

AUDIENCE PERCEPTION OF NIGERIAN TELEVISION STATIONS COVERAGE OF MILITARY OPERATION AGAINST BOKO HARAM

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Abstract

The media is very good at influencing public perception about events, institutions, activities, or situations. Media coverage can influence public opinion of military counterinsurgency actions in a favourable or unfavourable way. The purpose of this study was to determine how much the public believes the media's reporting of the military war against Boko Haram insurgency, how much the public believes Arise TV, a privately owned TV station, and why the public prefers Nigerian Television Authority. It also sought to determine how the public perceives the media's coverage of the military war against Boko Haram insurgency, how much the media influences the public's perception of the military incursion against Boko Haram, and what kind of influence Nigerian media coverage of the military war against insurgent has on the country's audience. Using the Social Judgement theory as its foundation, the study emphasised how audience perception—which is based on pre-existing attitudes or beliefs—involves acceptance, rejection, and noncommitment to media coverage. Using a survey, this study uses the quantitative research methodology. Results from field answers showed that ownership structure is a key factor in determining a media outlet's reporting, and the importance of information in security research necessitates appropriate ethical consideration. The study concludes that the privately owned media (Arise TV) reportage of military-insurgency fight was believed by the audience (respondents) than reportage of the government-owned media (NTA) which was tied to professionalism, and credibility thus recommends, public-owned media outlets to prioritize rebuilding their credibility and professionalism.

Keywords: Communication, Media, Security, Television, Audience, Insurgency

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Introduction

The overwhelming impact of mass media in our daily lives cannot be emphasized enough, even surpassing cultural institutions. It serves as our main sources of news and entertainment, and significantly influences our purchasing behaviours, voting inclinations, and academic interests. Its extensive influence is not unnoticed by politicians, businessmen, and government agencies, who consider it a potent tool of persuasion (Ngonso et al., 2023). Likewise, one of the fundamental assumptions about mass media is their ability to influence people's beliefs and opinions.

The audience is the central component of the media production. The audience comprises individuals from different backgrounds, including the educated, semi-

educated, uneducated, professionals, artisans, and others. However, the media producer or director is not concerned with the social class of the audience, but rather the viewership, which provides immediate satisfaction when it reaches a broad audience (Yacim, 2013). On the other hand, Ngonso and Uchenunu (2021) emphasize that the media play vital role in creating agenda for public utilization, which has led to media framing of topics dominating media discourses over the years. Frequent exposure to a specific media outlet can result in a biased view. For instance, the Nigerian Television Authority (NTA) could portray the military as in a positive light while Arise TV could present the military in a negative manner. The way the

media report the Nigerian military and Boko Haram insurgency can shape how the audience perceives them. It is crucial to conduct audience research as it helps to evaluate the characteristics and demographic attributes of the audience, which provides valuable information for future planning and decision-making.

Statement of Problem

In shaping public opinion, the media is highly proficient, whether it pertains to events, activities, institutions or incidents. The content of the media can have a positive or negative effect on how the general public perceives the military's efforts in the fight against insurgencies. That is why some socialist nations implement controls on media activities. Also, there exists a notable lack of trust and unease between the military and the media. Amidst accusations by the military that the media's coverage of insurgency is sensationalistic, provocative, and attention-seeking, it is crucial to acknowledge the media's integral role in holding the military accountable for their actions and informing the public of pertinent developments. Despite the significant body of research on the military-media dynamic in the context of Boko Haram, there exists a notable lacuna in the literature regarding audience perceptions of media coverage of military operations against this insurgency.

Objectives

The objectives of the study are to:

- i. Determine if Nigerian TV reportage influence audience perception of the military incursion against Boko Haram.
- ii. Find out the nature of influence Nigerian TV coverage of the military operation against Boko Haram insurgency has on the Nigerian audience.
- iii. Find out the TV outlet that audience tend to believes in their reportage of the military war against Boko Haram insurgency.

Research Question

- i. To what extent do the audience perceive the TV reportage of military operation against Boko Haram insurgency?
- ii. What is the nature of influence Nigerian TV coverage of military operation against Boko Haram insurgency has on the Nigerian audience?
- iii. What is the TV outlet that the media audience tend to believe in their reportage of the military operation against Boko Haram insurgency?

Scope of the Study

This study did not focus on the entire media establishment in Nigeria, but concentrates on two

media outlets Nigerian Television Authority (NTA) and Arise TV. NTA was chosen as all Federal government TV station comes under it as well the Federal government is fighting Boko Haram. Meanwhile, Arise TV was chosen because it is one of the top TV station in Nigeria been on Cable Station. It further concentration on the Nigerian military (Army, Navy, and Airforce) and their fight against Boko Haram insurgency within 2012-2022.

