

## Users' Perception of Crisis Portrayals on Social Media: A Study of Boko Haram Insurgency in Nigeria

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### Abstract

Social media are steadily becoming the dominant means of keeping in touch with one another and veritable channels of public communication of this epoch. Violent crisis like the Boko Haram insurgency in Nigeria is one of the global phenomena which elicit concern from every rational person. This paper examined the users' perception of crisis portrayals on social media using the Boko Haram insurgency in Nigeria as an example. Survey research design was applied with 300 respondents as the sample; multi-stage sampling technique was used to select the samples and questionnaire was the instrument of data collection. The study found that users perceive the portrayals of the crisis on social media as excess and over-blown, especially on *Facebook* by mostly users between 15 and 35 years old. Based on the findings, the paper mainly recommends more social media education and barring of youngsters of certain age from the use of *Facebook* in Nigeria.

**Keywords:** Users, Perception, Crisis, Portrayal, Social Media, Book Haram,

### Introduction

All media publications or broadcasts are meant for people's consumption and until the intended people or audience gets the publication or broadcast and responds to it, communication could not be adjudged to have taken place. It presupposes that the receivers of any mediated message(s) and their feelings are important factors to be critically examined in all communication enterprise. Thus, how the message receivers perceive what is broadcast or published should be a major consideration to the professional public communicators who ought to be interested on effective communication, which if not achieved all interaction effort is futile. Those consuming media contents determine whether an interaction has taken place or not, so their perception of the communication has to be given utmost priority at every point in time.

Prior to now people using mass media contents "are variously constructed as viewers, consumers, and citizens. Collectively, they are labeled the audience, the market, the public," (Cornell, 1991 and Thomas, 1960) cited by Raboy, Proulx and Welters (2001, p. 97). Meanwhile, the term user came to be associated with those who consume some media contents with the advent of web 2.0 technologies, software or applications. These are technologies that enable media consumers not only to read, listen or view messages, ideas, information, experiences, values etc., but also to contribute in generating the contents offered for public consumption. The web 2.0 applications promote the audience from being mere recipients of mass media contents as hitherto churned out by the journalists to becoming contributors in the media packages delivered to the public. Social media are integral offshoots of the web 2.0 technologies.

Therefore, unlike the conventional mass media, the social media give the people (the users) an open-ended avenue to contribute to media contents. These new media provide platforms for non-journalists to gate-keep and publish (post) what the public consume. In the same vein, the social media are open to journalists and media organizations too to use for information sharing, so media outfits and contemporary practitioners who worth their salt can hardly do without the social media. Perhaps this is partly why Ndolo (2011, p. 9) emphatically recommends that in the present age "media organizations as well as journalists must be ICT compliant." With the prevalence of the social networking sites now, the task of public information gathering and dissemination is like a prerogative of all. Before today; when journalists alone virtually had monopoly of public communication, dishing out news, messages and information to the people, there have been allegations of the

media thriving on bombarding the people with excessive reportage of crises and violence. That notion maybe is the reason Okunna (2007) argues that what honey is to bees is what crisis is to the journalists (the mass media).

However, in the contemporary world where non-journalists are part of news purveyors, this study focuses on ascertaining how the social media users perceive crises portrayals on the social media channels which are open for both the journalists and the non-journalists for communication and information dissemination to the public. The paper is set to examine whether there is a moderate representation of Boko Haram crisis on the social media. These new media are ubiquitous, open for people to interact as well as provide rooms for all their users to report freely with any lexis.

By virtue of the usage of social media for human interactions, this generation experiences the full reality of Milton's view of 'free market of ideas' where falsehood and truth are seemingly published concurrently by the new media users. Given the repercussions of shoddy reportage of conflicts, Adamu (2013, p. 82) provides that "reporting and covering events during conflicts, unrest or disasters, demands the highest professional qualities of a journalist." But the present trend of covering and publishing of events at any spot by anyone who has the new media tools such as internet-enabled phones, i-pads, and so on, leaves in the memory of every right-thinking person the question of, how do non-journalists report crises on social media? This is what this study seeks to get the new media users' views on, with respect to portrayal of Boko Haram violent crisis in Nigeria. **Statement of Problem**

The mass media place emphasis on reporting violent crises apparently because they are conflicts that affect human beings. Media organizations give attention to reportage of crises as bizarre phenomena which have grave consequences on people and their environments. To the journalists who cover and report violent crises, they are performing part of the cardinal roles of the mass media- surveillance and provision of information to the society. In the performance of the roles, there is this notion that journalists inundate the public with gory scenes. Some proponents of this view have the conviction that media personnel report violent crimes torrentially for pecuniary purposes.

So, there is the sensation that members of the fourth estate of the realm allegedly sacrifice their professional ethical rules at the altar of commercial values in coverage of crises or violence. This opinion is hinge on the point that crises as violence-ridden acts, sell lucratively on newsstands. However, operating on this ideology could negate national and international ethical norms guiding what journalists are to present to the public in crises circumstances.

