

# The Mass Media Coverage of the Kidnap of the Chibok School Girls

Amannah Peace Ireju

Lecturer, Mass Communication Department, Rivers state College of Arts & Science  
Rumuola, Port Harcourt, Rivers state Nigeria  
Email: [peaceizidor@yahoo.com](mailto:peaceizidor@yahoo.com)

Mba-Nwigoh, Enuolare Nwigoh

Consultant, Legacy Pension Managers Limited, 3 Estate Road, Rumuogba, Port Harcourt, Nigeria  
Email: [menuolare@yahoo.com](mailto:menuolare@yahoo.com)

Lucky Idowu Ojo

Lecturer, Department of Mass Communication, Auchi Polytechnic, Auchi, Edo State, Nigeria  
Email: [ojolucky4christ@gmail.com](mailto:ojolucky4christ@gmail.com)

## Abstract

The growing spate of terrorism in Nigeria and the new challenges it now poses for the mass media, had informed this study. Study adopted the survey research, with a population that comprised residents and journalists in Port Harcourt metropolis. A sample size of 300 was drawn. Yet 250 copies of the questionnaire were retrieved and data analyzed using simple percentages and frequency distribution tables. The findings were that there is a preponderance of the use of conflict approach and lesser use of peace-oriented journalism by the mass media in reporting the Chibok school girls kidnap incident. While it concluded that the mass media is not complicit in aiding terrorism in Nigeria, it however, among others, recommended that it was time the adopted the peace oriented journalism approach, thereby emphasizing peaceful options in crisis situations.

**Key words.** Mass media, terrorism, framing peace-oriented journalism – conflict.

## Introduction

Terrorism has gained salience in recent times in Nigeria, practically occupying all the mass media spaces. It is an outright impossibility these days for any Newspaper or Magazine edition, News bulletin on television or radio, post on social media etc., not to have stories on terrorism. A look at any of the daily newspaper, news from radio television, or the internet in Nigeria sends signals that create national panic. Newspaper headlines; such as “SSS Uncover Bomb Factory” “The Nyanya bombing” “Tight security in Jos after suicide bombing” “UN House Attack: Nigeria on trail of al-Qaeda agents”, “killers on the Rampage as insurgents massacre Ibo” “Gunmen invade Gwoza village, kill over 100 Boko Haram: 40 school children killed in Yobe” etc. are everyday news in Nigeria since 2010 (Okoroafor, et al 2012, p. 63) emphasis added.

Like every other facet of the Nigerian society, the mass media has been caught in the novel frenzy of terrorism. Yes, at some point they have had to grapple with the military in the Niger Delta, the dimension and peculiarity of the Boko Haram insurgents have left the media as startled and bewildered. Now, if the Boko Haram sects have overwhelmed the countries security agencies (Okpa, et al 2012, p. 95), one wonders if the same cannot be said of the mass media. Beyond the attacks on the institution (Human Rights Watch, 2012, p. 56), media researchers are beginning to critically examine challenges now faced by the Nigeria mass media in peace building and conflict management in contemporary Nigeria. The media wield powers as a result of this control and access to the tools of communication (Okoroafor et al 2012, p. 63). But as would be seen in this study there tend to be deliberate attempts by terrorist organizations like the Boko Haram to use the mass media in gaining attention for its cause.

Traditionally, terrorism research considered the media to be vital for terrorist group as they not only spread the fear or terror to a far larger audience than the relatively small group of immediate victims but the media provide the means of attracting attention and spreading the message of the group (Spencer, 2012, p. 6).

The recent kidnap of about 200 secondary school girls from their school in Chibok, Borno state, on April 14, 2014 by the Boko Haram terrorists, aptly amplifies the statement above. With the international attention this incident has garnered the forms of this study is to examine how the media has fared in its coverage as well as the extent or otherwise, the Boko Haram sect has succeeded in using both the local and international media in achieving its aims of attention and fear.

### **Statement of the Problem**

The recent security challenges in Nigeria are such that the mass media, like the Nigerian government are grappling to come to terms with. Given their enormous role as social engineers, the Nigeria mass media are yet to adopt proactive approaches to reporting conflict situations that will foster peace building and conflict management. Similarly, the inability of mass media to shift from the conventional news reportage which highlights neutrality to adopting the alternative approach that is cause-promotion driven leaves them at an inept state as agents of change.

Yet whether the Nigerian mass media have the where withal to engage in such a Herculean task of covering crisis leaves much to be desired.