Significance of the Study

This study is significant for several reasons. Firstly, the data will help the military know how the media represents the operation against Boko Haram insurgency. Secondly, the findings of this study will provide useful data for military public relations department to strategize in fostering good relationship with the media. Finally, this research will be an additional reading material for potential research work on the subject matter; it will be advantageous to researchers and scholars as it will be an eye opener of the reality of audience view of the military fight against Boko Haram insurgency and media reportage.

Conceptual Framework

Broadcast Media Advocacy

Broadcast media ought to raise awareness of potential dangers and educate the public on how to handle such situations. The media is a vigorous advocacy device for pressure groups and social/political mobilization (Gever, 2015). Broadcast media advocacy is a sub-theme of advocacy journalism which compels media professionals to take an active part in the peace building process. It involves a thorough analysis of the root causes of conflicts, a nuanced presentation of possible solutions, and a highlighting of the critical need for conflict resolution. By adopting this approach, the media can effectively mitigate the escalation of conflicts and facilitate the achievement of enduring peace (Okey-Ogueji, 2016). Perlman (2016) asserts that efforts to reform television have never been solely about the medium itself. Instead, they have aimed to transform the potential for television programming. Advocates for broadcasting policy change have assumed a connection between what viewers watch on screen and their cultural and political views. Thus, media advocacy targets the "power gap" instead of the "knowledge gap" addressed by traditional media approaches (Wallack, 1994). Nevertheless, Gibson (2010) posits that one practical restriction is that media advocacy can only reach politicians and citizens seldom due to its reliance on journalists employed by commercial media.

Insurgency

Insurgencies undoubtedly pose one of the biggest risks to world serenity, safety, and expansion.

The occurrence has been progressively rising globally since the year 2000 (Nnamdi, 2019). Insurgency is an organised government through armed struggle and subversion. Insurgency occurs when political expectations exceed opportunities and force is deemed necessary (Metz, 2007). Three historical periods can be distinguished in the development of ideas about insurgency and counter-insurgency: pre-Maoist, Maoist, and post-Maoist insurgency (Betz, 2017). Maoism is a school of thought made up of the revolutionary philosophies and campaigns that Mao Zedong and his friends in the Chinese Communist Party developed between the 1920s and Mao's passing in 1976. Maoism has evinced itself as a revolutionary approach predicated on a unique revolutionary perspective that is not reliant on a Marxist-Leninist or Chinese setting (Britannica, T. Editors of Encyclopaedia, 2024).

All insurgencies have different causes, but generally speaking, insurgent groups form in response to the status quo. Acts of repression, oppression, disenfranchisement, or alienation are a few examples of the status quo elements that may encourage such a reaction (Yurtbay, 2018). According to Desai and Eckstein (1990) it is important to recognise that insurgency is a syncretism phenomena, a powerful amalgam of contemporary revolutionary organisation, guerrilla tactics, and the "spirit" of ancient peasant uprisings—their millenarian, apocalyptic passions. Traditionally, insurgency also known as guerrilla movements has their origins in the desire for political, social, or both and they use rebellion to achieve their objectives (Ford, 2007).

Audience Perception

Atkins (2015) submits that when information is transmitted to the audience, he/she will decode the message by running it through its attention, senses, and experience filter. The process restarts when the recipient reacts, creating a feedback loop. This is where the perception of the audience emerges. Thus, by filtering and interpreting data from the senses, the audience forms a meaningful picture of the outside world through the process of perception. This revolves into audience research which helps media organizations understand the demographic and psychographic characteristics of their audience to systematically organize and target a given public (Ojebuyi, 2020).

The news media exposes people to knowledge about the globe. Although one's views about the world are shaped by this information, news consumption also develops one's attitudes towards the media (Tsfati & Cohen, 2013). Media effects, such as agenda-setting,

appear to be moderated by audience confidence in media institutions. The media holds tremendous power in shaping the public's perception of the world (Olley, Akpor, & Chukwu, 2021). Ngonso and Uchenunu (2021) posit that the media's function has established the role of the media in forming and moulding audience perception.

Social Judgement Theory

Social Judgement Theory is a communication theory that describes how individuals understand and evaluate communications based on their prior attitudes and beliefs. SJT proposes that people evaluate persuading messages by comparing them to their views, which are divided into three separate groups: "latitude of acceptance," "latitude of rejection," and "latitude of non-commitment."

