



**MEDIA PRACTICE AMID INSECURITY IN NIGERIA: A FOCUS ON
#ENDSARS PROTEST, BOKO HARAM INSURGENCY, NIGER DELTA
MILITANCY AND HERDSMEN-FARMERS CLASHES**

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Introduction

In Nigeria today, many people are fearful of being attacked or killed by terrorists in the form of Boko Haram insurgents, Niger Delta militants, herdsmen, etc. Their fears seem to be based on the premise that the current administration have failed in the aspect of security by failing to protect the lives and properties of Nigerians. Poverty and lack of proper socialization seem to pose a great danger as the major reasons why Boko Haram keeps penetrating violent acts at different parts of Nigeria. In the event of the declaration of a state of emergency or a curfew in a state, when everyone is inside to avoid either unlawful killing or

Mass media means technology that is intended to reach a mass audience. It is the primary means of communication used to reach the vast majority of the general public. The most common platforms for mass media are newspapers, magazines, radio, television, and the Internet. The general public typically relies on the mass media to provide information regarding political issues, social issues, entertainment, and news in pop culture. Mass media is communication that is to a large group, or groups, of people in a short time.

Journalism in Nigeria was originally a product of missionary and philanthropic influences. In the spirit of humanitarian era, European missionaries in Africa found a useful weapon in the newspaper, which had become a crucial agency or organized public comparing and enlightenment. Before the advent of media, human beings have been communicating through several but uncivilized means of communication. Hence, the evolution of mass media as a source of sending information on medium of information, which is possible as discovery of science and technology, began in 20th century, which is often referred to as the age of mass communication. At the turn of the century, the motion picture industry was in its infancy, and radio and television were still to come. The mass media constitutes, newspapers, magazines, journals, flyers, periodicals, radio and television. Media, whether in radio which deals with



sound and sight or vision on even the newspaper, which is the first rough draft of history or written record of contemporary civilization, is reasonably the same. The aim of running any of the mass media is to disseminate information through experts or professionals who were the journalists.

All over the world, the role of media as the “fourth estate of the realm of governance” is indispensable in the socio-economic and political development of any nation, this is why few extravagant statements were made about it to impressively acknowledge its role. The activities or performance of the media is remarked as a “potent organ for sanity restoration”. In this case, the dissemination of information is aimed principally at reforming the society as well as keeping the populace abreast of what is going –on in the society.

Surveillance Function of the Mass Media

We have a need for information to satisfy curiosity, reduce uncertainty, and better understand how we fit into the world. Media informs public about different events, happenings and phenomenon. The information flow is necessary for unity and coherence if we live in the society of collectivity. Surveillance refers to the news and information role of mass media. This role can be subdivided into warning surveillance associated with the news media (information about pending threats such as floods, military attack, and depressed economic conditions) and instrumental surveillance associated with both news and popular media (transmission of useful information about news products, entertainment guides, stock market prices, etc.). Surveillance information also can come from books, films, television programs, and other types of literary culture that provides information on human issues. Information travels quickly via the electronic media. The benefit of this is instantaneous awareness; the disadvantage is that misinformation can travel just as quickly as accurate information, and speedy dissemination.

An important function of the media is to keep up a surveillance of all the happenings in the world and provide information to the human society. The media has the responsibility of providing news and cover a wide variety of issues that is of some service to the society. Media help maintain social order by providing instructions on what has to be done in times of crisis, thereby reducing confusion among the masses. Example: In times of natural disasters, war, health scares, etc., it is the role of the



media to create awareness by providing information on what is happening and of ways in which the disaster can be faced.

Surveillance of the environment is a more complex way of saying that a function of mass communications is to tell you about what's happening around the world and deliver that information to you. Surveillance refers to coverage of a wide range of important topics that impact society. Examples of this include newspaper articles about political decisions in Abuja, foreign correspondents reporting on wars in far-flung countries, and emergency alert systems that come through our radio waves.

Today, we have more sources than ever to get our news. Some of these have forever altered how traditional media choices like newspapers and television stations deliver news stories to us. Where once we might have tuned in on our televisions to watch information on a live police chase, today we can turn into these same broadcasts on social media sites like Facebook and Twitter. And don't forget about the internet. Almost anything you want to know (and a lot of stuff you don't) is available with a single click, eliminating for many the need to watch the six o'clock news.

Agenda-Setting Function of the Mass Media

What issues are important to you? Why are these issues of importance? Media coverage not only directs what we think but also shapes how we think. This influence provides media with a powerful tool to influence government and the way people view it.

