are so crucial that societies can hardly progress meaningfully without these channels of mass communication.

This is apparently why the third President of the United States of America, Thomas Jefferson, while underscoring the importance of the press in the society in one of his speeches stated: “... Were it left for me to choose whether we should have a government without newspapers or newspapers without government, I shall not hesitate a moment to choose the latter” (cited in Mustapha and Abudulbaqui, 2012, p. 130). Similarly, President De-Gaulle of France once asked President John F. Kennedy of US; “How can you control your country if you do not control television?” (cited in Orhewere and Kur, 2004 p. 58). These assertions further underscore the pertinence of the mass media in any society. Governance in itself is communication based. The mass media facilitate the two-way communication process essential in bridging the gap between government and the governed, including the very essential role of ensuring that the basic values and tenets that keep a society together are promoted among the populace.

However, what is not totally absent in any society is crime. This refers to an anti-social act or a failure/refusal to live up to the standard of conduct deemed binding by the rest of the community (Historians. Org, 2001, cited in Nwabueze, 2011). Crime also refers to an act or omission which attracts legal punishment. Crime refers to acts which are against the law in any society. Incessant crime breeds insecurity in any society. Violent conflicts which consist of disagreements, clash, collision, or struggle most often constitute crime and all these contribute in creating a state of insecurity in a society if left unchecked. If national security is the freedom of a national territory and its people from want, threat, anxiety and dangers that are internally or externally motivated (Olaguaju, 1992, cited is Oloyede, 2011, p. 65), then insecurity in a nation refers to acts that are capable of negating the freedom or security in a society. These acts which breed insecurity most often constitute crime. So to combat insecurity means addressing the source of insecurity which is largely crime.

The state of insecurity in Nigeria is made obvious by the alarming trend of anti-social acts prevalent in the nation which in the not-so-distant past, were unthinkable and could not be associated with the country. Acts of terrorism by the Boko Haram Islamic sect, incidents of kidnapping in the southeast and South South parts

of the country, including agitations by militants in the Niger Delta have become “brands” of crime that have given a negative identity to Nigeria. This is in addition to other conventional crimes - theft, arson, violent ethno-religious conflicts etc. - which the law enforcement agents battle daily. These acts particularly those that involve threat to life have contributed in creating an alarming state of insecurity in some parts of the country.

This work examines the critical role of the mass media in combating the upsurge of crime which has led to a state of insecurity in the country, especially in the North, South Eastern and South Southern parts of the country. This discourse adopts the qualitative approach in appraising the correlation between the mass media and the insecurity in Nigeria with emphasis on practical measures relevant in this direction.

2. Mass media in Nigeria

To begin with, which communication channels are referred to as the mass media? These are channels of information dissemination simultaneously to a large, heterogeneous, anonymous and scattered audience. They primarily include newspapers, magazines books (print media) radio, television, the internet (electronic media), bill boards and posters (outdoor media). These media constitute the basic channels of communication in any society. However, the basic focus of this discourse is on the print (newspapers and magazines), broadcast media (radio and television) and to some extent, the internet. The mass media here basically refer to the press, a word which originally connotes the print media but is today used to refer to both the print and broadcast media.

The mass media are crucial in nation building. Governments can hardly survive without effective use of the mass media. The press are so powerful in a society that Edmund Burke, an 18th century politician first described them as the “Fourth Estate” of the realm, referring to the three major powers in Medieval times in European society which are the Lords (or Nobles), the Clergy, and the Commons (McQuail, 2000; www.wisegeek.com). Burke described the press sitting in the gallery in the parliament as the most powerful of all estates when compared with the other three estates in the British realm. Today, the press are still called the fourth estate of the realm, the other estates being the executive, legislature and the judiciary.

Mass media landscape in Nigeria shows tremendous improvement from the emergence of Reverend Henry Townsend's *Iwe Irohin* in 1859, through the independence era till date. With the emergence of media outfits virtually by the day in Nigeria what the nation boasts of today are mass media of high reckoning, both government and privately owned outfits. Such television stations as the Nigerian Television Authority (NTA), African Independent Television (AIT) and Channels Television among others, are beginning to have a truly global audience, having embarked on satellite broadcast operations. Radio stations such as Radio Nigeria, Ray Power FM, and the numerous state and privately owned outfits provide interesting news and current affairs programmes that impact on the society in one way or the other. Numerous dailies such as *The Guardian*, *Punch*, *Daily Sun*, *Thisday*, *Vanguard*, *The Nation* and *Daily Independent*, among others, have become dominant communication channels in Nigeria, providing diverse hard and soft news that keep the society informed.

The Nigerian press no doubt, have contributed immensely in making the nation what it is today, from the pre-independence era, through to the independence era, through the time of weathering the storm of military dictatorships to present democracy she is experiencing. In the words of Omu (1978), the Nigeria newspapers have played an active role in the society, relaying news of politics and political strife and stimulating discussion and thinking on a variety of matters of public interest and importance.

