

INSECURITY IN NIGERIA: PERCEPTIONS OF SELECTED LAGOS STATE RESIDENTS ON NIGERIA NEWSPAPERS' COVERAGE OF CRIME ON THE GRATIFICATION OF THEIR SAFETY INFORMATION NEED

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Abstract

Insecurity of lives and property in Nigeria has continued unabated through crime perpetration of all kinds. All forms of violent crimes, including property crimes are reported in the newspapers virtually on daily basis. Concerned by what the feelings of the audience could be on the resonating outcome of Nigerian newspapers' crime reportage, the attendant palpable fear, anxiety, a sense of insecurity and whether or not the newspapers' crime stories gratified their safety information need, this study adopted a non-probability sampling technique and through an in-depth interviews probed into the perspectives of purposively selected Lagos State residents on Nigerian newspapers' coverage of crime and the gratification of their safety information need. Adopting purposive sampling technique, a total of twelve literate respondents, across the three Senatorial Districts (Lagos Central, Lagos East and Lagos West) who had lived and worked in Lagos State for at least five years preceding the study were interviewed. Findings revealed a sense of insecurity and palpable fear among the respondents; Lagos State is prone to crime; murder, robbery, kidnapping, while payment of ransom to secure the release of kidnapped victims were rife. The study revealed that the newspapers feasted on crime stories, but embraced episodic crime reportage. The newspaper crime stories were found educative and gratified the safety information need of the reader even as the police, judiciary and the political class were found culpable in crime festering in Nigeria. The paper recommends that newspapers should engage more in investigative reporting of crime by reporting it like an epidemic while the country's security personnel require constant intelligence report in addition to being proactive, and professional. The Judiciary should ensure the dispensation of justice in all crime cases.

Keywords: Crime Stories; Gratification; Insecurity of Lives and Property, Kidnapping; Safety Information.

The issue of insecurity in Nigeria has become something of grave concern to all well-meaning citizens most of who continue to wonder how the Country arrived at such dastardly situation where no one is safe; and worse still, rather than abate, the problem is escalating and now totally out of control--- (Oyewusi, 2022).

Introduction

Insecurity has become a major concern for Nigerians. It has created an unequalled and unprecedented fear in all and sundry in Nigeria. Both the Government and the governed have had their confidence shaken and doubtful of a day without a security-breach occurring somewhere in the Country (Rufai & Salawu, 2021; Rufai, 2018). The American Psychological Association regards insecurity as being multifaceted and that it pertains to an all-round sense of uncertainty or anxiety in respect of one's worth, abilities, and conveying the message one is at risk or in danger of something or someone. The negative impact of insecurity could be physical, mental, or emotional.

Insecurity limits one's capability to accomplish tasks. Efforts by the Federal Government of Nigeria to combat the scourge have been futile. The Military and other law enforcement agents appear overstretched and seemingly overwhelmed by the level of insecurity in Nigeria. Security breaches had occurred at unimaginable places. The Kuje Correctional Facility was successfully invaded by terrorists and inmates suspected to be detained Boko Haram insurgents freed (Ejiofor, 2022). The advance party of the President and Commander in Chief of the armed forces was attacked in Katsina and two policemen killed (Oyelude, 2022). Also, the Presidential Brigade of Guards was attacked and casualties recorded (Emperor, 2022). Earlier, there was the Owo massacre, where about forty worshippers were killed and several people injured in a Church. The import of these security skirmishes is that security of the high and the low in the Nigerian society cannot be taken as granted.

According to Williams (2015:1) "insecurity is the anxiety one experience (sic) when one feels vulnerable and insecure". Google search engine defines insecurity as "the state of being open to threat; lack of protection". Nigerians at the moment are indeed grappling with daily threats to life, business, movement, relaxation, sports and recreation, to say the least. Many factors can lead to insecurity. It can result from a traumatic event, crisis such as divorce or bankruptcy or a loss. It can also result from one's environment, as unpredictability or upset in daily life can cause anxiety and insecurity about ordinary routine events. Insecurity in Nigeria is informed by the failure of the State in allowing crime and criminality to fester and become an industry (Ajayi, 2017, Ngwama, 2014; Rufai, 2018).

