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THE ROLE OF THE MEDIA IN ADDRESSING NIGERIA'S SECURITY CHALLENGES

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Abstract

The media functions as a channel for public dialogue, where different voices can express their opinions on state matters. However, the efficiency of this role is frequently stalled by issues such as media proprietorship, restriction/censorship, and the influence of political and economic leaders This study attempted to evaluate media effectiveness in the face of security challenges. The study objectives were: identify roles the media play in addressing security challenges in Nigeria, examine the causes of frictions between the media and security agencies in Nigeria, and evaluate the challenges of media in addressing security challenges in Nigeria. Qualitative research method was adopted to explore the existing literature in the area under study. This was done by engaging a scoping review of peer reviewed articles on security challenges in Nigeria. Findings from the study revealed that while it was observed that the media has largely followed through on ethical practices as mandated by regulations, some journalists function according to the whims and caprices of unscrupulous politicians, also, that the media has consistently provided public benefits to the society in the area of information dissemination. The study concluded by stating that the media's role in nurturing awareness, distributing information, and encouraging responsibility is central for state security. Nevertheless, political and economic pressure, misinformation, coercion, and resource limitations pose substantial challenges.

Keywords: Media, Security, Report, Challenges, Safety.

Background of the Study

Communication is the elementary conveyor belt of social, economic, and political interactions which are capable of inhibiting and decreasing insecurity as well as stimulating peace and tranquility in the society. The media are unquestionably the means for enlightening the citizens on security issues and making security agents to be proactive instead of being reactive in providing protection for the state from the threats posed by the criminals operating within a defined territory. Also, for any country to be really protected in the 21st century, which is sometimes called the information or jet age, it must look further than the conservative security

strategy. An in-depth consideration of technological development and security dynamics exposes that there has been far-reaching shift in the conceptualization and application of communication and security relationship as communication has developed to the point it currently determines the operations in practically all aspects of human interactions (Okeke and Oji, 2014). The media play an essential role in determining public opinion, swaying policy, and nurturing the democratic process. The media functions as a channel for public dialogue, where different voices can express their opinions on state matters. However, the efficiency of this role is frequently stalled by issues such as media proprietorship, restriction/censorship, and the influence of political and economic leaders (Okafor, 2020). These challenges advance questions about the real freedom of the Nigerian media and their ability to function as a genuine public estate. Maxwell McCombs and Donald Shaw's agenda setting theory postulates that the media do not inform people what to think but rather what to think about. By choosing which issues to highlight, the media stimulates public opinion and prioritizes certain topics over the others. This theory emphasizes the media's power in shaping societal concerns and directing public consideration (McCombs & Shaw, 2021).

The ombudsman role of the media is one of their most distinguished occupations, accentuating their obligation to monitor and hold those in authority accountable. Researchers debate that the media function as a check on government activities, revealing corruption, ineffectiveness, and abuses of authority. This function is essential for preserving transparency and nurturing good governance (Bennett, 2020). Nigerian academics also identify the watchdog part of the media. For example, Ogbu (2022) states that investigative journalism in Nigeria has been contributory in revealing various indignities and holding public officials accountable. However, the efficiency of this function is frequently compromised by intimidations towards journalists, inadequate resources, and political interfering, which can discourage vigorous investigative efforts (Ogbu, 2022). Public support is essential in the construction and execution of state policies, and the media plays a critical role in scrutinizing, informing, and broadcasting individuals, activities, and practices that jeopardize national security (Dairo, 2021). Journalists, performing as doorkeepers, nuture public discernment of contemporary political happenings and characters through their reportage and analysis. They direct public awareness of political subjects and the national political programs. The mass media's reputation in achieving societal goals whether social, health, structure, politics, education, or security advancement cannot be over-emphasized. The mass media as significant institutions for socialization are responsible for disseminating information in the society (Pate, 2021).