### **Objective of the study**

This study seeks to critically examine the challenges of reportage in contemporary Nigeria with special focus on the mass media coverage of the kidnap of the Chibok school girls. But then it seeks to:

1. Find out journalistic approach to reporting the Chibok kidnap incident.
2. Determine impacts of the mass media in peace building and conflict management in contemporary Nigeria.
3. Examine the challenges of reporting conflicts in Nigeria, with focus on the Chibok kidnap case.
4. Seek the extent the media has “aided” terrorism in Nigeria.

### **Research Questions.**

From the objective of study above, the following research questions are here drawn.

1. What journalistic approaches are adopted in reporting the Chibok kidnap incident?
2. What are the impact of the mass media in peace building and conflict management in contemporary Nigeria?
3. What challenges are inherent in reporting conflicts in Nigeria, with focus on the Chibok kidnap case?
4. To what extent does the media aid terrorism in Nigeria?

### **Significance of the study**

The study is of relevance to various users. First it will enable the media to understand where it stands in the fight against terrorism in Nigeria, as well as serve as a clarion call on them to meet up their responsibility as cardinal agents of peace and conflict management.

Since it tends to identify some challenges in reporting crisis situations, especially the Boko Haram, insurgencies, government, media owners, journalistic and society, would have insights, through recommendations on how they could be surmounted.

Furthermore, we cannot over stress the salience of this work as useful resource material on terrorism and role of the media.

### **Scope of the study**

The work was restricted to examining the approaches challenges of reporting terrorist activities by the mass media in Nigeria. It was restricted to residents and select journalists in Port Harcourt metropolis.

### **Definition of Terms**

1. Mass media: Consisting of television, radio, newspaper/magazine, internet etc.
2. Terrorism: The killing of innocent people by private group, in such a way as to create a media spectacle.
3. Conflict: Actual or perceived opposition of needs, values and interests.
4. Boko Haram: Fundamentalists, with an ideology opposed to western education.

### **Theoretical framework/Literature Review.**

The theoretical frameworks adopted in this study are the Agenda setting and Development Media Theories. The Agenda setting theory explains the effects of mass communication on culture and society (Ndolo 1998) as cited by Harry (2014, p.31). The agenda setting theory describes the powerful influence of the media – the ability to state and define what issues are important in society. Lang and Lang (1966, p.468) did aver that “the mass media force attention to certain issues... They are constantly presenting objects, suggesting what individuals in the mass should think about, know about, and have feedings about. It therefore stands to reason

that the extent of press coverage of the Boko Haram insurgency should be such that will emphasize peace and development and at the same time engages in value re-orientation.

On its part, the development media theory according to Nwanze (2003), as cited by Nsereka and Amannah (2014, p. 96), recognizes the peculiar problems faced by developing countries. According to proponents of this theory, the press in developing countries should highlight efforts at national development, speedy transformation of society, economic and social equality; mobilize the people for economic, social and political development and improvement in standards of living. It recognizes that societies undergoing a transition from underdevelopment and colonialism to independence and better national conditions often lack the infrastructure, the money, the traditions, the professional skills and even audience needed to sustain media institutions comparable to those of world war I and II. The relationship of this theory to the research is that the media should begin to set the agenda for development.

Debates are continuing to brew on the role of the mass media in crisis situation like the one we find ourselves here in Nigeria. They have often been operating from two sides of the divide. The idea of Graber (1989) cited in Okoroafor, et al (2012, p. 68) echoes this “that the media not only brings matters to public attention but also can doom people and events to obscurity by inattention”. It further explains the centripetal and centrifugal disposition of the media. Media is double bladed sword and is to be handled with due care. It can be utilized for the welfare of the society. Misuse of same will definitely damage and destruct the society like anything (Singhl, et al, 2012, p.4)

The argument on whether there is a symbiotic relationship between the media and terrorism is also raging. Terrorists are employing various communication devices for easy, faster and optimized communications (Singhl et al, 2012, p.4). Apparently, one of these devices being used is the mass media. Infact there exists a relationship between the media and terrorists. It has been noted that terrorists provide the media with emotional, exciting and bloody news which helps them sell their product (Ganor, 2003, p. 231). Therefore there are mutual benefits for both and the relationship could be described as “symbiotic” (Schmid, 1989) as cited in Spencer (2012, p.7).

But why does this relationship exist and what does it portend for society? Understanding why terrorists try to use the media could provide a clue. According to Spencer, they do that to; gain attention, gain sympathy for its cause and spread concern and terror in the general public and thereby effect political change.