The concept of latitude of acceptance pertains to the spectrum of notions or viewpoints that an individual deems agreeable or acceptable. Conversely, the latitude of rejection pertains to the range of concepts or opinions that an individual finds disagreeable or unacceptable. Meanwhile, the latitude of non-commitment pertains to the spectrum of ideas or opinions that an individual remains neutral about and neither accepts nor rejects (Sherif, Sherif, & Hovland, 1965). The choice of whether to endorse, reject, or take a neutral stance on NTA or Arise TV's reporting of the military conflict against Boko Haram may be influenced by the audience's preconceived notions and convictions regarding the Nigerian military's effectiveness in tackling insurgency. Ultimately, the audience's perspective is likely to shape this decision.

Furthermore, this study utilizes the Social Judgement Theory to examine how audiences perceive Arise TV and NTA, as well as two different institutions - the government military and the Boko Haram insurgency group. According to the theory, audience perception is shaped by their pre-existing beliefs and attitudes that have developed over time.

Empirical Review

Iguoba et al. (2023) researched on the topic *Influence of Mass Media on the Image of the Nigerian Armed Forces Operation*. The study investigated how the Nigerian Armed Forces are portrayed by the mass media and how this portrayal affects public opinion towards them. They noted that, it is impossible to overstate the impact of the Nigerian Armed Forces on the nation of Nigeria; from its inception to the present, it has relied on their support, which is why it is important to study. Survey was carried-out on the people of Etsako East Local Government Area of Edo State. The results showed that the media has had a unenthusiastic effect on the image of the Nigerian

Armed Forces, causing moderate confidence in the public. The study concluded that the Nigerian Armed Forces should utilize the media to its advantage by preventing the spread of fake news on media platforms. The researchers recommend educating citizens on how to verify information on new media.

A study was conducted by Emina and Ikegbu (2020) on *the role of the military in the development of Nigeria*. The study highlighted that the country is facing poverty issues due to terrorism from various militant groups such as the Niger Delta Militant, Boko Haram, and the Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB). The study focused on the non-political and non-military role of the military and emphasizes that the military should engage in social projects to lift the country from insurgency instead of just fighting terrorism. The study recommends counter-insurgency through non-political and non-military means.

The above works of literature have examined the military relationship with Boko Haram insurgencies but have not considered the perception of the media audience on the military operation against Boko Haram insurgency.

Methodology

To achieve its stated objectives, this study adopted the survey research method. According to Ngonso (2017) this approach is regarded as being trustworthy for perception research such as finding out the audience's perception of media coverage of military operations against Boko Haram insurgency.

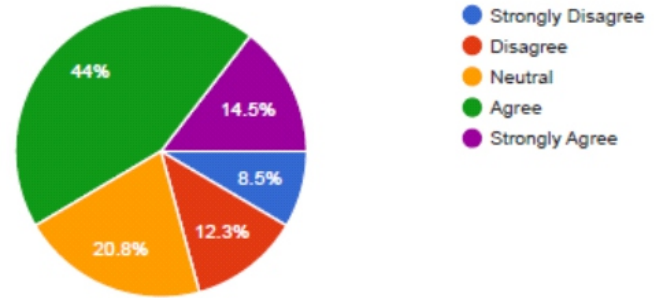
Viewers of the NTA and Arise TV comprised the study's population since they are the Colum of this study. The population is 17 million people viewers of NTA (NTA-Home, 2023). Arise TV viewers are 4.5 million people (Arise Media Group, 2023). Therefore, the total number of the subscribers of the two TV stations is twenty one million, five hundred thousand (21,500,000).

Taro Yamane sample size calculator was used in drawing 400 sample sizes from the population. Simple random sampling technique was employed in which everybody has an equivalent chance of answering the survey.

Presentation and Analysis of Data

Research Question One: Does Nigerian TV reportage influence audience perception of the military incursion against Boko Haram?

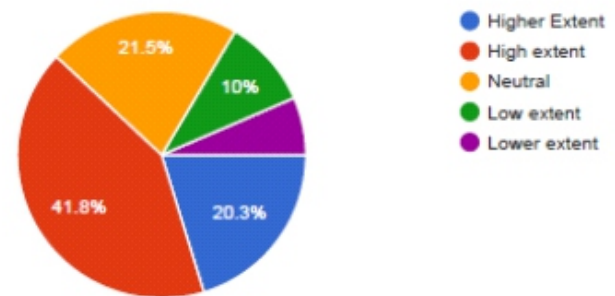
Chart 1: Arise TV and NTA coverage shape your perception of Nigerian Military War against Boko Haram Insurgency



Source: Field Survey, 2024

The chart above demonstrates whether or not Arise TV and NTA coverage shape audience perceptions of Nigeria's military campaign against the Boko Haram insurgency. The survey had 400 responses, with 8.5% strongly disagreeing, 12.3% disagreeing, 20.8% neither agreeing nor disagreeing, 44% agreeing, and 14.5% strongly disagreeing. This suggests that the majority of the audience accepts that Arise TV and NTA's coverage of the Boko Haram insurgency impacts their impression of Nigeria's military operation against the insurgency.