Statement of the Problem
However, as discussed by Peresin (2007), criminals sometimes strive to influence and exploit the media for their own purposes by distributing messages of violence and thus achieving the masses sympathy. According to Peresin (2007), the majority of professionals reasonably call the present-day radicalism mass media-oriented terrorism. This is because, when analyzing criminal activities, one may observe that in the majority of circumstances they are executed specifically in order to attract the attention of universal media. Also, Sharifi (2015) posits that criminals have recognized that the media is a fast paced industry which encourages them to insistently carryout dreadful assaults in order to maintain their media presence, and in citizens discuss. The researchers recommend that criminals are like any other social group; they are continuously modernizing their approaches, generating new styles, keeping the citizens interested in their activities, emphasizing that this has modeled serious challenges for security agencies and policymakers.

Walter (1978) mentioned in Biernatzki (2002) states that criminals recognize that their preeminent course to citizens' acknowledgement is through appealing to traditional news values: spectacle, conflict and misfortune, as driven by rivalry among the media. In Nigeria, research has shown that the media have not advanced well in this respect. Okpara (2010) quoted in Hamid and Baba (2014) discerns that the Nigerian media are yet to excellently execute the investigative function of the media in their reporting of criminals. He states that this has led to the persistent criminal activities in Nigeria. The Nigerian media have performed well in executing their investigative function.

Research Questions

This study sought to discover the following questions:

i.   What roles do the media play in addressing security challenges in Nigeria?
ii.   What are the causes of frictions between the media and security agencies in Nigeria?
iii. What are the challenges of media in addressing security challenges in Nigeria?

Objectives of the Study

On a general scale, this study is an attempt at appraising the media as a tool for addressing security challenges. Specifically, the study seeks to:

i.   Identify roles the media play in addressing security challenges in Nigeria.
ii.   Examine the causes of frictions between the media and security agencies in Nigeria.
iii. Evaluate the challenges of media in addressing security challenges in Nigeria.

Conceptual Analysis

The Media: The media play an essential role in determining public opinion, influencing strategy, and nurturing the democratic process. The media functions as a canal for public conversation, where dissimilar voices can discuss their outlooks on national concerns. However, the efficiency of this role is repeatedly stalled by concerns such as media proprietorship, censorship, and the sway of political and economic gladiators (Okafor, 2020). Stuart Hall's (2023) encoding/decoding prototype accentuates the media's role in building and facilitating cultural connotations. According to Hall, media messages are encoded with precise information that the audiences decode based on their cultural perspectives. This procedure highlights the media's role in influencing cultural perspectives and distinctiveness (Hall, 2020). In a culturally diverse state like Nigeria, the media's role as a cultural moderator is principally important. The media echoes and profiles cultural standards, ethics, and characters by presenting diverse cultural perspectives. Conversely, the representation of numerous ethnic and cultural groups in the media is frequently imbalanced, leading to stereotypes and distortions (Ndolo, 2023). Addressing these concerns necessitates a more all-encompassing and well-adjusted media approach that precisely mirrors Nigeria's cultural variety.

Security: Various researchers across the world have hypothesized diverse view points on the conception of security and insecurity. The word 'security' comes from the Latin word 'se-curus'. 'Se' means 'without' and 'Curus' means' uneasiness' (Oghuvbu, 2021). This suggests that "security initially meant liberty from state of discomfort and peaceful state of affairs without any dangers or threats" (Oghuvbu, 2021, p.3925). Therefore, security has a broader meaning such as to feel safe, to be protected from all forms of injury and it is used to label a situation without any risks or apprehensions (UNDP, 2002 Mentioned in Oghuvbu, 2021). Security is generally regarded as "liberty from threat or dangers to individuals or a state. It is the capacity to

safeguard and preserve oneself, legitimate interests and the improvement of welfare" (Mijah, (2007) sighted Eugina 2013).