It is the salience that the media gives terrorist activities that determine its effect. The central aim of terrorism is not so much the act of violence or the killing of a target, but rather the dissemination of terror and uncertainty among a population as well as the spread of the group’s message through the news worthiness of the violent act. Here one may consider the media to be the terrorist’s “accomplices” (Schmid 1989, p. 540). This accusation is serious. But then, the style of journalistic reporting could inform this accusation. Ashong and Udondo (2010) as cited in Popoola (2012, p. 213) submitted that “journalists in the country deliberately or out of ignorance report in such a way that same people get incited to carry out terrorist act” There is every reason to believe that these social problems are partly consequences of issues that are either unattended to or not adequately and constructively attended to by the leadership and the relevant social institutions, particularly the media (Okoroafor, et al 2012, p.68).

So, how possible is it for the mass media not to report incidents of terrorism? Any kind of media blackout of terrorist attacks faces two grave problems, one normative and one practical, Spencer noted. He observed that starting with the normative problem of censoring and restricting media reporting on terrorism, one has to point out that free media, although itself not always a bastion of liberal democratic values, is nevertheless a key characteristic of a democratic society. But then it could amount to an insult to the intelligence of the general public and would totally undermine confidence in the veracity of the media if censorship was to be introduced (Wilkinson, 2000, p. 185) as cited in Spencer (2012, p. 10). He further argues that apart from the normative problem of media censorship, the practicability of such a policy is questionable, considering the vast range of new media channels available to general public over satellite and now more importantly over the internet.

The better part of the times Nigeria hits the international news organization are for the not too right reasons. Although terrorist activities have been in existence in Nigeria, it took a new twist for the worse following the resurgence of the Boko Haram terrorist sect. the latest of the plethora of unwarranted activities on the Nigerian state and its citizen, was the kidnap on April 14, 2014 of some girls – over 250, from the government secondary school, Chibok (Wikipedia 2014, p. 1). This unfortunate development has attracted wide condemnation from countries across the world, especially the United States of America (U.S.A), France, UK, and China among others. The social media and traditional media have been a washed with stories of the

kidnapped girls. The hash-tag; “Bring back our girls” has hit a record 2.3 million as at 11 May (Wikipedia, 2014, p. 5).

Not only has the Boko Haram terrorist group “benefited” from the plethora of media coverage, the kidnap incident has attracted, the Nigeria media is now in the sunshine. The framing of the kidnap of the Chibok girls in the media is such that continually portrays the Nigerian government as inept in providing security for its citizens. For instance, the mass media in Nigeria, rather than engaging in conflict sensitive journalism tend to tow the line of thoughts of the foreign media, who have continually cast aspersion on the Nigerian government. As reported by Dorell (2014, p. 8). “The scale of the kidnapping was unprecedented, which led the former United States Ambassador to Nigeria John Campbell to declare that Boko Haram’s Strength appears to be increasing. The government’s ability to provide security to its citizens appears to be decreasing. Again, director of the Atlantic Council’s Africa Center J. Peter Pham said “The failure of government to even get” clear count further reinforces a perception of systemic governmental failure, Dorell reported. The Economist labeled President Goodluck Jonathan as incompetent saying that Jonathan and the Nigerian military” cannot be trusted any longer to guarantee security for Nigerians”. Adding that “the worst aspect of the Nigerian government’s handling of the abduction is its seeming indifference to the plight of the girls’ families. The punch, 10 May 2014). When we take a look at this kind of framing of the kidnap of the girls, one wonders what point this kind of report would score in crisis situations like this. This brings us to the advocacy for conflict sensitive journalism. Howard (2003) as cited by Adisa and Abdulraheem (2012, p. 6) describes it thus:

A conflict sensitive journalist applies conflict analysis and searches for new voices and new ideas about the conflict. He or she reports on who is trying to resolve the conflict, looks closely at all sides, and reports on how other conflicts were resolved. A conflict sensitive journalist takes no sides, but is engaged in the search for solutions.

Okoroafor et al (2012, p. 65) comes handy when they advocated that “the media can help to promote the security of life and property, national interests and national integrity which fosters national security and any meaningful development both socio-economic and cultural etc.

### **Methodology**

The survey design was adopted for this research work. This is because the design deals with opinions and attitudes of people. Survey is a study of characteristics of sample through questioning that enables a researcher to make generalization concerning his population of interest (Ohaja, 2008) cited in Ochonogor and Igani (2014, p. 78). This design was considered suitable because of its ability to provide necessary data that enabled the researcher to arrive at certain findings. Meanwhile, the population of this study comprised residents and selects journalists in Port Harcourt city. The simple random sampling was used to select 250 respondents from the population as the sample size. The research instrument used for this study was a set of questionnaire. The questionnaire was constructed in unambiguous sentences to elicit views of the respondents. It consisted of both the demographic and psychographic sections.