Former Nigerian President, Muhammad Buhari in his 2022 "Democracy Day Broadcast confessed that he lives in grief on daily basis due to the seemingly intractable cases of killings, kidnappings, armed banditry, murder and other cases of crime and violence (*Punch*, Monday, 12th June 2022). It is in this context that this paper gauges the perceptions of selected Lagos State residents on Nigerian newspapers' coverage of crime and the gratification of their safety information need.

Literature Review

Evolution of Newspaper in Nigeria and Its Importance to the Study

A discourse of how the newspaper evolved in Nigeria is of importance to this study, because the newspaper is the main thrust of this study, hence, a brief on the origin and the

performance of the newspapers on the socio-economic and political spheres of the country would significantly enhance the quality of the study.

The evolution and emergence of newspaper in Nigeria predates both the colonial amalgamation of Nigeria of 1914 and the nationhood of Nigeria in 1960 (Oso, Odunlami & Adaja, 2011). Missionary activities were credited to have acted as the springboard for the development of newspapers in Nigeria, through Reverend Father Henry Townsend of the Church Missionary Society (CMS). This is captured in the words of (Oso, 2012) as follows: “The origin of the Nigerian press is closely linked to the Christian missionary’s zeal to educate, evangelize and civilize the ‘natives’ of their new colonies” (p.13). These feats were aided by schools and the printing press. These two factors were products of missionary activities towards their evangelism mission. Rev. Hope Waddell of the Presbyterian Church of Scotland Mission was at that time in Calabar, and had established a printing press. Aided by these factors, Rev. Father Henry Townsend, on 3rd December, 1859, (Oso, 2012) rolled out Nigeria’s first newspaper, titled, *Iwe Irohin fun Awon Ara Egba ati Yoruba (Newspaper for the People of Egba and Yoruba)*. This heroic deed sowed the seed of literacy and the act of information seeking from newspapers among Nigerians. Newspapers are regarded as informative and influential on behaviour (Altheide, 2003; Awake, 2005; Baran, 2001; Bello, 2015; Sacco, 1995; Soola, 2007), are sources of crime stories (Crowther, 2007; Surette, 1998), and are depended upon as elite information repertoires during disasters (Sommerfeldt, 2015).

Newspapers, as media of communication, shape culture, play an important role in business and affect the daily lives of millions, inform the public of important affairs and provide information on which many readers form opinions (Awake, 2005). The newspaper enjoys primacy among other forms of the media and demands a considerable degree of literacy from its readers. It is a primordial mass medium and a major purveyor in carrying stories about crime (Crowther, 2007; Jewkes, 2015; Soola, 2007). It is an unbound regular publication containing a variety of stories (Anaeto & Tejumaiye, 2009). It serves as a source of information about the happenings around us and at a distance to its audience. It is a durable medium and its contents are storable as reference materials.

The relevance of the emergence and the sustenance of newspaper publication in Nigeria to this study are underscored by: the establishment of reading culture and the promotion of literacy among the people, dissemination of information, especially crime stories to the audience, and the information seeking behaviour of Nigerian newspaper audience from Nigerian newspapers’ crime stories. The information seeking behaviour of media audience from newspapers is in tandem with the cardinal objective of Reverend Henry Townsend in establishing *Iwe Irohin fun awon Ara Egba ati omo Yoruba* in 1859 to promote literacy among the people. The development of newspapers in Nigeria took place in phases and can be broadly categorised into: Pre-independence (Missionary and the Colonial/Early press era (1859-1960); Independence period or the first Republic (1960-1966); the first military period (1966-1979); the second republic (1979-1983); the second military period (1984-1999) and to the current longest democratic period ever in Nigeria (1999 to date). Each of the periods impacted significantly on the media history of Nigeria, Nationalists struggles for Nigeria’s independence; the practice of journalism and newspaper business and newspaper readership in Nigeria (Oso, et al, 2011; Oso, 2012; Bello, 2015)

The missionary era marked the beginning of the culture of formal reading by the people of South-West, Nigeria, as characterised in the objective of *Iwe Irohin*, which was to promote literacy and inculcate the habit of reading in people, alongside exposing them to Western education and Christianity (Oso, 2012; Bello, 2015). The Colonial/Early newspapers focussed on reporting the political and social life in Lagos at the time and also the nationalists’ struggles for Nigeria’s

independence. Such newspapers included *Anglo African* by Robert Campbell (1863-1865); *Lagos Observer* (1882); *The Chronicles* (1908) and the *Nigerian Daily Times* (1926) among others (Oso, et al, 2011). Late Dr Nnamdi Azikwe's *West African Pilot* and the *Nigerian Tribune* established by Late Chief Obafemi Awolowo in 1949 (and still in existence as the only surviving pre-Independence newspaper in Nigeria) were among the many newspapers in Nigeria that contributed to the development of political consciousness of Nigerians as well as the political economy of the Country (Oso, et al; 2011).