The Role of the Media in State Security Strategy

The media play a critical role in state security policy by nurturing public awareness, broadcasting critical information, and promoting a culture of alertness and resilience. One of the crucial functions of the media in state security is to enlighten citizens about possible dangers and how to respond to them. This role is necessary in Nigeria, where dangers such as terrorism, abductions, and ethnic conflicts are widespread. For example, during the height of the Boko Haram insurgency, Nigerian media outlets played a noteworthy role in updating the public about the group's actions, government responses, and safety measures to be undertaken. Mainstream media outlets such as Channels TV, AIT and the Premium Times delivered regular updates and comprehensive analyses, serving to keep the public conversant and vigilant (Oso, 2021). The media also play a dynamic role in distributing vital information during crises. Precise and appropriate information help to alleviate anxiety, direct public responses, and support harmonized feedbacks from security agencies and the public. For instance, throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, Nigerian media disseminated essential information about health strategies, lockdown procedures, and immunization operations, thereby contributing to public safety and health security (Uwalaka and Watkins, 2020). Nevertheless, the efficiency of this role is subject to the reliability and trustworthiness of the information provided. Misinformation and unconfirmed information can destabilize public trust and aggravate crises. Therefore, it is fundamental for media organizations to abide by ethical broadcasting principles and confirm information before distribution.

By regularly reporting on security concerns and inspiring public involvement in security efforts, the media nurtures a philosophy of awareness and resilience. This includes enlightening the public on the significance of security awareness and inspiring proactive measures to improve community security. Operations and campaigns intended at encouraging community policing, for example, have been expedited by media reporting and backing. Nigerian media have been contributory in encouraging initiatives like the "See Something, say something" campaign, which inspires citizens to report suspicious activities to security agencies. Such initiatives help create a resilient society capable of weathering and recuperating from security challenges (Okon, 2021). Investigative journalism is an influential tool for encouraging responsibility and transparency within and among different security agencies. By revealing security gaps, corruption, and human rights abuses, investigative journalists hold security officers responsible and drive for reforms. In Nigeria, prominent examples include investigative reports by Sahara Reporters and Premium Times that have uncovered numerous occurrences of corruption and misbehavior within the security sector. For instance, investigative reports on the mismanagement of funds assigned for counter-terrorism efforts have led to public uproar and successful government actions to address these concerns (Ogbondah, 2020). Such journalism not only encourages responsibility but also builds public trust in security institutions by showing that they are subject to inspection and reform. Deliberate communication initiatives led by the media are necessary in countering radical narratives and de-radicalizing susceptible people. Through targeted messaging, the media can challenge the ideologies broadcasted by radical groups and provide substitute narratives that encourage peace and tolerance.

Challenges with the Media

Despite its constructive roles, the media can also pose challenges to state security. Sensationalist reporting, distribution of misinformation, and unsubstantiated news can damage public trust in security establishments, stimulate anxiety, and aggravate tensions. For example, embellished reports about terrorism or ethnic conflicts can lead to widespread anxiety and suspicion, thwarting the efforts of security agencies to maintain law and order (Uko, 2020).

Theoretical Framework

This study adopts the Social Responsibility Theory (SRT) which proposes that the media has a responsibility to act in the overall interests of the public, going beyond simple information dissemination to address societal issues and promote ethical practices. The theory developed from a need to balance media freedom with commitments to society, recognizing the significant influence of the media on public opinion and behavior. There is a plethora of key principles that further accentuates the reason for adopting this theory which includes: ethical practices, public benefits, accountability, community engagement, freedom, and responsibility.

Methodology

Qualitative research method was adopted to explore the existing literature in the area under study. This was done by engaging a scoping review of peer reviewed articles on security challenges in Nigeria. A scoping review methodology was considered the best way to examine state of the art literature that covers a wide range of security challenges in Nigeria and beyond. Although a scoping review has its own limits such as the narrow opportunity to provide specifics for practice, it has an awe-inspiring advantage of providing concrete examples of how terrorism and criminalities are tackled in countries with security challenges.