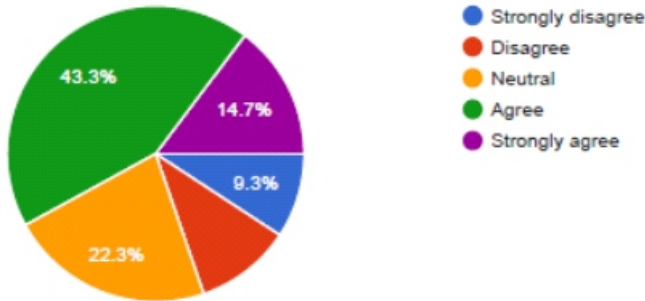
Research Question two: To what extent do you believe that Nigerian media coverage increases your awareness on the Nigerian military war against Boko Haram insurgency?



Source: Field Survey, 2024

Of the 400 respondents, 81 (20.3%) ticked higher extent, 41.8% ticked high extent, 21.5% ticked neither high nor low value, 40 (10%) ticked low extent, and 6.4% ticked lower extent. As a result, they are qualified to answer the remaining questions since they can relate to the coverage of the Boko Haram insurgency in the Nigerian media.

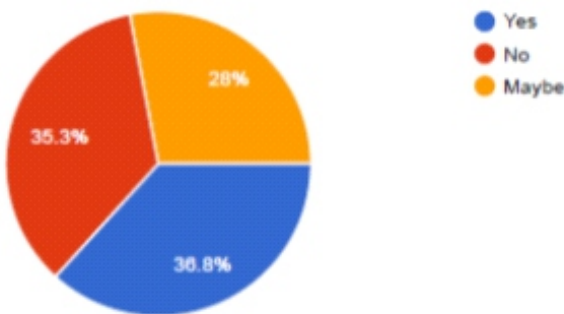
Question 3: Does the frequency of reportage by NTA and Arise TV affects the Nigerian military operation against Boko Haram insurgency?



Source: Field Survey, 2024

Chart 3 above displays showed the frequency of coverage by NTA and Arise TV and how it affected the interest of the 400 respondents. A significant majority of respondents 43.3% concurred that the media's coverage of the Boko Haram insurgency has influenced their perception of the conflict. This sentiment was further reinforced by a notable proportion 14.7% who expressed strong agreement. 22.3% adopted a neutral stance, neither agreeing nor disagreeing with the statement. 10.4% dissented, while 9.3% strongly dissented.

Question 4: Do you think that Nigerian TV coverage on the Military war against Boko Haram Insurgency creates a positive impression of the Nigerian military in your mind?

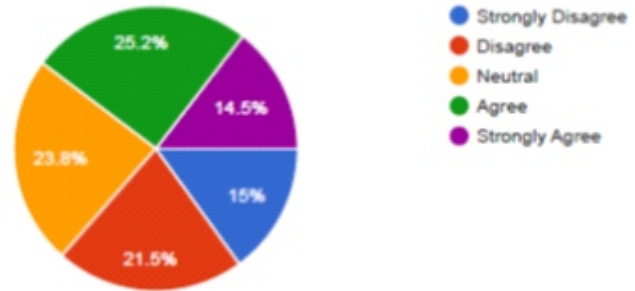


Source: Field Survey, 2024

The chart 4 above shows that a total of 36.8% respondents answered "yes" when asked if they had a positive perception of the Nigerian military war against Boko Haram insurgency as portrayed by the Nigerian media. 35.3% answered "no," and 28% were undecided.

it is clear that the majority of respondents think that the coverage of the military war against the Boko Haram insurgency has a positive impact on them.

Chart 5: Arise TV and NTA coverage on the Military war against Boko Haram insurgency portrays the Nigerian military as weak.