The Military era was characterised by press censorship, arrests detention and even killing of journalists and the closure of newspaper houses regarded as threats to the government of the day (Oso, 2012). After the second Military incursion into governance in Nigeria came the current democratic dispensation. Unlike during the Military dispensation when the press experienced brutalization and numerous closures, one of the undeniable advantages of the current democratic rule in Nigeria is a freer press than what obtained during the military era. In this age of globalization, the Internet has made access to newspapers online possible and thriving and competing with hard copy of newspapers, thus making access to information more widespread, and censorship of media somehow difficult, if not impossible.

Despite the odds and encumbrances from the political class, the press in Nigeria has been vibrant, resilient and strategic to keep weathering the storms. According to an online publication by Squirrel PR (2022). *Punch, The Guardian, Vanguard, The Sun, Daily Trust, Nigerian Tribune* are among the twelve top rated newspapers in Nigeria providing their readership with news on crime, economy, health, security or a lack of it, politics, education, disasters among other happenings in the society. The online version of the aforesaid newspapers is available thus making access to information easy and accessible.

Newspaper Readership in Nigeria

The newspaper has been described as one of the oldest components of the modern era (Boczkowski, 2004) and also regarded as the primary model of information delivery (McQuail, 1994). The newspaper is crucial in opinion formation on domestic and foreign issues towards economic development and diplomacy (Olofin, 2012). The newspaper is an important source of information and could shape readers' thoughts (Awake, 2005). In an attempt to satisfy information need- a basic physiological need for human existence- human beings turn to various media, for information, education, entertainment and national mobilization of the public for national and international integration (Olofin, 2012). The newspaper is a credible source of information on social phenomena (Bello, 2015).

The newspaper has also been globally acknowledged as a source of crime information (Altheide, 2003; Chermak, 1994; Sacco, 1995; Surette, 1998; Young, 2005). The advent of the internet and the presence of online newspapers have not diminished the importance of the print medium of newspapers as a news source (Hiebert, Ungurait, Bohn, 1988). The newspaper is literacy medium and central to governance in any country. It is a vehicle for information dissemination and service delivery from the government to the people. It also serves as a medium through which government policies get to the public domain, hence, a go-between the government and the public.

A Brief Profile of the selected newspapers and the Justification for their choice

The choice of newspapers (*Vanguard, Punch, The Sun, Nigerian Tribune, and the Daily Trust*) for the study was purposive. Since the heroic deed of Rev. Henry Townsend in establishing

Iwe fun awon ara Egba ati Omo Yoruba (The newspaper for the Egba and Yoruba) in 1859 (Oso, 2012), many newspapers both privately and government owned, had existed and gone into extinction in Nigeria ever since (See Daramola, 2006; Salawu, 2001; Ngoa, 2012; Oso, Odunlami & Adaja, 2011). Currently, Nigeria has about one hundred and fifty newspapers of local, regional and national outlook (Bello, 2015).

In a recent web ranking of national newspapers in Nigeria, the five selected newspapers for this study were ranked thus: *Punch*, 1st, *Vanguard*, 2nd, *The Sun*, 5th, *Nigerian Tribune*, 6th and the *Daily Trust*, 7th (Make Money.ng, 2022). In addition, three of the selected newspapers, *Vanguard*, *Punch*, and *The Sun*, are based in Lagos and were established in 1984, 1977 and 2003 respectively. The fourth newspaper used in the study, the *Nigerian Tribune*, is located in the city of Ibadan (both Lagos & Ibadan are located in South West, Nigeria). It is the only existing pre-independence newspaper in Nigeria, having been established in 1949. The fifth newspaper, the *Daily Trust*, began operation in 1998, and is located in the Northern part of the country, Abuja (the seat of the Nigerian government), to be precise. It is credited as the largest circulating newspaper in Northern Nigeria (Make Money, ng, 2022).

