PROMINENCE OF PRESS REPORTAGE OF INSECURITY IN NIGERIA

Ifedayo Akinwalere, PhD
Mass Communication Department, Olabisi Onabanjo University
Ago Iwoye, Ogun State

ABSTRACT

The study examined the manifest content of The Punch and Nigerian Tribune Newspapers on insecurity from July to December 2020. Content analysis was employed to carry out the study. Content category is Prominence with (front page, back page, editorial page and inside page) as units of analysis. Agenda setting theory was used to explain the study. Findings revealed that The Nigerian Tribune had the highest (55.6%) coverage, while 44.4% of the total coverage comes from The Punch Newspaper on insecurity. Findings also showed that 76.9% and 52.2% coverage of insecurity in the Nigerian Tribune and The Punch Newspapers respectively were in the inside pages. Also, 14.8% of the total coverage of insecurity was in the back page while 10.4% were on editorial page of the selected newspapers. The outcome of the study indicated that a majority of the coverage of insecurity by the selected Newspapers were in the inside pages. This study, therefore, recommended that the Press should be ready to play their surveillance and social responsibility in covering and presenting messages of public importance frequently and prominently in their front pages.

Keywords: News Coverage, Insecurity, Newspaper, Nigeria, Reportage, Kidnapping.

Introduction

Over the years, research on news factors has resulted in increasingly sophisticated taxonomies. However, important questions on the importance of news factors for news production remained unaddressed. Previous research evidenced the presence of various news factors in journalistic coverage and reportage. Insights from within the newsroom, moreover, demonstrated how journalists and their editors consciously apply these news factors to make the most appealing news product. Still little is known, though, about their consequences for journalistic products and a systematic, large-scale assessment was lacking (Boukes, Jones & Vliegenthart, 2020).

Insecurity is rampant in Nigeria. There are frequent incidences of particular crimes, such as sectarian violence, ethno-religious conflict, political assassination, ransom kidnapping, campus cultism and electoral crimes to human rights violations. There are many types of kidnapping and reasons behind them, such as being politically or financially motivated; the latter can be referred to as 'express kidnapping'. Any of these kidnappings can also take place virtually, in that scam

artists convince a victim to believe a kidnapping has already happened over the phone (Ezemenaka, 2018). One important issue arising from these events is the role and effects of mass media coverage of insecurity. Journalism often attracts controversy, not least where news coverage becomes part of the contest to define the social meaning of events (Norris, Kern & Just, 2003).

The problem of internal security crisis cannot be properly understood nor decoded, unless the analysis and the interpretation of the underlining causes, types, effects and solutions are premised on the contemporary global financial and economic crisis. The under currents of the inter connectedness between the contemporary nation states pose a fundamental challenge of the issues of internal security, conflict management and development especially to the third world countries. In the contemporary world it has become extremely difficult to divorce internal security from external pressures. Indeed, internal security is symbiotically linked with the global politics and its other dynamics. For example while the revolution in the information technology has impacted positively on the global economy, it has also radicalized the perceptions of the victims of global politics on the issues of injustice, poverty, ethnicity and inequalities arising from the contradiction of western imperialism. It has reawakened the minds of the oppressed to seek for justice and equity outside the framework of the nation state. The 'Arab Spring' of Libya, Tunisia, Egypt, and South Sudan among others readily comes to mind (Egbefo & Salihu, 2014).

No country can emphasise the significance of national growth if the majority of its citizens are still afraid and uncertain. A country cannot hope to achieve a relatively high level of national development in the near future if the majority of its farmers are unable to reach their farms and a significant number of its youth are unemployed. Without a doubt, security is critical for the provision of food, employment, industrial raw materials, income, and foreign exchange for national development. For a country like Nigeria, where over 70% of its population live on less than a dollar, according to the World Bank Index (2012), it is a severe peace-threatening issue that requires an immediate and pragmatic response. Poverty and lack of development have all been blamed for the country's high rate of crime, which includes armed robbery, kidnapping, prostitution, terrorism, and other social vices. Furthermore, notwithstanding the enormous sums of money generated by oil sales, if this trend continues, we must, without a doubt, look inside more than before. The situation is currently deteriorating due to the sharp decline in oil prices. As a result, a rigorous examination will expose the huge role that proper security plays in national growth.