The challenge then is that excessive exhibition of crises scenarios could inflame the audience to act in a manner that could be inimical to orderliness and peaceful co-existence of people. Taking cognizance of this and considering the fact that technologies through the social media have launched human society into libertarian media principle, where the task of conveying information for public consumption is left in both the hands of the media professionals as well as the people called users of the social media; this paper wants to find out how they (the users) perceive portrayal of Boko Haram crises in the new communication channels. It shall fathom the crises' portrayals on specific social media platforms and the age brackets of people who perpetrate it most. All these constitute the problems which this work wants to unravel.

### **Objectives of the study**

The following objectives guide this paper:

1. To determine users' perception of Boko Haram crisis portrayals on social media
2. To ascertain the crisis' portrayals on specific social media platforms
3. To establish which age bracket portrays more of Boko Haram crises on the social media

### **Research Questions**

1. How do users perceive portrayals of Boko Haram crises on social media?
2. Which of the social media are more of the Boko Haram crises portrayed on?
3. Which age group portrays more of the Boko Haram crises situations on the social media?

### **Theoretical Perspective**

This paper is hinged on the dependency theory which according to Baran (2010: p. 369) was founded by DeFleur and Ball-Rokeach in 1975. One of the tenets of the theory that made it apt for this study is that "in our modern industrial society we are increasingly dependent on media (a) to understand the social world; to act meaningfully and effectively in society," Baran (2010: p. 370). In the present age the reliance of the people (users) of the social media on the new means of communication for understanding what happens or who did what at any given point and place is not hidden. This invariably could determine their perception and thus responsible action or otherwise, on a given matter. From this perspective, the usefulness of this theory to this paper becomes clearer, as the users' dependent on the social media shall account for their perception of the

portrayals of crises on the new channels of communication. Part of the reasons for the dependency of the users of the social media on them is contained in the next paragraph that further elucidates the significance of dependency theory to this study. As new technological means of communication, the social media enjoy their users dependence greatly as they (the social media) offer people the opportunity to participate in communication contents gathering and dissemination. This feature might be one of the reasons for many people's choice of the social networking sites in communication today as captured by (Idakwo, 2011, p. 23) who states that "social media have become a mainstream activity and have become a major mode of communication..."

Another part of the provision of the theory that makes it germane to this paper has it that media users' "level of dependency is related to (a) 'the number and centrality (importance) of the specific information-delivery functions served by a medium,' Baran (2010, p. 369). In this tenet of the theory, we could picture the fast message delivery, interactive mien and quick feedback mechanism characteristics of the social media as part of the reasons for their users' dependency on them. This important role which the social media play in the delivery of the communication contents shall be crucial to the users who read or watch the Boko Haram insurgency through them. The reason being that most people are often eager to know as soon as possible and respond to the communication about the actions undertaken by the militant sect. That stems from the enormity of the havoc which the activities of the insurgents have been causing to Nigerians and the non-Nigerians alike.

## Literature Review

### a. Perception

Perception is a multifaceted concept that has many determinants depending on the disposition of the individual towards a given issue vis-à-vis the value their society attaches to it. Thus, the perception of any subject most often varies from place to place and culture to culture as well as person to person. The societal viewpoint on any matter could play a great role on the aggregate perception of the individuals with relation to some issues. Folarin (20002, p.70) explains these views better when he states that "perception depends on a complex of variables such as psychological disposition, past experiences, cultural expectations and social relationships." By a way of definition, Akpan (2007, p. 339) sees the term "perception as the natural ability to understand or notice something quickly." Also, in defining perception, Burgoon and Ruffner (1978, p.104) cited by Folarin (2002, p. 70) aver that perception is "the process of making sense out of experience." Like in this study, the effort is geared towards grasping the sense or feeling the social media users get out of the portrayals of the Boko Haram crises on the social networking sites. From the foregoing, it could be deciphered that users' perception of the phenomenon shall largely be a product of how Nigerians decode the issue of audience exposure to crises. Their perceptions might equally be a product of impression about Boko Haram by each individual's religious and socio-cultural milieu within the country, which is made up of multi-religious and ethnic/cultural groups.

### b. Mass media and reportage of crises

Journalists reporting conflict situations are coerced into a quadruple dilemma. This arises from the premise that they are expected to fulfill the ultimate roles of journalism to the public- provision of truthful information, equitable (balanced) reportage of two conflicting parties, accurate and adequate reportage that would enable "citizens...to form a well-informed opinions," (Nord and Stromback, 2006, p.85) as well as not over-blowing the report to avoid inflaming the audience. Another critical demand to the reporter is the need to present the report in a manner that would draw listenership, readership and or viewership for patronage of his/her medium. So, the journalist covering crises has to grapple with these onerous challenges mentioned.

In all these, it is pertinent to assert that reportage of any conflict is non-negotiable for the media. This is why Manoff (2011) cited by Adamu (2013, p. 82) argues that "journalism is the handmaiden of conflict. The epistemology of journalism is inherently conflictual in the same way our system of jurisprudence is inherently adversarial." Adamu (2013) also argues in support of the opinion by stating that "journalists' news judgment is predicated on conflict and our definition of conflict. Audiences' love and savour conflict. This is the framework within which journalists' labour." These scholars' ideology on the subject matter in this part of the study shall be useful in making clearer the correlation between the media and conflicts in the practitioners' assessment of news.