The five newspapers share some characteristics. They are listed among the top ten newspapers in Nigeria having national spread and have existed for over a decade, going by their years of establishment (Nigeria Press Council, 2009). They are published in English, and English being the official language in Nigeria, makes them more acceptable to the readers than if the medium of expression had been in any other language.

Despite the dwindling economic fortunes of the newspapers, symbolized by low circulation of the newspapers (Oso, 2012), in line with the economic downturn facing the country, the selected newspapers, according to the Nigerian Press Council (2009), are widely read newspapers; have national spread in Nigeria, hence, adequate for this study. The newspapers publish on various issues like politics, business, health, finance, crime, law, environment, tourism, sports etc. and have been cited in scholarly articles and at different fora (Okidu, 2013). All the selected newspapers are available in hard copies and online versions, hence, easily accessible.

Theoretical framework

Uses and Gratifications Theory (U>)

The study is anchored on the Uses and Gratifications theory. The U & GT approach in communication studies and mass media research has a longstanding history (Liu, 2015). The uses and gratifications theory is a response and a challenge to the minimal effects theory. It was proposed to contest the notion of audience docility. McQuail (2005: 403), noted that early communication researchers mainly focused on media effects on children and young people with an emphasis on potential harm and that early theorists on media influence, concentrated on the impact of audience exposure to the media on behaviour. The turn of the 20th century, to say the least, marked the beginning of research on information seeking behaviour on the part of the audience. Studies in this respect date back to the beginning of empirical mass communication research. (Ketterer, 2000). The U & G has as its main theme an understanding of how and why the media audiences use the media in their daily routine.

Media Use and Gratifications

Gratification is the reward or benefit accruing from an individual media user's engagement with the media. Gratification has been identified to come from two sources: content gratification and process gratification (Rubin, 1985). Process gratification pertains to the practice of using the

media, excluding the media content. Such process gratification includes using the media for entertainment, distraction, or companionship. It relates to the act of using the medium itself. Content gratification on the other hand, relates to the message and the importance to the reader. It is about the message, and not the medium. Content gratification is crucial with respect to communication content and future correspondence. It is about the needs of the media user met by his or her engagement with a particular medium or media.

According to Maslow (1943) human needs are hierarchical. The safety and security needs of an individual must be satisfied before higher social needs could be attained. Safety needs are concerned with physical safety, order, stability, familiarity and control over one's life and environment (Parumasur and Roberts- Lombard, 2014). An important need crucial to this study is cognitive need. Cognitive need which is also referred to as information/surveillance need, is chiefly concerned with "seeking information about relevant events in immediate surroundings, society at large and the world" (Pitout, 2009: 392).

Other aspects of cognitive needs include, "seeking advice to enhance decision making choices, learning about important topics and self – improvement and gaining a sense of security through knowledge in the media" (Pitout, 2009:393). The media therefore provide media users an avenue to enhance their safety information need as a response to the confounding challenges such as pervasive crime and insecurity to lives and property. The media audiences according to Dominick (1993:49) "use media content as gratifications". These are the needs of the audience satisfied by the media. Uses and gratification theory (UGT) holds that media audience are at the liberty to choose to consume certain kinds of media in anticipation of a specific gratification.

The U & G has as its main theme an understanding of how and why the media audiences use the media in their daily routine. The advent of the various media has seen the U & G theory deployed to inquire into how the radio, newspapers, television, books, magazines and lately the various forms of the new media (e.g., phones, tablets, compact disks, computers), the internet and the social networking sites (SNS) are adopted by the user to shape and define their everyday activities. The importance of UGT to this study is underscored by the fact it investigated the use to which the respondents deploy newspapers' crime stories to gratify their safety information need.

Methodology

The study adopted in-depth interviews on the participants purposively selected for the study.