The media is expected to have a role in this case by raising awareness and mobilising resources through widespread coverage of security issues. The core of this research is whether and to what extent the media is doing this.

Reportage of events, situations and cultures are capable of influencing public opinion. The central focus of explanation lies in the idea of 'news frames', representing persistent patterns of selection, emphasis, and exclusion that furnish a coherent interpretation and evaluation of events. Decisions and common practices in newsgathering, that is, determination of what and how news stories are covered and reported contributes towards what is known as framing in news production and dissemination. Out of the myriad ways of describing events in the world, journalists rely upon familiar news frames, and upon the interpretation of events offered by credible sources, to convey dominant meanings, to make sense of the facts, to focus the headlines, and to structure the story line. Although the specific details surrounding any terrorist occurrence may be unique, this is a vital factor in insecurity news framing. In this model, the societal culture is understood to operate at the broadest level, predominant norms, values and beliefs in any community. In 'one-sided' cases, there is a broad consensus about how terrorist events should be interpreted within any particular community (although not necessarily outside that community), including among most mainstream leaders, including government officials and political interest groups, journalists and the public, with few voices offering alternative perspectives (Norris, Kern & Just, 2003).

Newspapers have the responsibility to unknot every potential act that is capable of depriving society of orderliness and citizens' rights. The Nigerian media, especially the print media, have no alternative than to play significant role in informing the populace and educating them on insecurity. Thus, it is the sole responsibility of the mass media (newspapers) to communicate various issues relating to violence and insecurity, the effect, the implications, and the way forward. Hence, it is against this background that this study was conceived to investigate the prominence of coverage of insecurity with a view to analysing the manifest contents of two select Nigerian newspapers: *The Punch* and *Nigerian Tribune.*

Objectives

The objectives of the study are

1. To determine the level of frequency given to insecurity in *The Punch* and*Nigerian Tribune* newspapers from July to December, 2020.

2. To determine the level of prominence given to insecurity in *The Punch*and *Nigerian Tribune* newspapers from July to December, 2020.

Literature Review

One sure way of keeping in touch with our contemporary world is through the media. Communication is a vital component of our lives and existence and no society has been known to exist without it. It is the exchange of ideas, views, information, experiences and the sharing of meanings between persons, nations, societies and cultures. The press are often in liberal theory referred to as the Fourth Estate and the watchdog of the society, meaning that the media exist as an organ of information sourcing and dissemination, educational promotion, surveillance, social enlightenment and mobilization (Tobechukwu, 2007).

Journalists professionally have the responsibility for the collection, collation and publication of news. A direct result of this role is that they also influence public opinion as well as set agenda for public action. Indeed, they galvanize the society towards identified public goals. In the case of Nigeria, the media played the crucial role in mobilizing the citizenry toward the national goal of establishing a democratic society even at the risk of their lives. The journalist occupies a critical position in any media organisation against the background of his professional responsibility. This role is more vividly understood when it is realised that the mass media offer the widest and fastest means of disseminating information. They influence opinion formation, perception building and social mediation. They act as a mirror with which the society can view itself while also influencing social realities. Indeed, they provide a free market for contending groups to express opinions or canvass support especially in a multi-party democracy like Nigeria. In this regard, it should be noted that the contest for dominance is highly intense and the journalist, more often, determines which opinion predominates (Leman, 2015).

Prominence in News Reporting

News factors play a role from the commencement to the end of news production which entails decisions about the prominence given to a story. Prominence indicates the degree of importance given by editors to a specific news item. This prominence can be operationalised by a news story's placement and length. That is, the more news factors a news item contains, the more prominence it will be given in terms of (a) story length and (b) story position (Boukes et al., 2020). Seven news factors tend to influence journalistic judgments of newsworthiness: negativity (damage; the negative aspects of an event or issue), continuity

(frequency; having been in the news previously), proximity (cultural, geographical, and/or economic 'nearness'), eliteness (presence of individuals or organisations involved in an event), influence and relevance (the significance of an event in terms of its effects and/or consequences), personification in an event, such as eyewitness reports), and conflict (presence of confrontation and/or controversy) Eilders (2006 cited in Boukes et al., 2020).