However, Hetsroni (2007, p. 759) quoting (Centerwall, 1989; Lichter, 1999; Parents Television council, 2003) captures the allegation leveled against the television in particular with reference to portrayal of crises and violence by observing that "for decades, the networks have been loudly accused for causing irreversible mental damage to innocent viewers by exposing them to explicit violence." In a nutshell, journalists have been accused over the years of deliberately feeding the audience with crises and violence scenes for the sake of promoting their organization's profit motive mainly.

### c. Media ethics on crises reportage

There are ethically established principles that guide reportage of crises and violence on the mass media as public channels of communication. The principles were provided because if reporting of conflicts is not handled with decorum, it could engender more harm to the society instead of providing a panacea for an ongoing crisis. This could inevitably cause great damages to the members of the public and this is what the mass media as responsible social institution should endeavor to avoid. Media audience could be highly ignitable, so concerted effort has to be put in place all the time to ensure that their sensibility is not set ablaze. Perhaps, Okoye (2011, p. 268) had that in mind when he cautions that “media contents that portray...scenes of...violence should be handled with caution.” The Code of Ethics for Nigerian journalists puts it better, as it states in clear terms that media personnel should endeavour to eschew depiction of violence textually or pictorially. In its item five, the code provides that “a journalist should not present lurid details, either in words or picture, of violence,..or horrid scenes.”

Now that the use of the social media is a trendy fact, it is high time efforts of the mass media be redoubled in taking precautionary measures on the portrayal of violence and conflicts to the populace. The reason for this is not far-fetched, and they include the point that the social networking sites have the capabilities of enabling easy mobilization of people more than the conventional media. This could be gleaned from the reason that the audiences (users) are interconnected virtually by cellular phones and other mobile telecommunication devices. With these gadgets, scattered and divergent multitude of people can receive information and communication instantaneously on any issue. They (social media) could as well engender negative mob actions as Ezeah, Asogwa and Edogor (2013, p.23) state that “the social media by their nature have the capabilities of ... ‘inflaming’ the audience.”

### d. The Boko Haram menace in Nigeria

The Boko Haram incidence is a grievous conundrum threatening Nigeria as a sovereign nation. The country is really not at war but the Boko Haram insurgents have held some parts of the country hostage that is more dangerous than being at a full warfare. The menace is equated with the Nigerian-Biafran war which tore the country apart for about three years of its span, but the Boko Haram saga has lasted persistently for about five consecutive years with wanton destruction of lives and property of the citizenry. With reference to the enormity of the Boko Haram crisis, Nigerian President observes that “with the exception of the civil war, never before in the history of our country have we faced the level of threat we see today,” Jonathan (2014). Citing other scholars and sources Blanquart (2012, p. 30) explains vividly that, “Boko Haram can be understood as an Islamist insurgency that has risen from political and religious discontent within Nigeria (Adasoji, 2011; Onuoha, 2012; Soloman, 2012). This extremist sect threatens the security, sovereignty and stability of Nigeria, particularly northern Nigeria, by a range of high profile attacks on the military, police, schools, political figures and other infrastructure (Nicoll, 2011; Think Security Africa, 2011).”

Initially the operation of the Islamic sect was against promotion of western education, which the group saw as inimical to the propagation of their version of Islamic religion. But with time, the Boko Haram changed their modus operandi and included in their attacks destruction of public, individual and international organizations’ property, killing and maiming of all class of people in the country. The militant sect is presently at war with the Nigerian state defence and security operatives who attack the faceless group in an attempt to keep the territorial integrity of the nation. Perhaps, Brinkel and Ait-Hida (2012, p.1) capture how the sect has been in the following words:

Nigeria has recently been confronted with increased terrorist activity by a group called Boko Haram. This group has been able to survive counterterrorist measures by the Nigerian government and has increased its attacks on targets inside and outside its traditional area of operation. On Christmas 2011, at least 25 churchgoers were killed. Earlier, Boko Haram hit the headquarters of the United Nations in Abuja, Nigeria’s federal capital, in a suicide attack, leaving at least 23 people killed and more than 80 injured.

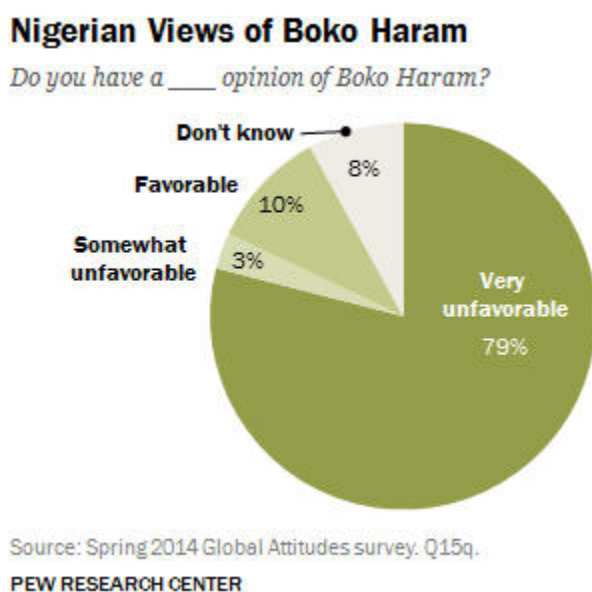
Through their nefarious activities, the Boko Haram sect has severely caused Nigeria great economic and other losses. Perhaps, as a result of that, the sect has irked most right-thinking Nigerians as the citizenry live in fear of their fellow citizens who have taken to violence against the state and her people. No wonder, in a study entitled ‘Print Media Framing of Boko Haram Insurgency in Nigeria: A Content Analytical Study of *the Guardian, Daily Sun, Vanguard* and *Thisday* Newspapers,’ Okoro and Odoemelam (2013, p.93) recommend that as measure to help the efforts of government in combating insurgency that “Nigerian press should be encouraged in reporting terror related news stories positively (emphasizing on policy actions and response to the situation) especially when it is proven that government is channelling effort to such direction.”