Source: Field Survey, 2024

The chart above indicates whether Nigerian media (Arise TV and NTA) coverage of the military fight against the Boko Haram insurgency portrays the Nigerian military as weak. Out of 400 responders, 25.2% agreed, followed by 23.8% who were neither agreeing nor disagreeing, 21.5% disagreed, 15% severely disagreed, and 14.5% strongly agreed. This means that Nigerian media outlets Arise TV and NTA have portrayed the Nigerian military as weak in the fight against the Boko Haram insurgency.

Discussion of findings

The first research question aimed to understand the audience's perception of the extent of media coverage of the Nigerian military war against the Boko Haram insurgency. The data indicate that there is a correlation between the frequency of coverage by NTA and Arise TV and the audience's interest in the Nigerian military's fight against the Boko Haram insurgency. This suggests that the more the audience watches, the more interested they become in the Nigerian military's incursion against Boko Haram. Ganiyu (2012) discovered that the frequency of Boko Haram reporting in the print media is valued since it is a newsworthy phenomenon in the society as cited by (Odu & Aluko, 2016).

Data also shows that although the gap between those who accept a positive impression (36.8%) and those who accept a negative impression (35.6%) is not large, 28% of respondents neither agree nor disagree with the Nigerian media's positive portrayal of the military's fight against Boko Haram. Nonetheless, the

majority of respondents believe that the Nigerian media is portraying the military's fight against Boko Haram in a positive light. Iguoba et al. (2023) identified three key factors to demonstrate the military's ability to defend, namely their strength, available soldiers (manpower), and weapons. On the issue of strength, respondents agree that the Nigerian military has the ability to fight the Boko Haram insurgency, with only 12.2% disagreeing. On the availability of soldiers, the majority of respondents agree, with only 13.5% disagreeing. However, when it comes to weapons, 20% of respondents strongly disagree, while 28.2% agree that this is where the problem lies. The Nigerian media has portrayed the Nigerian military in the war against the Boko Haram insurgency as having strength and available soldiers but lacking in weapons.

During the pilot study, different respondents complained about the comparison between Arise TV and NTA. Therefore, this study attempted to fill that gap by asking respondents who are the audience of Arise TV and NTA. The result revealed, respondents believe that NTA's reportage on the military war against Boko Haram insurgency is one-sided and if Arise TV is more professional than NTA in covering the military war against Boko Haram insurgency. Based on the responses of 35.8%, it appears that the audience feels NTA's reportage is one-sided, and that Arise TV is more professional in their coverage. This shows that the ownership structure is a major determinant of the audience's trust in one medium over another. According to Okoro and Chukwuma (2012) the reportage of the Boko Haram insurgency by the broadcast media has been observed to display a marked bias and glorify terrorism to a significant extent. But Anavberokhai (2023) in her study of the *Punch* and *Vanguard* newspapers' coverage of herders-farmers crisis found that the newspapers were objective in their reportage of the crisis. This again support the findings of this study, which showed that, private owned TV stations gave an objective account of the military fight against Boko Haram insurgency.

Bias media reportage may be viewed as problematic, as they have the potential to contribute to a distorted understanding of the situation and to promote negative outcomes. Media outlets must present a fair and balanced account of the facts, drawing from multiple sources and perspectives to provide a comprehensive picture of the situation. In doing so, they can help to foster a more nuanced and informed public discussion and promote a more peaceful and just resolution of the conflict.

Conclusion

It is evident from this study that the media is a tool in the fight against insurgencies and terrorism. The

media is an important tool in the effort to combat insurgencies. It can create audience perceptions that are either for or against the insurgency, and it can also generate interest and awareness about the war.

The study found how the media reportage on national security matters is handled. The way journalists cover and report on the issue can create either a positive or negative impression. From the study, it was discovered that the Nigerian military is seen as a structure with manpower and strength but without weapons to fight the Boko Haram insurgency. This is largely due to the coverage and reporting of the media.

Privately owned media (Arise TV) reportage of military-insurgency fight was believed by the audience (respondents) than reportage of the government-owned media (NTA) which was tied to professionalism, and credibility.

Recommendations

The following recommendations are imperative based on the findings of the study:

1. Public-owned media outlets should prioritize rebuilding their credibility and professionalism. This will foster trust and confidence in the audience and promote an environment of believability.
2. The media can be leveraged to disseminate information to the masses, gather intelligence, and increase public awareness of military efforts. By leveraging the media, the Nigerian military can enhance its ability to counter propaganda, instill public confidence, and promote transparency and accountability.
3. The utilization of media as an indispensable tool in the fight against Boko Haram and other insurgent and terrorist groups should be embraced by the Nigerian military. This approach can significantly enhance the efficiency and effectiveness of military operations.

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