Agenda setting is the idea that what the public thinks about is set by the media. The agenda setting theory was first introduced by Dr. Maxwell McCombs and Dr. Donald Shaw in 1972. This theory states that the news plays an integral part in the shaping of political realities. The amount of time spent on an issue and the information relayed in a news story, along with the story's position, determines how much a reader learns and the amount of importance placed on the issue. The agenda setting theory of McCombs and Shaw states that when the media reflect on the views of a candidate during a campaign, they are also shaping and determining the issues of importance. This can ultimately set the agenda for a political campaign.

Media provide cues to public which tells them where they should focus their attention. This way political reality is set by the media. The agenda-setting theory rests on two basic assumptions. The first is that the media filters and shapes what we see rather than just reflecting stories to the audience. An example of this is seeing a sensational



or scandalous story at the top of a broadcast as opposed to a story that happened more recently or one that affects more people, such as an approaching storm or legislative tax reform.

The second assumption is that the more attention the media gives to an issue, the more likely the public will consider that issue to be important. Another way to look at it: Mass media organizations aren't telling us what to think or how we should feel about a story or issue, but are giving us certain stories or issues that people should think more about. There is psychological and scientific merit to the agenda-setting theory. The more a story is publicized in the mass media, the more it becomes prominently stored in individuals' memories when they're asked to recall it, even if it doesn't specifically affect them or register as a prominent issue in their minds.

There are three types of agenda setting:

Public agenda setting: when the public determines the agenda for which stories are considered important.

Media agenda setting: when the media determines the agenda for which stories are considered important.

Policy agenda setting: when both the public and media agendas influence the decisions of public policy makers.

Social Responsibility of the Mass Media

The question of social responsibility in the media continues to be timely, as highlighted by recent controversies on the #EndSARS protest and other burning issues of national interest especially pertaining to security. Holding the press accountable for the level of responsibility of its actions implies having a clear idea of what this "responsibility" entails. In the words of Hodges who has attempted to assemble this kind of definition, "we cannot reasonably demand that the press give an account of itself or improve its performance until we determine what it is the press is responsible for doing" (Hodges, 1986).

Social responsibility in the media can be traced back to a report produced by the Commission on the Freedom of the Press, more casually known as the Hutchins Commission. The syntheses of the idea put forward in the Hutchin's Commission report became known as the social responsibility theory of the press (Schram and Patterson, 1956; Eze, 2011, p.85). In as much as the press carry out their traditional roles of informing, educating and entertainment, they should exercise more



responsibility. That is to say, the freedom given to the press should be attached with responsibility just as stewardship is attached with accountability (Obeagu, 2018, p.18).

Social responsibility extends to all spheres of public life, but each has its own peculiarities. An interesting definition of the essence of social responsibility in the media sphere is offered by Zoryana Haladzhun who points out that in their activities the mass media “must fulfill certain obligations to the society”, which “provides for publication of materials that meet high professional standards of information, accuracy, activity and balance” (Haladzhun 2017, p.70). The specific features of social responsibility in the media space is due to the facts that: Firstly, its subject matter is information disseminated by the media; Secondly, the legal entities with responsibility are the media, the individuals is their owners, editors and journalists; Thirdly, the user of the mass media production is the whole society; Fourthly, the relationship between the mass-media and society is governed by a special branch of a information law — a media law.

An Overview of Insecurity in Nigeria

The cycle of violence being unleashed on Nigerians by the fundamentalist group, Boko Haram has heightened serious fears among Nigerian populace and even the international community (Okpaga, Ugwu and Eme, 2012, p.77). The dangerous dimension the insecurity challenge has posed before the nation has become a source of worry since there is belief in some quarters in Nigeria that the trend has even gone beyond religious or political colouration. The dangerous trend has led to the bombing of everything within the sect’s reach with little or no provocation.

#EndSARS Protest

Youths across the country, mobilized through various social media platforms have taken to the streets in the past few days to protest against the activities of the Special Anti-Robbery Squad (SARS), which has long been accused of unlawful arrests, torture and extrajudicial killings. The Federal Government after a few days of protests was forced to announce that the squad has been disbanded. This, however, did not bring an end to the protests as the protesters claimed that similar announcements had been made in the past without any effective reform measures.