In order not to get carried away by the contributions of the mass media today in making far-reaching impact on the Nigerian society, it is pertinent to note that some other media, most of which are defunct today contributed in shaping the nation today. As Momoh (1985) observes, it is hard to forget the contributions of publications in the colonial era such as *Lagos Times*, *Eagles*, *Lagos Observer*, *Anglo-African*, *Lagos Critic*, *Lagos Weekly Record*, *The Nigerian Pioneer* etc. which were sources of literature, veritable instruments of social mobilization and cooperation, propagators of religious and desirable social and cultural values as well as promoters of free enterprise.

The press in Nigeria today are still playing these very important roles in the society, especially in ensuring mass support for the democratic governments at various levels. Just as Daramola (cited in Tejumaiye 2011 p. 23) writes, the news media shape culture, influence politics, play important role in business and affect the daily lives of millions of people, including people's attitude, conducts and fundamental moral values. Though the press in Nigeria have been faced with challenges. These challenges have not prevented them from impacting on the nation in diverse ways.

3. Insecurity in Nigeria: An overview

Once the word "insecurity" is mentioned while referring to Nigeria, the first words to come to mind are Boko Haram, kidnapping, Niger Delta Crises, and ethno-religious crises. These words constitute a brand used in identifying the nature of insecurity peculiar to Nigeria among other African nations. Before the public manifestation of Boko Haram terrorist activities in 2009, Nigeria had been witnessing series of kidnapping of mostly foreign expatriates by militants in the Niger Delta region of Nigeria. The militants were said to be agitating against what they saw as injustice against their region. They were initially operating in the creeks but once their activities extended to the streets, they constituted palpable insecurity in the south southern region of Nigeria.

Then came the emergence of series of kidnapping in the southeastern part of the country, which contributed to the worsening insecurity level in the south east and south southern geographical regions. These were in addition to the growing level of ethno-religious violence in Jos, Plateau State and some other parts of North central region with reprisal attacks in some parts of the south. At a point, the Jamaatu Ahlis Sunna Lidda'awati Wal-Jihad Islamic sect otherwise known as Boko Haram brought another dimension to the threats to life in Nigeria - terrorism. With a strong aversion to western education and persistence on instituting Sharia law in the Northern states of the country, the group went into a killing spree and suddenly states like Borno, Bauchi, Niger, Sokoto, Jigawa, Yobe, Kano Adamawa, Kaduna, Kogi and the Federal Capital Territory (Abuja) became insecure at varying degrees, some seriously terrorized while some others had a

few flash points. Churches, schools, markets, motor parks, offices and office complexes, special day celebrations (Independence, Christmas, Sallah etc. celebrations), public transport, villages, public and even private places, became insecure and today though attempts are being made by the Federal Government to negotiate with, tension, anxiety, terror, fear and general insecurity are still thick in the air (Ekanem, Dada and Ejue, 2012; Muozoba 2011; Udoudo and Duyra, 2012). Thousands have been killed in these flashes of madness.



Figure 1. Guide to Nigeria's trouble spots (Source: BBC.COM)

The BBC World News in an article entitled "Guide to Nigeria's Trouble Spots" which was published on its website on the 9th of March 2012, provided a vivid description of the trouble spots in Nigeria using the map of Nigeria (world-Africa 17310808. htmBBC.htm). The map shows with explanations, the insecurity in Niger Delta, South East, North East and North Central geopolitical regions. This article seems to be a confirmation to the world that these regions are not just flash points but insecure.

Udoudo and Diriyai (2012) after a study, identified the following as the types of terrorist activities prevalent in Nigeria; religion related terrorism, ethnicity-driven terrorism, socio-economic driven terrorism,

politically-driven terrorism and Hate-driven terrorism. These types of terrorism capture the various shades of violence – from political, through social to economic - which have contributed in various ways towards worsening the level of insecurity in Nigeria. This trend portends bad omen for the nation particularly because it keeps foreign investors away from the nation. Local businesses are also negatively affected, together with the snail-pace development such activities bring upon the country. Ethno-religious conflicts have reportedly lead to over 100,000 deaths in Nigeria between 1976 and 2010, including loss of properly worth billions of Naira (Newswatch Nov. 2, 2009, cited in Pate, 2011).

Various reasons have been adduced as the root cause of violence across the nation. Among these are the multidimensional, multicultural personality of Nigeria, corruption, poor governance, unemployment, mismanagement of diversity and conflict issues in the country. Pate (2011 p. 51) after an analysis of the trend of violence in the country poses some unanswered worrying questions: “How can one explain the basis for these frequent violent explosions that seem to litter the landscape? Why do people of different ethnic backgrounds kill each other? Why do adherents of different religions feel threatened by each other? Why do supporters of different political parties take up arms against each other? Why do farmers fight pastoralists? At what point did social relations start to breakdown between people of different ethnic groups particularly in the North? Why are governments and institutions failing to monitor and contain these conflicts? Whom do we blame? Could it be specific individuals or institutions?”