Perhaps, the greatest harm of the Boko Haram menace is not only the threat of their activities to disintegrate Nigeria but giving impetus to springing up of other related violent groups in the country, for instance Oftedal (2013, p.37) reveals that:

In January 2012, a group known as Ansaru announced its formation. Its exact relationship to Boko Haram remains unclear, but according to Militant Leadership Monitor (2012b), Ansaru most likely broke away from Boko Haram because of disagreements over Boko Haram's killing of Muslims, which Ansaru has characterized as "inhumane" and "inexcusable." Ansaru is suspected to have been involved in six major incidents: four kidnappings of foreigners, an attack on a detention facility in Abuja, and an attack on Nigerian soldiers heading for Mali (Zenn 2013c: 2). While six incidents are insufficient to draw any firm conclusions, Ansaru seems to be more anti-Western and internationally oriented in its targeting practice than Shekau's Boko Haram

Nigeria has experienced series of internal religious and socio-political crises spearheaded by distinct insurgent groups; however, recorded history has it that none but the Boko Haram insurgency only attracted classification as terrorist team. Akpan, Ekanem, Olofu-Adeoye (2014, p. 151) corroborated this opinion as they aver that "the Boko Haram fundamentalist Islamic group is the first insurgent organization in Nigeria to be classified as a terrorist organization by the United States of America and its allies." Nigeria as a country narrowly escaped classification as a terrorist nation by the international community owing to the violence and atrocities which the Boko Haram sect perpetrates. Probably, the magnitude of the sect's mayhem informed why Nigerian views about them were highly rated unfavourable (79%) in the survey result of Pew Research Centre (2014) presented below:

Figure 1: Nigerian views of Boko Haram



### Methodology

Survey research design was used for this study as people's views constituted the source of primary data collection. The population of the study comprises all postgraduate students of the University of Nigeria, residing in the institution's postgraduate (UNN-Odili) hostel located in Nsukka Campus. The hostel has an estimated 177 independent rooms with each being occupied by three students as roommates. That is to say 177 x 3, this gives a total number of 531 students living in the basement, first floor to the fourth floor making up the hostel. The choice of these students was because given their level of education most of them are users of the social media and there is an internet service within the hostel premises that could enable students use most of the new media.

The sample size is 300 chosen in accordance with the rule given by media researchers, Wimmer and Dominick (2011, p. 103) who direct that one guideline recommended for a multivariate studies like this "is as follows: 50=very poor; 100=poor; 200=fair; 300=good; 500=very good; 1,000=excellent" (Comprey & Lee, 1992).

The sample technique involves a multi-stage sampling technique which was chosen as both probability and the non-probability sampling techniques were applied in the selection of the sample elements. By the

application of simple random sampling, students occupying the second floor and the fourth floors of the hostel were selected. Through the use of quota sampling technique, we chose to study equal number of male and female students within the chosen floors. Based on that, students on the two floors (second floor for female and fourth floor for male) initially selected using simple random sampling were subsequently chosen. Each of the floors has one hundred and twenty legal occupants, thus the two floors have two hundred and forty students. Also, we used quota sampling to randomly select thirty male and thirty female occupants further from first and third floors where male and female students live respectively. This brings the number studied to three hundred students.

The instrument of data collection for the paper was the questionnaire. The content of the instrument was structured using the Modified Likert-type Scale (proposal 2) as recommended by Nworgu (1986) cited by Nworgu (2006, p. 146) because we (the researchers) deemed it most suitable for meeting the objectives of this work. With this modified scale the responses were assigned values as follows: Strongly agree=4, Agree=3, Disagree=2, Strongly Disagree=1 and Undecided=0.

For test of validity, a draft of the measuring instrument was submitted to a senior lecturer in mass communication that went through it and pointed out certain facts to add as well as others to be removed. After that, by face validation, he confirmed that it has comprehensible statements that could elicit appropriate answers to the research questions of the study.