The massacre at Lekki punctuated more than two weeks of protest of police brutality in Nigeria. The hashtag #EndSARS began trending (again) on social media on Oct. 4. The immediate trigger was a video that showed a SARS officer shooting a young motorist in Ughelli, in Delta state, then pushing his body out of the car and driving off with the dead man's Lexus SUV. Within days, crowds of young people gathered in Nigerian cities to demand the abolition of SARS (Abosedo, 2020).

The SARS unit has come to embody some far deeper fissures in Nigerian society. Formed in 1992 to combat a wave of armed robberies and kidnappings, SARS was initially not a visible presence in Nigeria: its officers operated in the background without uniforms to catch violent criminals by surprise. The unit rapidly expanded in 2009 as the government sought to take on the rising tide of fraud and cultism on university campuses. But instead, it became the centre of consistent scandal, as officers indiscriminately used harassment and extortion against Nigeria's young people (Olaloku-Teriba, 2020).

Amnesty International documented at least 82 cases of torture, extrajudicial killings, extortion and rape by SARS between January 2017 and May 2020 (Attiah, 2020). According to their report, victims held in SARS custody have been subjected to "mock execution, beating, punching and kicking, burning with cigarettes, waterboarding, near-asphyxiation with plastic bags, forcing detainees to assume stressful bodily positions and sexual violence." Arrests and cases are rarely investigated. Despite the fact that Nigeria criminalized torture in 2017, no SARS officer has been convicted.

During the #EndSARS protest which started peacefully, many were killed and different state governments declared curfews. Amid this level of insecurity, media practitioners still risked their lives by going out to gather news to disseminate on the latest development of the protest.

Niger Delta Militancy

Militancy in Nigeria's Niger-Delta region is one of the earliest forms of organised rebellion and insurgency in the country spanning back to the early 90s. When foreign oil corporations degraded the Niger Delta regions following oil exploitation, minority groups in the region did not take it lying down. And while the intent was first justifiable, it has since resulted in oil pipeline vandalism, loss of lives, kidnapping, killing of security operatives; all leading to a meltdown of Nigeria's economy. Indeed,



the Nigerian government's failure to address the legitimate concerns of the population of the Niger Delta region has resulted in further deterioration of the security situation in the region. Also, oil exploitation and the politics of distribution of oil wealth have created disempowerment, frustration, and deprivation which has further exacerbated violence in the Niger-Delta.

Despite the burning nature of the region and the growing tensions as a result of pipeline bombings and vandalism as well as kidnapping of oil workers, journalists still go out in search of news as well as taking photographs for newspaper publications.

Boko Haram Insurgency

The Jihadist Boko Haram group is now synonymous to insurgency in Nigeria. In 2009, the group started an armed rebellion against the Nigerian government. And the death toll, 37,500 deaths since 2011. These casualties also include law enforcement with 2019 accounting for the demise of 750 operatives. According to the Global Terrorism Index, the group has grown to become the deadliest extremist group in the world. Besides the deaths, Boko Haram insurgency resulted in the displacement of about 2.5 million Nigerians. About 244,000 Nigerians now live as refugees as a result. A lot of journalists have been kidnapped by Boko Haram and bandits in the north while trying to cover the insecurity situation in the region. Obviously, media practice is one of the most difficult anywhere in the world. Without being guarded by police or other security apparatus, media practitioners are exposed to the dangers of the society posed by insecurity. A media practitioner working for a television/radio station will definitely have to be at work once it's time. A newspaper reporter must submit their news stories before deadline.

Herdsmen-Farmers Clashes

One of the major waves of insecurity in Nigeria is the farmer-herder clashes. Since 1999, these conflicts have left a body count of 19,000; only rising to prominence in recent years. According to the International Crisis Group, the mounting conflict between herders and farmers was six times deadlier in 2018 than Boko Haram insurgency. Over 1,300 people lost their lives between January and June 2018 because of these clashes. Since the violence escalated in January 2018, about 300,000 people in Adamawa, Benue, Nasarawa, Plateau, and Taraba States have fled their homes. A



2019 report by Foreign Affairs put the death toll from farmer-herder clashes at 10,000 within a two-year period.

Conclusion

The term media is a collective phrase that represents not only the press, cinema, radio, television and internet, but also to some extent, books magazines, pamphlets , direct mail literature, posters, folk media, and natural communication methods such as rumours, education and preaching. It is so termed because its reach extends to vast heterogeneous populations. Generally the mass media employ technological means to communicate to the masses. They are founded on the idea of mass production and distribution.

Media practice makes the practitioners exposed to danger and maybe endangered species giving they risk losing their lives trying to serve the public by being socially responsible while setting agenda for the masses through surveillance of the environment.

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