The demographics of the participants in the in-depth interviews are provided in Table 1.0

Table 1.0: Selected Participants' Demographic Information

| Participants | Age | Gender | Marital/ Status | Educational attainment | Years of residing in Lagos | Occupation | Monthly income range | LG/LCDA | Senatorial Districts |
|--------------|-----|--------|--------------------|---------------------------|-------------------------------|---------------------|-------------------------|--------------------|-------------------------|
| A | 49 | F | M | Degree | since birth | Poultry farming | Not disclosed | Lagos Island | Lagos Central |
| B | 52 | M | M | Degree | since birth | Media Practice | Not fixed | Kosofe | Lagos East |
| C | 50 | M | M | Post – Secondary | since birth | Banking | N120- N150:000 | Agbado/ Oke-Odo | Lagos West |
| D | 35 | F | M | Degree | since birth | Physician | Not fixed | Ikorodu | Lagos East |
| E | 59 | F | W | Higher Degree | since birth | School Principal | N150- N180:000 | Ibeju/Lekki | Lagos East |
| F | 48 | M | M | H.N.D | since birth | Public servant | N120- N180:000 | AmuwoOd ofin | Lagos West |
| G | 25 | F | S | School Certificate | 10 | Schooling | _____ | Badagry | Lagos West |
| H | 21 | F | S | School certificate. | 6 | Artisan | Not fixed | Eti-Osa | Lagos Central |
| I | 32 | M | M | Post – Secondary | 12 | Teaching | N80:000- N120:000 | Ojo | Lagos West |

| | | | | | | | | | |
|---|----|---|---|----------------|-------------|------------|-----------------|---------------------|------------------------|
| J | 55 | F | M | Degree | 30 | Trading | Not fixed | Osodi/Isolo | Lagos East |
| K | 19 | M | S | School cert | 7 | Apprentice | _____ | Iru/Victoria Island | Lagos Central Lagos |
| L | 20 | M | S | Post-secondary | Since birth | Attendant | N50:000-N80-000 | Epe | st |

Source: Author's Field survey

Demographic Information of the Interviewees

The ages of the interviewees (see Table 1.0) ranged between 19 and 59 years. Four of the respondents, fell within the age bracket of 19-25. Participants I and D were within the age brackets of 26-32 and 33- 39 years respectively. Participants G, H, K, and L, fell within 19-25 years age bracket. Also, Participants A, B, C, and F were within 47 and 53 years. Only two (E & J) of the interviewees were 54 years and above. The gender distribution of the interviewees was equal, six each. On educational qualification, all the interviewees possessed the minimum educational requirement for the study, which was Secondary School Certificate.

In terms of years of residing in Lagos, all the interviews had lived in Lagos State beyond the five-year limit set for the study. In fact, seven (7) of the participants had lived all their years of existence in Lagos State. This is healthy for the study, in that it afforded the interviewees, a good background for the study. In terms of occupation, with the exception of Participants G (a student) and K (an apprentice), all the remaining participants were employed, or in private practice. This was related to the income of the interviewees. Five of the interviewees were on fixed income, another five (in private practice) on either undisclosed or flexible income. Two of the interviewees were not earning income.

The distribution of the respondents cuts across the three Senatorial Districts in the State (Lagos Central, Lagos East and Lagos West). This assisted in presenting the experience of the interviewees on the phenomenon of crime in Lagos State and the gratification of their safety information need, as crime is of concern to all.

An Examination of Respondents' Perceptions of Crime in Lagos State and the Coverage by the Selected Newspapers

Crime is a normal feature in every society, especially in cities (Alemika & Chukwuma, 2005; Beirne & Messerschmidt, 1991; Durkheim, 2013/1933). This view is corroborated by the findings of this study. According to the participants, Lagos state is prone to crime. This is attributable to its population and economic activities. By the 2006 National census figures Lagos State has a population figure of 9, 113,605 which makes the State the second most populated in Nigeria, behind Kano State (Federal Republic of Nigeria Gazette, 2009 on National Census, 2006). According to the respondents, crime has remained recurrent in Lagos State despite efforts of the state government to combat it. The participants were unanimous in their verdict that "every type of crime manifest in Lagos". Participant C spoke of a wave in crime. He said: "when one form of crime goes down in Lagos State, another is on the rise". All the interviewees were unanimous on the presence of crime in Lagos State. According to the interviewees, at a time, cases of robbery were high. Recently, cases of kidnappings, murder, and rape are on the increase.

On the causes of crime, majority of the respondents noted that crime is mainly caused by the unemployed youths; aided by self- serving political office seekers, who in a bid to secure electoral victory at all cost, buy and distribute guns to the youths, and abandon them after their electoral victory. Such guns were not often surrendered after elections by the recipients. The

holders deploy the guns to fend for themselves by committing various crimes. The Police were also said to be culpable. Specifically, Participant A said that:

About crime, I think our politicians brought us to this situation. Nigeria used to be a moderately safe country. It is our politicians that bought guns for the youths who are unemployed, but find it difficult to get the back the guns after the election. The police are also a part of the problem of crime. How can they fight crime when they are a part of it?