More questions than answers. However, these questions summarise the picture of the gravity of insecurity in Nigeria which is now diverting attention and resources supposed to be used in providing meaningful development to the nation. Ignoring these problems will definitely mean abandoning development plans because no society develops meaningful in the face of insecurity. What then could the media do as part of the general efforts by various individuals and institutions towards addressing these crises?

4. Theoretical explanation

To understand how the mass media could play meaningful role in combating insecurity in Nigeria would require a theoretical explanation. This is because mass communication theories explain the likely effect of mass communication process in the society. This discourse could be anchored on several communication theories but the most vital one is the agenda –setting theory.

The agenda setting basically states that the media, through frequent coverage of issues determine what the dominant discussion would be. The theory says the media may not tell us what to think, but they divert our minds to what to think about (McQuail, 2008, cited in Pate 2012). By frequently reporting certain issues, the media move those issues from press agenda to public agenda.

Through frequent, meaningful and responsible coverage of acts that breed insecurity in Nigeria, the media can sensitize the public against such against. Frequent discussions on issues of insecurity will not just attract attention to the need to address such problems but also raise consciousness on the need to combat insecurity.

5. Mass media, crime fighting and security in Nigeria

The point has been made that the mass media are crucial in the achievement of society-wide objectives, be it in the area of social, health, infrastructural, political, educational or security development. The mass media constitute one of the most important institutions of socialization and in fact, the major cultural industry responsible for the distribution of ideas in the Nigerian society (Pate, 2011). Other institutions of socialization such as the church, family, educational institutions, political establishments etc. basically play reinforcement roles to the mass media by performing their separate functions in the society. This shows that the mass media impact on the society and determine dominant perceptions, values and attitude. How then can this all-powerful position of the mass media in the society be utilized in mobilizing against acts of insecurity in Nigeria?

The surveillance and correlation functions of the media are at the core of mobilization against acts of insecurity. The surveillance role says the media provide information to the society which is used in opinion molding and attitude adoption. The correlation role says the media relate news and various happenings in the society to the individuals' life and environment. This is done through interpretation and explanation of the implications of happenings on the life and environment of the masses, including implications of acts that breed insecurity on the society. It is expected that through effective information, the society would gradually turn against such acts.

Osadolor (2001) cited in Orhewere and Kur (2004) writes that the most critical role of the media should be in helping to prevent or at least attenuate the severity of conflicts. Publicity is critical in exposing and checking vices. As Joseph Pulitzer, the legendary journalist and creator of the Pulitzer prizes for excellence in journalism had said, "publicity may not be the only thing that is needed but it is the one thing without which all other agencies will fail" (cited in Olayede, 2011, p. 64).

Several programmes for creating awareness on crime with a view to discouraging acts of insecurity exist in the media. Such crime specific programmes such as Police Diary on Radio Nigeria, Eagle on Radio sponsored on Radio Nigeria by the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC), several pages of newspapers dedicated to crime stories including non-crime specific pages that carry stories, political awareness radio and television programmes which sometimes sensitize the public against crime, the various jungles and promotional messages against violence regularly running on most television and radio station; these are among the efforts being made by the media towards the utilization of publicity in sensitizing against acts that breed insecurity. That acts of insecurity have continued does not mean that these efforts are meaningless. Raising awareness is essential in making the society uncomfortable for such acts to thrive.

The need for emphasis on conflict and terrorism reporting in the interest of the public, is essential. The media have been accused of contributing in worsening the state of insecurity and conflicts in Nigeria due to reportage primarily aimed at maximizing profit and increasing audience base. After an analysis of media coverage of diversity and conflict issues by various scholars, Pate (2011) listed out common practices adopted by the media which tend to contribute negatively to crises situations as follows – selective reporting of prejudicial stereotypes about groups and individuals, reporting inter group conflicts out of their fundamental sociological, economic, political and other contexts, shallow and episodic coverage, total

blackout on some groups, individuals or community, use of inflammatory, misleading and sensational headlines to attract sales, publishing inflammatory statements against some people or groups as letters to the editor, attributing statements by individuals to groups making generalized statements not supported facts etc. These are activities which the media need to desist from to make meaningful impact in combating insecurity in Nigeria, otherwise they (mass media) will continue to be seen as fueling insecurity.