Ezemenaka (2018) carried out a study on kidnapping in Nigeria and found that the causes of kidnapping were poverty, unemployment greediness, peer influence, irresponsibility, vengeful justice, sheer evil, laziness, desperation for riches, religion and illiteracy. In the study, all respondents stated they detested kidnapping, and on their perspective on security it was noted that the security agencies are not effective in crime related issues. Moreover, these agencies are also involved in crimes due to the fact that they are also after money; their greediness will not allow them to be effective, and they are only effective when an influential person is involved.

The prominence of newspapers coverage of insecurity news might have attracted the attention of readers, the degree of prominence attached to news items and the degree of information potentially imparted by the selected newspapers. Story placement in newspapers accorded importance or unimportance to a news story and this can be recognised by readers (Brown & Udomisor, 2015). Interestingly, Nigerian newspapers always reserve back pages for sport news and occassionally publish feature stories on important issues in the back pages. This accounted for fewer insecurity news in the back pages of newspapers.

It should be noted that the front page of an edition of a newspaper is a page while an edition of a newspaper can be made up of 50 or 100 or more pages. Abimbola (2017) states that newspapers publish more stories in the inside pages than in front pages. Ekeanyanwu and Olaniyan (2010) stated that newspapers play noticeable role in our society and that news stories are mostly published in the inside pages while important parts of news stories are published in the front pages. Rogers and Dearing (1996) on agenda-setting practice asserted that agenda setting theory is an active endeavour to get the attention of news media, the public and/or policy makers to certain issues of national importance. Enwefah (2010) states that Nigerian newspapers are very active and alive to their responsibilities in Nigeria. According to McCombs and Shaw (1972, 1976) cited in McQuail and Windahl (1981 cited in Brown et al., 2015), audiences not only learn about issues

and matters through the Press, but they also learn how much significance is attached to an issue from the prominence the Press place upon it.

Theoretical Framework

Agenda setting theory was proposed by Maxwell McCombs and Donald L. Shaw in (1972/1973). This paper is anchored in Agenda Setting theory which states that the media, through regular coverage of issues determine what the central discussion would be. The theory says the media may not tell us what to think, but the media channel our minds to what to think about (McQuail, 2008 cited in Pate, 2012). Wimmer and Dominick (2000) observe that the theory proposes that the public agenda or what kind of things people discuss, think and worry about is powerfully shaped and directed by what the media select to circulate to the public. The notion of agenda setting can be traced back to Walter Lippmann (1992), who suggests that the media were responsible for the picture in our heads. Lang and Lang (1966) reinforced this notion by observing that the media pay attention to certain issues. They are constantly presenting objects, suggesting what individuals should think and have feelings about. Folarin (1998) avers that agenda setting involved elements such as the quantity or frequency of reporting, importance given to the reports through headlines display, (pictures and layouts in newspapers, magazines, films, graphics or timing on radio and television) the degree of conflicts generated in the reports and cumulative media specific effects over time. This implies that the press impresses upon the mind of the citizens the extent at which rape cases are reported which will influence their attitude and behaviour towards insecurity in our society.

To understand how the mass media could play meaningful role in combating insecurity in Nigeria would require a theoretical explanation. This is because mass communication theories explain the likely effect of mass communication process in the society. By frequently reporting certain issues, the media move those issues from press agenda to public agenda. Through frequent, meaningful and responsible coverage and reportage of acts that breed insecurity in Nigeria, news media can sensitise, educate and inform the public on the need to be vigilant everywhere. Frequent discussions on issues of insecurity would not just attract attention to the need to address such problems but also raise consciousness on the need to combat insecurity.

Methodology

Content analysis method was employed to implement this study. Content analysis is a research method that is suitable for a study on news contents. Content

categories are: (A) prominencewith (front page, back page, editorial page and inside page) as units of analysis.

Population and Sample Size

The Punch and *Nigerian Tribune* newspapers were purposively selected for the study. The population is 184 editions of *The Punch* and *Nigerian Tribune* from July 1, 2020 to December 31, 2020. Simple random sampling was used to select every one day in a week from July 1, 2020- December 31, 2020. A total of 48 editions were content analysed for the study. That is, 24 editions from each of the selected Newspapers.