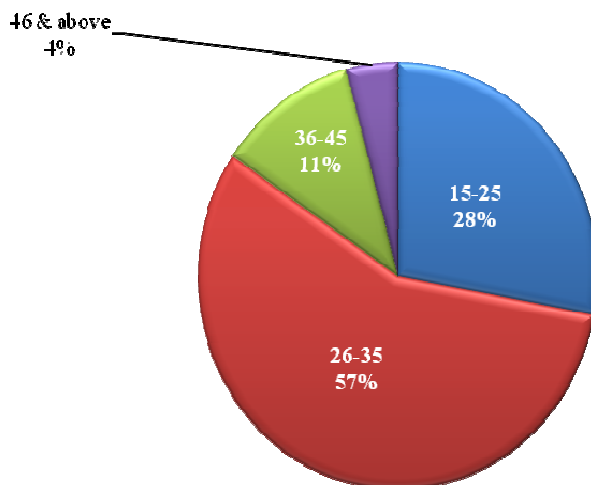
The reliability of the measuring instrument was ascertained by administering a pre-test questionnaire randomly to selected respondents within some of the rooms in the hostels. The result of the pilot test was not presented in the final analyses of this paper, as it was used for confirming the reliability of the measuring instrument.

We distributed three hundred copies of questionnaire and two hundred and ninety were filled, returned and were used for the analysis. For data presentation and analysis, a pie chart with simple percentages was used for analyzing the age; other demographic data such as religious background and marital status of the respondents were analyzed using a table and simple percentage; while tables with mean and standard deviation were used in the analyses of responses of the respondents' on their views about items presented on the corpus of the questionnaire.

The mean cut-off mark for the responses used for the paper is 2. Meanwhile the standard deviation cut-off point used is 2.5. This mark shows the level of variance (significance or insignificance); if a deviation is up to this point or above, it means significant variance, and vice versa.

#### Data Presentation and Analysis

**Figure 1: A pie chart showing age distribution of the respondents**



*Source: The researchers' field work*

The data on the figure above show that respondents on the age brackets of 26-35 representing 57% of the sample have the preponderance; they were followed by respondents in the ages 15-25 which represent 28% of the sample; respondents in the age bracket of 36-45 representing 11% of the sample followed next, as respondents in the ages of 46 and above representing 4% of the sample have the least.

**Table 1: Religious background and marital status of the respondents**

| Religion     | Responses  | Percent (%) | Marital status  | Responses  | Percent (%) |
|--------------|------------|-------------|-----------------|------------|-------------|
| ATR          | 0          | 0           | <b>Single</b>   | 273        | 94%         |
| Christianity | 288        | 99%         | <b>Married</b>  | 17         | 5.8%        |
| Islam        | 2          | .6%         | <b>Divorced</b> | 0          | 0           |
| <b>Total</b> | <b>290</b> | <b>100</b>  | <b>Total</b>    | <b>290</b> | <b>100</b>  |

*Source: The researchers' field work*

From the table above, none of the respondents (accepted to be an adherent of African Traditional Religion (ATR), a total of 288 respondents representing (99%) of the sample accepted to be members of Christianity; while 2 respondents agreed that they are adherents of Islam. The second section of the table containing marital status data of the respondents shows that 273 of them representing (94%) are singles; 17 respondents which represent (6%) are married people, while none of the respondents is a divorcee.

**Table 2: Social media users and non-users**

| <i>Question</i>  | <i>Responses</i> | <i>Frequency</i> | <i>Percentage</i> |
|--|------------------|------------------|-------------------|
| Please do you know and use any of these social media such as: Facebook, LinkedIn, Twitter and YouTube? | Yes              | 290              | 100%              |
|  | No               | 0                | 0                 |
|  | <b>Total</b>     | <b>290</b>       | <b>100</b>        |

*Source: The researchers' field work*

The data on the above table were used to ascertain the respondents' knowledge and usage of the social media, their responses show that all of them 290 which represents (100%) accepted that they know as well as make use of any of the social media such as Facebook, LinkedIn, Twitter and YouTube.

### Analysis of Research Questions:

Before we delve into the analyses of the research questions, we deem it necessary to explain the following used here below:

To get the Mean cut off point =  $(SA+A+ SD+D+U) \div 5$

$$(4+3+2+1+0)=10 \div 5$$

Thus, the mean cut-off point is  $(10) \div 5= 2$

To get the standard deviation cut-off point=  $\frac{(4-2)^2 + (3-2)^2 + (2-2)^2 + (1-2)^2 + (0-2)^2}{5-1}$

$$\frac{2^2 + 1^2 + 0^2 + 1^2 + 2^2}{4} = \frac{4+1+ 1+4}{4}$$

So, the standard deviation cut-off point is  $10 \div 4 = \sqrt{2.5}$

**Research Question 1: How do Users Perceive Portrayal of Boko Haram Crises on Social Media?**

**Table 3: Items used to proffer answer to research question one**

| <b>Responses</b>         | <i>Boko Haram crises portrayal on social media is over-blown</i> | <i>Boko Haram crises portrayal on social media is excessive</i> | <i>Boko Haram crises portrayal on social media is moderate</i> | <i>Boko Haram crises portrayal on social media is never over-blown</i> |
|--------------------------|--|---|--|--|
| <i>Strongly agree</i>    | 140  | 120   | 5  | 2  |
| <i>Agree</i>             | 145  | 165   | 3  | 1  |
| <i>Strongly disagree</i> | 3  | 4   | 139  | 142  |
| <i>Disagree</i>          | 2  | 1   | 143  | 145  |
| <i>Undecided</i>         | 0  | 0   | 0  | 0  |
| <i>STD</i>               | .55727   | .57089  | .54508   | .60349   |
| <i>Mean</i>              | 4.4610   | 4.3872  | 2.5320   | 2.5387   |

*Source: The researchers' field work*

The data on column two of the table has a mean of 4.4610 with a standard deviation of .55727. The reason for the high mean recorded was because in favour of the statement 'Boko Haram portrayal on the social media is over-blown,' greater number of the respondents (140 and 145) chose the options: strongly agree and agree which have the greatest weight (4 and 3) as contained on the Modified Likert-type Scale (proposal 2) used for the study. There is a low figure for the standard deviation, which is an evidence of significance difference on the number of respondents that accepted the above statement and those that declined to it. The reason for that is because lower number of the respondents (3 and 2) chose the options: strongly disagree and disagree respectively which have the least weight (2 and 1) on the Modified Likert-type Scale (proposal 2) which we adopted for the paper.