Participant C, agreed with the view that the unemployed youths were willing tools in the quest by politicians to attain power at all cost for the sake of themselves and their families. He, however, added that other social factors, such as loss of moral values, lust for money, and the youths being their partners in crime, could be adduced for the state of crime and criminality in Nigeria. He said that:

We should not forget that as a people, we have lost our moral values and decency. We now worship money no matter how it is come by. Most times we read from the newspapers and hear from people that the sources of this ill-gotten wealth are evil and through corrupt means. Except we retrace our steps, the fight against crime and criminality can become worse. I hope the government and the newspapers can help us out of this mess.

Participant L corroborated the view. She said that the moral decadence in the society and the influence of negative aspects of foreign culture have led to various alien acts in our culture. She mentioned indecent dressing on the parts of male and female which often results in the ladies being sexually harassed by youths and some elderly ones. She also said further that many homes are broken due to the harsh economic situation in the country and that this development has led to a loss of bonding and the spirit of togetherness that was common in families and in communities in the olden days. Participant E mentioned the problem in the judiciary. He said that:

Our courts are no longer for the masses. We now have judgement and not justice. It is now *cash and carry* (suggesting a miscarriage of justice due to inducement). The courts give judgement in favour of the highest bidder. There is no hope for the common man. The police too do not help matters. People now lack confidence in the police. That is why people now think twice to give the police any security information. We heard a story of how the police revealed the identity of their informants to the criminals, who were later attacked or even killed. The situation is that bad.

The culpability of the police in combating crime, moral decadence in the society, coupled with the involvement of political office holders in recruiting and equipping youths for crime, as it were, could be partly responsible for the alarming rate of crime and the associated sophistication in crime perpetuation in Lagos State. Crime has remained intractable in Nigeria. Of a fact, the Police and the Law Enforcement Agencies in Nigeria do not currently appear to be winning the war against crime and criminality in Nigeria.

In addition, it came to the fore during the interview sessions that: murder, kidnapping, robbery, car snatching and burglary were common occurrences in Lagos during the period of the study, but kidnapping was on the rise. The origin of modern-day kidnapping in Nigeria was traced to the Niger Delta area and dates back to the advent of the current democratic experience. This finding is corroborated by (Ngwama, 2014: 134.), who said that:

The first act of kidnapping in Nigeria started in 2006 when the militants of the Niger Delta took total hostage to protest the inequality in the region. According to

the militants, Nigeria is built at the expense of the region which serves as the cash cow for the whole country.

Ever since, kidnapping has been on the increase and defying every attempt by the government to combat it. The crime of kidnapping has since spread to other parts of Nigeria, especially in the creeks in South west Nigeria, of which Lagos State is prominent. The crime of kidnapping as expressed by one of the respondents is on the high in Lagos, especially, along Ikorodu and Epe axis. Ikorodu and Epe are aquatic communities in Lagos State and are surrounded by creeks. It is a widely held view that people from the Niger Delta area, because of their aquatic nature, are the ones perpetrating the crime of kidnapping, especially, across the creeks to escape arrests. One of the aftermaths of the crime of kidnapping is economic loss (Pshisva & Suarez, 2010). This fact also came to light in one of the interview sessions. Participant A regretted that she had to close down her poultry farm and declined to restock for fear of attack by the kidnappers. She said that poultry and vegetable farmers were often kidnapped along Epe, Sala, Igbodu and Lekki axes of Lagos State, adding that she had contributed levies (ransom) three times to free some kidnapped farmers.

Apart from economic loss, the spate of kidnappings from the findings from the in-depth interviews, has affected the psyche and the social lives of the respondents. It has led to fear of strangers and the neighbourhood and also altered movements, especially, commuting at night. This fact about paying ransom to rescue kidnapped victims negates the official position often held by the Nigerian police which claim that no ransom is paid to free kidnapped victims.