Discussion of Findings

Findings of the study reveals that citizens depend so much on the media for precise and appropriate information about the activities in the society. This suggests that the customary roles of the media in any society which are to enlighten, inform and entertain are so fundamental that societies can scarcely advance meaningfully without these conduits of mass communication. It was also observed that though the media are faced with a lot of challenges in the fight against insecurity, they have substantial influence in combating the nuisance, as they helped in keeping the people well-informed of the security situations in the country. This observation is in line with the position of Tejumaiye (2011) who postulates that although, journalism in Nigeria has been faced with challenges; these challenges have not stopped them from impacting on the state in different ways. According to him, the mass media shape culture, impact politics, play imperative role in business and influence the daily lives of millions of people, including people's outlooks, behaviors and essential ethical values. The researcher also establish that the media have not been completely utilized in addressing security issues in Nigeria. Accordingly, it was discovered that the extraordinary level of insecurity in Nigeria can be controlled if the media can be appropriately utilized, since communication-based approach through the media has been considered better than application of force in the management of security situations in the country. This is in agreement with the suggestion of Ogu and Oyerinde (2014), who postulate that effective communication process, cultured communication facilities and adaptive participating communication method are needed for the security design of the state to be adequately recognized, esteemed and exploited. This can find consolation in the fact that communication is the rudimentary driver of social interaction which can help to avert and control animosity as well as encourage peace and tranquility in the society, as rightly captured

by Okeke and Oji (2014) who advance that for any state to be truly safe, it must look outside the conservative security forces.

A critical investigation of technological development and security dynamics reveals that there has been a radical alteration in the conceptualization and presentation of communication-security relationship as communication has developed to determine operations in most aspects of social life. On a related note, Al-Rfouh (2015), supports that the battle ground has moved from being a geographical position to a cybernetic environment. In this case, its apparatuses or tools for victory are not only weapons and arsenals but consist of every form of technology that has the prospect to affect the physical, psychological and spiritual wellbeing of individuals. Findings are further summarized as follows:

i.   While it was observed that the media has largely followed through on ethical practices as mandated by regulations, some journalists function according to the whims and caprices of unscrupulous politicians.

ii. The media has consistently provided public benefits to the society in the area of information dissemination.

iii. The media is actively involved in community engagement activities as neither the society nor the media can do without the other.

iv. The media has really asserted itself as the true vanguard of freedom by enlightening their audience about the rights as enshrined in the constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria.

Conclusion

The findings from this study point toward the vital role of the media in a state's security strategy, the substantial impact of challenges encountered by the media, and the efficiency of various approaches to improve the media's involvement. The media's role in nurturing awareness, distributing information, and encouraging responsibility is central for state security. Nevertheless, political and economic pressure, misinformation, coercion, and resource limitations pose substantial challenges. Effective approaches such as training, partnerships, objectivity, fact-checking, and investigative journalism can improve the media's role in encouraging nationwide security. These findings show the need for sustained support and development of the media sector to guarantee it can efficiently contribute to state security. Policymakers, media establishments, and security agencies must work together to address the challenges and execute the strategies identified in this study to reinforce the media's role in public security.

Recommendations

Founded on the findings and discussions, the following recommendations are suggested to improve the role of the media in state security strategy:

1. There is need to implement all-inclusive training programs for journalists focused on security reportage and concerns related to state security. This is because enhanced understanding and knowledge of security matters will empower journalists to report more precisely and responsibly, contributing to a more knowledgeable public and effective state security policy.

2. While it was observed that the media has largely followed through on ethical practices as mandated by regulations, some journalists function according to the whims and caprices of unscrupulous politicians.

3. The media has consistently provided public benefits to the society in the area of information dissemination.

4. The media is actively involved in community engagement activities as neither the society nor the media can do without the other.

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