Prominence

The term "prominence" in newspaper reporting refers to the attention given to problems in the publication. The most important or notable news of the day is always featured on the front page of a newspaper. The next key piece of information is on the back page. In the hierarchy of relevance for news reporting in newspapers, inside page stories are the least important. The following divisions were developed in order to quantify the amount of importance/prominence connected to insecurity over the inquiry period:

- Front Page (FP) stories mean very important stories.
- Back Page (BP) stories are next to front page stories in order of prominence.
- Inside Page (IP) stories are the least in the order of importance placed on news reports.

PRESENTATION OF FINDINGS

Table 1: Level of Frequency Given to Insecurity in *The Punch* and *Nigerian Tribune* newspapers from July to December, 2020

VARIABLE	FREQUENCY	PERCETAGE %
THE PUNCH	111	44.4
TRIBUNE	139	55.6
TOTAL	250	100

Table 1 shows the frequency of coverage of insecurity in *The Punch* and *Nigerian Tribune* newspapers from July to December, 2020. Findings reveal that cumulatively, The *Nigerian Tribune* had the highest (55.6%) coverage, while 44.4% of the total coverage comes from *The Punch* Newspaper. This indicates

that *Nigerian Tribune* newspaper reported more news on insecurity than *The Punch* newspaper from July to December, 2020.

Table 2: Level of Prominence given to Insecurity in The Punch Newspaper and Nigerian Tribune from July to December, 2020

Prominence of Coverage	**The Punch %**	**Nigerian Tribune %**	**Total %**
Front Page	13(11.7)	9(6.4)	22(8.8)
Back Page	21(18.9)	16(11.5)	37(14.8)
Editorial Page	19(17.1)	07(5.0)	26(10.4)
Inside Page	58(52.2)	107(76.9)	165(66.0)
Total	**111(100.0)**	**139(100.0)**	**250(100.0)**

Table 2 revealed the level of prominence given to insecurity in *The Punch* and *Nigerian Tribune* Newspapers from July to December, 2020. Findings show that 76.9% and 52.2% coverage of insecurity in *Nigerian Tribune* and *The Punch* Newspapers respectively were on inside pages. Also, 14.8% of the total coverage of insecurity was on the back page while 10.4% were on editorial page. This implies that majority of the coverage of insecurity by the selected Newspapers were in the inside pages. Hence, security issue was not treated as very important issue for the public to be aware of from July to December, 2020 by *The Punch* and *Nigerian Tribune* newspapers. This outcome might be attributed to the prevalence of corona virus pandemic across the world. The focus of every media was on health issue (COVID-19) which dominated front pages of newspapers in 2020.

Discussion of Findings

Findings reveal that *Nigerian Tribune* newspaper had the highest (55.6%) coverage, while 44.4% of the total coverage comes from *The Punch* newspaper. The outcome indicated that the selected media adequately reported insecurity issue. Coverage of insecurity was 76.9% and 52.2% in the inside pages of the *Nigerian Tribune* and *The Punch* Newspapers respectively. The results indicated that security issue was not treated as very important issue for the public to be aware of from July to December, 2020 by *The Punch* and *Nigerian Tribune* newspapers. This outcome might be attributed to the prevalence of coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic across the world. The focus of every news media in 2020 was majorly on health issue (COVID-19).

Story placement in newspapers confers significance or insignificance in a news story and this can be recognised by news media audience (Brown & Udomisor, 2015). Nigerian newspapers always reserve back pages for sport news; and occasionally publish feature stories on important issues in the back pages. This also resulted in the less insecurity news in the back pages of the selected newspapers.

The front page of a newspaper is always recognised as the most prominent page for placement of news. The front page of a newspaper is a page while an edition of a newspaper can be made up of 100 or more pages. Even though most of the news stories were placed in the inside pages of the selected newspapers, the fact that a few of the stories were published in the front pages indicated the newspapers still paid attention to the insecurity crises. Therefore, the selected newspapers gave sufficient importance to the insecurity crises. This outcome is in line with one of the findings by Abimbola (2017) that newspapers publish more stories in the inside pages than in front pages. Ekeanyanwu et al. (2010) state that newspapers play prominent role in our society and that news stories are mostly published in the inside pages while main parts of news stories are published in the front pages. The result also agreed with Rogers and Dearing (1996) on agenda-setting process in which it was emphasised that agenda setting theory is a dynamic attempt to attract the attention of news media, the public and/or policy makers to certain issues of national interest. This result is also in agreement with Enwefah (2010) who notes that Nigerian newspapers are alive to their leadership duties.