The data presented on column three have the mean of 4.3872 with a standard deviation of .57089. This high mean rate was recorded as a result of the fact that greater number of the respondents (120 and 165) concurred with the statement that 'Boko Haram crises portrayal on social media is excessive,' as they (the respondents) chose the options: strongly agree and agree, which have the greatest weight on the Modified Likert-type Scale (proposal 2) which was used for the paper. The responses have a low rate of standard deviation; the import is that there is a significance variance among those who accepted the above statement and those who rejected it. The reason for the low deviation was that fewer respondents (4 and 1) were of the options: strongly disagree and disagree which have the least weight on the Modified Likert-type Scale (proposal 2) used for the study.

The data on column four have the mean score of 2.5320 with the standard deviation point of .54508. The reason for this rate of mean is that all the respondents (144 and 146) chose the options strongly disagree and disagree on the statement 'Boko Haram crises portrayal on the social media is moderate.' The options though possessing a lighter weight on the Modified Likert-type Scale (proposal 2) adopted for the paper pulled the mean score as none of the respondents chose the options that possess the greater weight on the scale used, that accounts for the standard deviation recorded on the column.

The data on column five have the mean rate of 2.5387 with the standard deviation point of .60349. The reason for this mean score is that greater respondents (144 and 146) chose the options strongly disagree and disagree on the statement 'Boko Haram crises portrayal on the social media is never over-blown.' The options though possessing a lighter weight on the Modified Likert-type Scale (proposal 2) adopted for the paper drew the mean score as fewer respondents (2 and 1) chose the options that possess the greater weight on the scale used. Also, that accounts for the standard deviation recorded on the column.



**Research Question 2: Which of the Social Media are more of the Boko Haram Crises Portrayed on?**

**Table 4: Items used to answer research question two of the study**

| <b>Responses</b>         | <i>Boko Haram crises are portrayed more on Facebook</i> | <i>Boko Haram crises are portrayed more on Twitter</i> | <i>Boko Haram crises are portrayed more on LinkedIn</i> | <i>Boko Haram crises are portrayed more on YouTube</i> |
|--------------------------|---|--|---|--|
| <b>Strongly agree</b>    | 141   | 37   | 3   | 21   |
| <b>Agree</b>             | 129   | 45   | 2   | 82   |
| <b>Strongly disagree</b> | 7   | 72   | 51  | 2  |
| <b>Disagree</b>          | 11  | 97   | 93  | 91   |
| <b>Undecided</b>         | 2   | 39   | 141   | 94   |
| <b>ST.D</b>              | .50077  | 1.23058  | .76284  | 1.38794  |
| <b>Mean</b>              | 4.5084  | 2.8384   | 1.6835  | 2.4882   |

*Source: The researchers' field work*

The data on the second column of table four above have the mean rate of 4.5084 with the standard deviation of .50077. The mean point is high because in their response to the statement 'Boko Haram crises are portrayed more on Facebook' all the respondents chose the options: strongly agree and agree, which have the greatest weight on the Modified Likert-type Scale (proposal 2) used for the paper. The same reason is behind the standard deviation point recorded on the column, as none of the respondents selected the other options available at all.

The data on third column of table four show the mean of 2.8384 with standard deviation of 1.23085. The standard deviation recorded in the column is not too far from mean score, because in their response to the statement 'Boko Haram crises are portrayed more on Twitter,' greater respondents chose the options strongly disagree, disagree and undecided, the mean came up to 2.8384 because although fewer respondents were of the options strongly agree and agree, their points (strongly agree=4 and agree=3) have the greatest weight on the scale used, while the standard deviation score could not reach the cut-off point as the weight attached to the responses: strongly disagree, disagree and undecided is less (i.e. 2, 1 and 0 respectively).

The data presented on column four of table four above show the mean score of 1.6835 with the standard deviation of .76284. This mean recorded is lower than the mean cut-off point for the study. The reason is because in their response to the statement: 'Boko Haram crises are portrayed more on LinkedIn' all the respondents chose the options: strongly disagree, disagree and undecided, while none of them chose strongly agree or agree with the statement. That accounts for the low standard deviation recorded. This invariably portrays that the respondents overtly declined to the statement for the column.

For the data presented on column five of table four the mean recorded is 2.4882 with the standard deviation of 1.38794. The standard deviation for the column does not vary significantly with the mean as in their response to the statement 'Boko Haram crises are portrayed more on YouTube,' greater number of the respondents (91 and 96) chose the options disagree and undecided respectively; while fewer respondents (21 and 89) chose the options strongly agree and agree respectively which have greater weight on the scale used.