Moreso, the researcher personally administered and retrieved the instrument from the respondents. Of the 250 copies of questionnaire distributed, 200 were successfully retrieved, giving us a retrieval rate of 83.33%. But, data were presented and analyzed, using frequency distribution and percentages. This was to enable readers understand the variables that contributed to the outcome of the research.

### **Data presentation, Analysis and Discussion of Findings**

A total of 250 copies of the questionnaire were retrieved from the 300 distributed to residents and journalists in Port Harcourt metropolis. All the 250 copies of the questionnaire were then collated and used for the analysis.

**Research Question 1:** What journalistic approaches are adopted in reporting the Chibok kidnap incident? This question sought to identify the journalism approach adopted by the mass media in the Chibok kidnap case with a view to weighing its implication on the society. The result is represented thus:

**Table 1.** Frequency of Journalistic approach in reporting the Chibok kidnap incident.

Response	No. of respondents	percentage
Neutrally objective	85	34%
Cause-promotion	11	4.4%
Conflict approach	96	38.4%
Peace journalism	58	23.2%
	250	100

From table 1 above 96(38.4%) respondents that the conflict approach of reporting is predominant in mass media reportage of the Chibok kidnap incident. But 85 or 34.0% did submit that the reportage have reflected neutral objectivity by journalists. Peace journalism had 58(23.2%) respondents while 11(4.4%) observe the use of cause – promotion approach by the mass media.

**Research Question 2:** What are the impacts of the mass media peace building and conflict management in contemporary Nigeria?

The impact of the mass media in peace building and conflict management in contemporary Nigeria comes under scrutiny with this result.

**Table 2.** Frequency of mass media impact on peace building and conflict management in Nigeria.

Response	No. of respondents	Percentage
Strongly agree	45	18%
Agree	85	34%
Strong disagree	30	12%
Disagree	90	36%
Total	250	100%

**Research Question 3:** What challenges are inherent in reporting conflicts in Nigeria, with focus on the Chibok kidnap case?

Table 3: Response on the challenges in reporting conflicts in Nigeria.

Response	No. of respondents	percentage
Threat to life	53	21.2%
Funding	71	28.4%
Preference for foreign media	79	31.6%
Lack of professionalism	47	18.6%
Total	250	100%

From table 3 above, it could be seen that preference for foreign media (79 or 31.6%) is a major challenge for reporting crisis. Yet 71 or 28.4% of the respondents see funding as a challenge to reporting conflict. Moreso, with 53(21.2%) respondents see threat to life of journalists as a challenge, 47 or 18.6% feel that lack of professionalism is a bane to reporting conflict.

**Research Question 4:** To what extent has the mass media aided terrorism in Nigeria.

**Table 4.** Responses on mass media “aid” of terrorism in Nigeria.

Response	No. of respondents	percentage
Very highly	14	5.6%
Highly	96	38.4%
Grossly minimal	37	14.8
Minimal	103	41.2%
Total	250	100

From table 4 above it was discovered that 103 (41.2%) respondents feel the mass media aiding of terrorism in Nigeria is minimal. Conversely, while 96(or 38.4%) respondents believe that the mass media are highly aiding terrorism in Nigeria, 37(14.8) feel it is grossly minimal.

## Discussion

The result in Research question 1, clearly justifies the problem of this work. It was discovered that journalists use the conflict approach in reporting crisis situations. The result confirms Adisa; and Abdullaheem (2012, p. 9) who argued that this kind of approach is characterized by:

- Media mostly just follow events. They don't explain what led to those events.
- They concentrate on bad news of conflict and **silent** on peace process
- They are often sensational and emotional in tone
- They often reinforce stereotypes
- When telling every story, they not only choose who and what to include inside the frame but who and what to leave out. This approach to reporting cannot bring about the needed peace and development.

On research question 2 findings revealed that the mass media reportage has not had impact on peace building and conflict management in Nigeria. While it contradicts Okoroafor et al (2012, p. 58) that "the media as a social institution in Nigeria and else where in the world is a powerful tool of reportage and education of society and therefore quite instrumental for the pursuit of the security of life, proerty, national interests and the actualization of positive social and economic transformation". It further confirms Adisa and Abdulraheem (2012, p. 11) that "the moment conflict erupts; mass media begin to seek for exclusive and bizarre scenes to report even if those scenes do not serve any purpose for the society.