In the same vein, McCombs and Shaw (1972, 1976) cited in McQuail and Windahl (1981 cited in Brown et al., 2015) aver that news media audiences not only learn about issues and matters through the news media, they also learn how much prominence attached to an issue from the emphasis the Press place upon it. The study concluded that both *The Punch* Newspaper and *Nigerian Tribune* reported insecurity at the same frequency. The coverage of insecurity in *Nigerian Tribune* and *The Punch* Newspaper were on inside pages.

Recommendations

It is therefore recommended that:

1. The Press should be ready to play their surveillance and social responsibility in covering and presenting insecurity messages of public importance frequently in their front pages more than less important information. This means that mass media should never be used as divisive

instruments among Nigerians but rather should be used for the promotion and consolidation of national unity and integration.

2. Reliance on traditional media in combating insecurity might not be enough this period; therefore, Citizens' Journalism should be alternative media focus to battle the challenge of disease pandemic and any other forms of insecurity and watchdog the society.
3. Steady workshops on conflict reporting, journalism ethics, mass media in a multi-cultural society, reporting terrorism, professionalism in journalism, among others are essential to continually keep media newsmen abreast with trends in mass media use in combating insecurity in Nigeria. This would ensure that the mass media are not used to worsen the problem of insecurity due to lack of knowledge on how to handle and manage this specialised area of journalism.

References

Abimbola, R. O. (2017). Comparative analysis of the prominence Nigerian newspapersaccorded selected political crisis situations. *New Media and Mass Communication,* 62, 1-60.

Boukes, M., Jones, N.P., & Vliegenthart, R. (2020). Newsworthiness and story prominence: How the presence of news factors relates to upfront position and length of news stories. Retrieved from https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/pdf/10.1177/1464884919899313. DOI: 10.1177/1464884919899313.

Brown, N. J., & Udomisor, I. W. (2015). Evaluation of political news reportage in Nigeria's*Vanguard* and*The Guardian* Newspapers. *Advances in Journalism and Communication,* (3), 10-18.

Egbefo, D. O., & Salihu, H. A. (2014). Internal security crisis in Nigeria: Causes, types,effects and solutions. Retrieved from https://www.ajol.info/index.php/ijah/article/view/110242

Ekeanyanwu, N. T., & Olaniyan, O. (2010). Media coverage of people's perception ofPresident Yar'Adua's pre-election campaigns. *Journal of Mass Communication Research,* 10(2), 79-85.

Enwefah, C. (2010). Media ownership and direction of editorials in four selected Nigerian Newspapers. *Journal of Communication and Media Research,* 2(2), 91-101.

Ezemenaka, K. E. (2018). Kidnapping: A security challenge in Nigeria. Retrieved from http://jssidoi.org/jssi/uploads/papers/32/Marova_Assessing_environmental_security_of_differentiated_territories.pdf.

Folarin, B. (1998). *Theories of mass communication.* Ibadan: Stirling-Horden Publishers Nigeria limited.

Leman, S. U. (2015, January). Political reporting in the Nigerian media-an overview. Paper presented at the training for journalists in Kaduna.

McCombs, M. (2004). Setting the agenda: the mass media and public opinion, Cambridge:Polity Press.

Nwabueze, C., & Ebeze, E. (2013). Mass media relevance in combating insecurity inNigeria. *International Journal of Development and Sustainability*, (2)2, 861-870.

Nwabueze, C., & Edegoh, O. (2010). Framing the agenda: press coverage of the 2008 teachers' strike in Nigeria. *Journal of Communication and Media Research,* 2(1), 113-120.

Norris, P., Kern, M., & Just, M. (2003). Framing terrorism: The news media, the government and the public. https://www.academia.edu/2749908/Framing_terrorism_The_news_media_the_government_and_the_public.

Pate, U. A. (2011). Practice and challenges of media performance in conflict phone

multicultural Nigeria. In Oso, L., Soola, D. & Pate, U. (Eds.), *Media, governance and development: Issues and trends* (pp. 47-59) Mushin: Primus Prints & Communication.

Tobechukwu, E. N. (2007). *The Nigerian press coverage of political conflicts in a pluralisticsociety.* Department of Mass Communication, Covenant University, Ota, Ogun State, Nigeria.