**Research Question 3: Which age group portrays more of the Boko Haram crises scenes on the social media?**

**Table 5: Items used to answer research question three of the study**

| <b>Responses</b>         | <i>15-25 years</i> | <i>26-35years</i> | <i>36-45years</i> | <i>46 and above</i> |
|--------------------------|--------------------|-------------------|-------------------|---------------------|
| <b>Strongly agree</b>    | 132                | 142               | 38                | 7                   |
| <b>Agree</b>             | 140                | 95                | 137               | 4                   |
| <b>Strongly disagree</b> | 4                  | 11                | 7                 | 129                 |
| <b>Disagree</b>          | 2                  | 13                | 99                | 131                 |
| <b>Undecided</b>         | 12                 | 29                | 9                 | 19                  |
| <b>STD</b>               | .62286             | .50082            | 1.12933           | .54508              |
| <b>Mean</b>              | 4.4310             | 4.4949            | 3.4040            | 1.4680              |

*Source: The researchers' field work*

The data on column two of table five above have a mean score of 4.4310 with the standard deviation of .62286. The high mean recorded for the responses was because greater number of respondents (132 and 140)

chose the options: strongly agree and agree accepting that ‘people within the ages of 15-25 portray more of the Boko Haram crises on the social media.’ The options have the greatest weight on the Modified Likert-type Scale (proposal 2) used for this study. With that greater number on the options (strongly agree and agree), fewer respondents chose options having the least weight on the scale used for the work, that is responsible for the lower standard deviation recorded on the column.

The data displayed on column three of table five above have the mean rate of 4.4949. This high mean was recorded because greater part of the respondents (142 and 95) chose the options: strongly agree and agree accepting that ‘people within the ages of 26-35 portray more of the Boko Haram crises on the social media.’ The options possess the greater weight on Modified Likert-type Scale (proposal 2) used for this paper. The standard deviation for the responses on the column is .50082; this rate was recorded as fewer respondents chose the options possessing the least weight in accordance with the scale used.

The data presented on column four of table five above have the mean score of 3.4040. This figure is above the mean cut-off point for the study and that was because greater respondents (38 and 137) chose the options: strongly agree and agree accepting the statement that ‘people within the ages of 36-45 portray more of the Boko Haram crises on the social media.’ The options have the greatest weight on the Modified Likert-type Scale (proposal 2) used for this study. The responses on the column have the standard deviation of 1.12933. This point was obtained as fewer respondents chose the options having the weakest points on the scale applied for the study.

The data displayed on column five of table five above have the mean rate of 1.4680. The reason for this low mean recorded is because greater respondents (129 and 131) chose the options: strongly disagree and disagree rejecting the statement that ‘people within the ages of 46 and above portray more of the Boko Haram crises on the social media.’ Though the options have the weakest weight on the Modified Likert-type Scale (proposal 2) used for this study, the numerical strength they pulled (129 and 131) outweighed that of the respondents on the options with the strongest point (7 and 4) for strongly agree and agree respectively on the scale. This is responsible for the standard deviation rate of (.54508) recorded for the column.

### Discussion of Research Findings

In the course of this study, some findings have been recorded on the subject matter (users’ perception of crisis portrayals on social media: a study of Boko Haram insurgency in Nigeria). From the data obtained and analysed, it has been ascertained that users perceive crises portrayal on social media as being over-blown. This was one of the findings on research question one of this paper. In responding to the item used to find out whether crises portrayed on the social media are over-blown, the respondents accepted massively that the crises were over-blown on the media. Another related finding on the users’ perception of the subject matter is that crises portrayal on the social media is excessive. This perception is recorded on the third column of the items used in answering research question one.

After the above two items, the two other items on the table for research question one were used to ascertain whether the respondents were surely certain on their views about crises portrayal being over-blown and excessively shown on the social media. To test the certainty or otherwise of their responses, they were asked whether crises portrayal on the social media is moderate or never over-blown and they rejected the two views as greater number of the respondents strongly disagreed and disagreed with the statements, ‘Boko Haram crises portrayal on social media is moderate; as well as Boko Haram crises portrayal on the social media is never over-blown.’

With these above findings, it becomes clear that the use of social media is dragging the society to another era of yellow journalism. The genre of journalism characterized by portraying of “excess...crime, and disaster news...” (Baran, 2010, p. 94). Excessive portraying of crimes and disasters is really dangerous in the world of today that is a global village where information spreads speedily and permeates every nook and cranny like a wild fire. Now with the new communication technologies in vogue, greater number of audience could negatively react to an information portraying violence done miles away to their biological or psychographic related persons.

Obviously, uncontrolled and repeated displaying of certain crises or conflicts in a particular region of the globe; could spark a crisis in a different part of the world that has an affinity with the victims of the disseminated disaster, especially in the developing countries where unnecessary ethnic or clannish attitudes still hold sway. Over-blowing of crises whatsoever shall not be given a room to hibernate into, in the contemporary world that is laden with the yokes of terrorism and other forms of violent conflicts from one region to the other. The public’s right to know shall not for any reason be sacrificed at the altar of feeding them with over-blown and excess scenes of crises and or disasters. This could boomerang and unleash an untold disaster to the society.