The mass media need to allot specific air time and space to reports on terrorism, kidnapping and other forms of crime capable of breeding insecurity. This is a way of emphasizing the negative impact of such acts on the society. The allotment of specific airtime and space to reporting terrorism, including sponsorship of reporters to embark on independent investigations of terrorist acts in the country were among the suggestions made by journalists in a study on how to combat terrorism through mass media strategies (Udoudo and Diriyai, 2012). This will provide the needed reinforcement of the negative impact of such crimes on the society. Just as Pulitzer (cited in Oloyede 2011, p. 64) observes “get all these things (acts of terrorism and other acts of insecurity) out in the open, describe them, ridicule them in the press and sooner or later, public opinion will sweep them away”. This could be a gradual but effective process.

Citizens journalism could play a vital role in the utilization of the mass media to combat insecurity in Nigeria. Citizens journalism which is also known as public, participatory, civic or street journalism consists of active participation of members of the public in news gathering and dissemination. It has variously been defined as members of the public playing an active role in the process of collecting, reporting, analyzing and disseminating news and information (Glaser, 2007), a wide range of activities in which everyday people contribute information or commentary about news (Okorie, Oyedepo and Usaini, 2012); secular process of passing information (Salawu 2012).

The mass media should be utilized by ordinary citizens in exposing crime and sensitizing the public against acts of terror. The pertinence of citizens journalism in combating crime was played out in the brutal murder of four students of the University of Port Harcourt (UNIPORTH) at Aluu, a community in Rivers State Nigeria. The recording of the clubbing and burning to death of the four boys was uploaded on the internet and in a few seconds the story went viral. The mass media further spread the story especially from the angle of the public outcry generated by the recorded murder. Cable News Network (CNN) has i-report programme where citizens journalists provide reports that conventional journalists could not get. Citizens journalism makes everyone a reporter. The 2009 presidential election in Iran underscored the pertinence of citizens journalism where virtually every Iranian that had a handset became a reporter and sent stories and pictures of the post election violence across to the world through conventional media such as CNN, BBC FOX News etc. This was after President Ahmadinejad had banned foreign media from operating in the country and also attempted to block internet access in the country (Nwabueze, 2009). The ordinary citizen can also contribute in exposing acts of insecurity through the numerous phone-in programmes on radio and television, the internet media, especially social media and online versions of conventional media.

The various ways the mass media could be effectively adopted in combating insecurity as explained here, require commitment on the part of media workers. Both the public and mass media workers should play complimentary roles as partners in this regard.

6. Conclusion

Mass media use in combating rising insecurity in Nigeria is not without challenges. Among the impediments to mass media reportage of acts that breed insecurity, especially terrorism are lack of research and investigation, people's reluctance to supply information on terrorists, fear of being attacked by terrorists, self censorship for fear of victimization, lack of insurance policy for journalists, poor remuneration, security threats and lack of access to the scene of terrorist acts (Udoudo and Diriyai, 2012, p. 91).

It is pertinent to note that most crimes which breed insecurity have been classified into one form of terrorism or the other by Udoudo and Diriyai. For instance, inter-religious crises were classified as religion related terrorism, ethnic crises were classified as ethnicity terrorism, socio-economic driven crises (especially the type that exists) in the Niger Delta region, including kidnapping for economic reason in the south east region are classified as socio-economic driven terrorism, politically motivated acts of violence such as is perpetrated by Boko Haram (some of the sects reasons for violence are political in nature, though with religious coloration) are tagged political terrorism, Hate-driven terrorism also associated to an extent with the Boko Haram sect (who sometimes bomb or shoot a section of the public simply based on hatred) is classified as hate-driven terrorism (Udoudo and Diriyai, 2012).

The media and the general public must rise to the challenge of combating rising insecurity in the nation by embarking on communication-based approaches that would effectively stigmatize such acts in the society. While the journalists and other media workers are urged to engage in responsible journalism committed towards discouraging the acts of insecurity in the nation, the public should step-up the use of citizens or civic journalism through the mass media as a way of complementing media workers' role in exposing and combating insecurity in the nation. Responsible journalism devoid of contents capable of heating of the polity and the society in general should be avoided. As Orhewere and Kur (2004) observe, responsible media practice in times of conflict suggest that the media do not carry inaccuracies, distortions, conflict, confusion and errors of facts in their reports.

The welfare of journalists should be given serious attention, especially the provision of insurance package which would encourage them to engage in dare-devil conflict reporting in the interest of the public. A journalist whose take-home pay is nothing to write home about, coupled with the irregular nature of the pay, would not have the zeal to engage in investigations he feels constitutes a risk to his life.

Regular workshops on conflict reporting, journalism ethics, mass media in a multi-cultural society, reporting terrorism, professionalism in journalism, among other topics are essential to continually keep media workers abreast with trends in mass media use in combating insecurity in Nigeria. This would ensure that the mass media are not used to worsen the problem of insecurity due to lack of knowledge on how to handle this specialized journalism area.

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