The Selected Nigerian Newspapers Source(s) of Crime Stories

In the in-depth interviews, some of the respondents (Participants, A, B, E F H & I) held the views that in covering crime in Nigeria, the media rely on eye witness accounts; report wrongly either by exaggerating, underreporting or by carrying misleading and inaccurate headlines. These views are captured in the words of Participant E, as follows:

Unlike, the practice by CNN and Al Jazeera, Nigerian Newspapers often depend on other news media sources, especially foreign media and the posts by others to serve crime stories to the audience. In the process, facts are distorted and misrepresented, leading to ambiguities and different interpretations by the audience.

This finding is supported by Soola (2007:7) who observed the “inadequacy and inefficiency with which crime and violence are being reported in the Nigerian media”. On how the sampled newspapers can improve on crime reportage in view of what had been said, Participant E said that the newspapers can only help when they are ready to reduce their profits, because:

It is those politicians and the criminals who call themselves business men to deceive people that advertise in the newspapers. So, the press-men would not want to go after them, if investigation links any of their patrons to crime.

This is an indictment on the press in carrying out its social responsibility function of providing factual, objective, fair and balanced reportage. Furthermore, Participant I said that the newspapers can improve crime reportage to benefit the society by visiting crime scenes as much as possible, investigate crime cases further and advise government on how to reduce crime in the society. He advocated that:

Journalists should do more on crime coverage. They should stop relying on the posts by others, or news by foreign media before they can publish crime news. As a matter of fact, they should investigate crime cases further and see that offenders

are punished. They should do this in the interest of the people and even the journalists themselves. We have heard on many occasions that some journalists were murdered and the killers remain unidentified. If they help the society to report on crime appropriately, they are also helping themselves.

On whether newspapers' crime stories enhance or gratify their safety information need, Participant C said that his exposure to newspapers' crime stories and his accumulated experience as a resident in Lagos State, has led to a change in behaviour safeguarding himself, his property and his loved ones when driving, especially, in the gridlock that often characterise traffic in Lagos State. In his submission, he has had to be applying central locking device, wind up his car glasses, and also hide such personal effects like phones, computers, as well as cash, among other easily attractive valuables from prying eyes.

In the same vein, Participant D said that she used to be a nocturnal person, who enjoyed night journeys. She has had to alter that aspect of her life, in view of the calamities and victimization that befell others that she read about in the selected newspapers, which occurred mostly at nights. Similarly, Participant E said she had fear of sexual assault on her girls. To this end, she finds it difficult leaving them behind with people based on the experience of others she read in the papers and heard from informal discussions that known and familiar faces are those who rape innocent girls. For fear of being kidnapped, Participant A said that she closed down her poultry business situated around the hot-bed of kidnapping activities.

Summary of Findings

From the analysis, the following themes and sub-themes which would add to the existing body of knowledge on media coverage of crime and the impact on the audience are discernible:

Themes

- The Nigerian nation, especially Lagos State was prone to crime.
- Murder, kidnapping, robbery, car snatching and burglary were common occurrences in Lagos during the period of the study, but kidnapping was on the rise. Ransom was paid to secure the release of kidnapped victims.
- There was proliferation and illegal possession of arms, mainly by the unemployed youths in Nigeria.
- The newspapers feasted on crime stories, but embraced episodic framing in crime reportage.
- The direct experience of crime victims from the selected Nigerian newspapers' crime stories enhanced and gratified the safety information need of the respondents by avoiding night travels, winding up car windows in traffic gridlocks, not leaving their children, especially, the girls with people, concealing some personal possession like phones from prying eyes at risky environment.

Sub- themes

- The selected newspapers relied on secondary sources for crime reportage.
- Insecurity, anxiety, and palpable fear pervaded the mind of the respondents.
- The police, judiciary and the political class were found culpable in crime festering in Nigeria.
- Moral values are on the decline in our society according to the respondents.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of the study, the following recommendations are made to the government, media and the public:

- (1) Government should grant the press more enabling environment to report crime stories contextually.
- (2) Newspapers in reporting crime stories should strive to balance their profit motives with public interest by being socially responsible. Social responsibility of the media places a moral burden on the media not only to describe social phenomena, but to investigate and interpret social phenomena in public interest.
- (3) Crime should be treated by the media as a disease requiring diagnosis.
- (4) On the part of the public, information seeking enhances appropriate behaviour in social contexts. An informed citizenry is an asset to a nation, and easier to govern.
- (5) The public, through the family and other social systems should join hands in resuscitating the neglected value systems, of honesty, integrity, hard work and decency.

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