Moreover, one of the objectives of the study was to unravel on which of the social media platforms where the Boko Haram crises were portrayed more on. Among *Facebook*, *Twitter*, *LinkedIn*, and *YouTube* that were presented to the respondents to rate which one do users depict more of the Boko Haram crises on, they (the

respondents) rated *Facebook* as the highest, followed by *Twitter*, *YouTube* and *LinkedIn*. The reason for massive placing of *Facebook* as the channel through where more of the Boko Haram crises are portrayed shall not be unconnected with the fact that it has been variously and widely recorded as the mostly used social networking site. So, its usage by greater number of people might have formed part of the reasons for the respondents' singling it out in the rating. Also, this is an indicator that the level of the users' knowledge of the medium is high as none of them chose the undecided option. One outstanding thing in the rating is that all the respondents accepted that more of the Boko Haram crises are portrayed more on *Facebook*. The high usage of the platform (*Facebook*) might be as a result of its availability to even users of less sophisticated mobile phones unlike other social networks examined in the paper.

Furthermore, another objective which this paper was set to achieve was to find out the age bracket that portray more of the Boko Haram crises using the social media. To establish that, the respondents were presented with different age categories to select the very group who portray more of the Boko Haram crises on the social media. Age brackets of 15-25, 26-35, 36-45, 46-years and above were given as options to the respondents. There was a preponderance of responses in favour of the ages 15-25 and 26 to 35 years as indicated by the level of the mean recorded on their columns. The next was 36-45 and the least was 46 years and above. The implication of the result is that younger people are found to be responsible for displaying more of the Boko Haram crises.

Then another reason could be that younger persons have been generally found to be greater users of the social media. There is also the possibility that more of them (young people within the ages: 15-25 and 26 to 35) are in the postgraduate hostels where the respondents were drawn from. A pointer to this could be seen in the demographic data for this study where respondents on the age brackets of 26-35 representing 57% of the sample dominated. In a nutshell, the message that could be deduced from the whole scene is that young people in Nigeria still have grip of the use of the social media more than the elderly.

### Summary

In this study that assessed the social media users' perception of crises portrayals on the new means of communication (the social media), we started it by given a general background to it. The explanation of the word 'users' was done and why the use of it in reference to social media message consumers and sources was clearly elaborated. Within the introductory part of the study, we looked into media and crises reportage. Also, the reason for exerting effort towards having the knowledge of the users' perception of message contents was offered.

The objectives that guided the study were provided and the problem it was set to uncover was stated and some literature were reviewed on the subject matter. Thereafter, we outlined the methodology for the study and follow it to the end with presentation, analyses of data and discussion of the research findings.

### Conclusion

This study found out that users' of the social media perceive portrayal of crisis on the media as overblown. Also, it was ascertained that they (users) view the portrayal of crises on the media as being excess. These two findings point to sensational representation of Boko Haram crises on the social media. It went further to inquire deeper on which of the social media site, people do exhibit more of the crises, and it found out, that it is on *Facebook* platform. This finding may be supportive to the popular view that *Facebook* is the most widely used social media in Nigeria. The paper further found out that younger people are fond of displaying or posting more crises scenes on the social media than the elderly.

### Recommendations

From the findings of this paper, we recommend the following:

1. **Media education-** Technologies have generously bequeathed to humanity plethora means of public communication. It is now the onus of the people to strategize and regulate how best to apply the new channels of communication to achieve the best result for the interest of human society. The task of devising ways of regulation of the usage of the new media is squarely a responsibility which mass media practitioners and academics have to shoulder for the nation. The media pundits have to educate the public to know the dangers of sensationalizing reports on social media and to desist from it. Also, people should be made to know that most of the contents of the social media messages are not depicting the reality as some unscrupulous persons blow them out of proportion. This could guide users not to promptly react negatively to certain reports without verification of the authenticity. In support of that view, Okoro and Agbo (2003, p.59) succinctly admonish that "it is vital that the new media audience should understand how to use the new media and to manage the barrage of information reaching them."

2. **Baring of young people from Facebook:** Like the Children Online Privacy Protection Act (COPPA) used to restrict children less than thirteen years old in America from joining *Facebook*, (Boyd, 2011), Nigerian Government has to bar some younger people from the use of *Facebook*. Hence, the medium is the mostly used platform by the youngsters in the country to over-blow and excessively portray crises of the Boko Haram insurgency. This becomes necessary taking cognizance of the frequent religious and socio-political crises rocking various parts of the country and the resultant losses the nation has incurred in the process. Where America as civilized as they are, deemed it necessary to enact an act prohibiting people below the age of thirteen from using *Facebook*, similar measure could be taken in Nigeria. Among other things, this shall help to reduce the rising tide of violence which this study has found that young people fan the embers of it using the medium.
3. **Updating the audience with the latest scoop:** The mass media should be updating the public with current reports of whatever that transpires in any part of the country as soon as possible. This could avert some dangers as members of the public would be well and early informed about situations for them not to react negatively based on messages received from some social media. If all these steps shall be taken, there will be better use of the social media in passing more useful information to the people and avoiding the negative use of the new communication tools.

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