It is startling to note that among the options provided in research question3, preference for foreign media was the greatest challenge journalists' face in reporting the Chibok kidnap case. Granted that there is a penchant by our leaders for foreign news station, the growing suspicion and mistrust that have often characterized press-government relationship in recent times would have warranted this. The press have often been seen as being critical of almost all government policies. But has their choice for foreign media made any difference? The answer is an emphatic no. the local "media have further strengthened this result, as most of the stories on the Chibok girls have their source from the foreign media. In an edition of the nation newspaper, the paper had curled from CNN the profile of Abubakar Shekau; the leader of the Boko Haram sect. Yet, how many media organization have their reporters covering these crisis beats? There is overbearing reliance on the foreign media, who have correspondents in these areas. The implication is that, they framing of the kidnap of the Chibok girls by the foreign media and adopted by our local media makes ridicule of the New World communication order and its arguments.

#### **Research Question 4**

The result reveals that the mass media's aiding of terrorism is minimal. This contradicts earlier positions that have implied that the mass media is complicit terrorism. First it contradicts research question one which implied that terrorism is strengthened by the journalistic style of reportage. It further contradicts (Schmid 1989, p. 540, Spencer (2012, p. 6) who have implied that the media are perceived as "accomplices".

#### **Conclusion/Recommendation**

These are most challenging times for the mass media in Nigeria. With the surge in terrorism, the media is yet to come to term with social and national realities, and as so begin to adopt conflict sensitive journalism approach. The outcome of this study would have vindicated then in being complicity to aiding crime, but their cardinal function of fostering peace and national development must remain utmost priority.

#### **Recommendation**

1. The mass media must adopt the peace journalism approach. This will enable them emphasize peaceful options in crisis situation.
2. It has also become imperative for media practitioners in Nigeria to synergize with foreign media organizations for training of staff.
3. it is time for the Nigerian media to refocus and reposition itself for the challenges of national security in Nigeria. This will imply proper funding of staff.
4. Government should be hasty in addressing the issue of poverty and unemployment of youths that is gradually assuming a frightening dimension in the country.

#### **References**

- Adisa, R.M and Abdulraheem, M. (2002). Mass Media and Conflicts in Nigeria; A Call for Peace-oriented Journalism. General Studies in the Social Sciences: Some Fundamental Topics. Illorin: General Studies Division, p 14-36.
- Dominick, S.R. (2009). The Dynamics of Mass Communication (10<sup>th</sup> ed) New York: MCGraw-Hill
- Harry, I. (2014). Press Coverage of Social and Economic Crisis in Nigeria: The Case of Avian Influenza. In A.A Amakiri and F. Amadi (eds.) Review of Communication and Media Studies. Vol. 1 No. 1 February 2014, p. 31-39.

- Human Right Watch (2002). Spiraling Violence: Boko Haram Attacks and Security Force Abuses in Nigeria. Los Angeles: HRW Press
- Lang, K. and Lang G. (1996). The Mass Media and Voting. In B. Berelson and M. Janowitz (eds). Reader in Public Opinion and Communication. New York: Free Press.
- Nzereka, B. G and Amannah, P. I (2014). An Evaluative study of the Freedom of Information Act and Media Practice in Nigeria. In A.A Amakiri and F. Amadi (eds.) Review of Communication and Media Studies. . Vol. 1 No. 1 February 2014 P. 94-102.
- Ochonogor, C. I and Igani, B. (2014). Stress Factors in Journalism Practice: A Survey of Print Media Journalists in Port Harcourt, Nigeria. In A.A Amakiri and F. Amadi (eds.) Review of Communication and Media Studies. Vol. 1. No. 1 February 2014, p. 74-84.
- Ohaja, E.U. (2003). Mass Communication Research Project Report Writing. Lagos: John Letterman Limited.
- Okon, G.B. (2007) Basic Dimension in Mass Communication. Port Harcourt: HDX Communication
- Okoroafor, E. C., Okoro, J. O, Tayo-Garbson, S. U (2012). The Media. National Security and Socio-Economic Development in Nigeria. European Scientific Journal. October Special Edition Vol. 8. No. 24, P58 – 72.
- Orlu – Orlu, H. C (2014) An Analysis of Uses and Gratifications of Nigeria Video Films Among Youths in Port Harcourt Metropolis. In A.A Amakiri and F. Amadi (eds.) Review of Communication and Media Studies. Vol. 1 No. 1 February, 2014, p. 85-93.
- Reese, S.D. and Lewis, S.C. (2009). Framing the War on Terror. The Internalization of Policy in the US Press. Vol. No (6): 777-797.
- Singh, J, Goyal S. and Gupta, V. (2012) . Terrorism and the Role of Media. International Affair and Global Strategic. Vol. 4, 2002, P.1-8, [www.iiste.org](http://www.iiste.org). ISSN 2224-574x
- Spencer, S. (2002) Terrorism and the Media. Arts and Humanities Research Council. Swindon: AHRC