



Audience Perception of Broadcast Media Coverage of Banditry and Kidnapping in Nigeria: A Study of Benin Residents

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Abstract

The study assessed audience perception of broadcast media coverage of banditry and kidnapping in Nigeria: A study of Benin residents. The objectives of the study were to: determine the extent to which the Nigeria broadcast media cover the issue of banditry and kidnapping, ascertain the broadcast media that cover the issue of kidnapping and banditry more and determine how Benin residents perceive the effect of broadcast media coverage of banditry and kidnapping on the audience. The study adopted survey research design. Findings showed that a majority (74%) of the respondents clearly agreed that the broadcast media covered the issue of banditry and kidnapping in Nigeria to a reasonable extent. It was found that the private stations with a total of 87% covered kidnapping and banditry in Nigeria more than the government owned stations. Further findings revealed that Benin City residents had a good perception of the broadcast media coverage of kidnapping and banditry in Nigeria. It was recommended that the public broadcast media should devote more air time to covering issues of kidnapping and banditry in line with their social responsibility roles to society.

Key Words: Audience, Perception, Broadcast Media, Coverage, Banditry, Kidnapping

Introduction

In spite of government efforts, the security situation in Nigeria is deteriorating. The rising case of banditry is worrisome, especially in some parts of Northern Nigeria. Banditry is a type of organised crime committed by outlaws typically involving the threat or use of violence. A person who engages in banditry is known as a bandit. A bandit primarily commits crimes such as extortion, robbery, and murder, either as an individual or in groups. Kidnapping has remained the most virulent form of banditry in Nigeria. It has become the most pervasive and intractable violent crime in the country. Kidnapping can be targeted at individuals or at groups. School children have been kidnapped in groups in various parts of Nigeria. Usually, the prime targets of kidnapping for ransom are those considered to be wealthy enough to pay a fee in exchange for being freed.

Similarly, the trend is on the increase all over the world because the Global Slavery Index (2014) reported that throughout 2014, men, women and

children continue to be kidnapped in village raids and held as slaves by militias in eastern DRC (Democratic Republic of Congo). In April and May 2014, 267 women and girls suffered sexual violence by armed groups. In Nigeria, also, kidnapping is ongoing since the early 1990s (Hazen & Horner, 2007). Kidnappings continue to contribute to a climate of insecurity in the South East, the Niger Delta and the South-western region. Hostages have most recently also been taken in the states of Northern Nigeria. Between 2008 and 2010, the Nigeria Police Force recorded 887 cases across the country (Action on Armed Violence, 2013). Kidnapping is taking place everywhere in Nigeria; it is a national problem that has eaten so deep into the fabric of the country (Dodo, 2010) but it takes place more in the moment of terrorism, insurgency and other forms of political violence. The kidnapping of 250 girls in a girls' secondary school in Chibok, Borno State in 2014 and many more by *Boko Haram* represents the growing incidence of the kidnapping in Nigeria (Ibrahim & Mukhtar, 2017).

In the last decade more than 8,000 people have been killed in the states of Kebbi, Sokoto, Niger and Zamfara, according to the International Crisis Group. But recent attacks in the president's home state of Katsina, where more than 100 people were killed in attacks between April and June, 2021, have led to protests and calls for his resignation. On two separate occasions the bandits targeted villagers who had received food handouts from the government during the coronavirus lockdown.

"They were about 200 on motorbikes, each bike rider carried a passenger and they all carried AK-47 guns," Bashir Kadisau, an eyewitness, told the BBC. He said he climbed to the top of a tree when he saw the large number of motorcycle riders coming into Kadisau village, and saw the attackers loot shops, steal cattle and grain, and shoot people who were fleeing (Orjinmo, 2020). This study examines Benin residents' perception of broadcast media coverage of banditry and kidnapping in Nigeria.

Statement of the Problem

The threat posed by kidnapers and bandits are increasing every now and then in Nigeria. The issue is giving Nigeria bad image globally and has also impacted on government efforts to attract foreign investors. There are other studies previously conducted on the kidnapping phenomenon. Freeman (2016) studied the incidence of kidnapping at the international level but she confined it to child abduction, though she viewed it from the global perspective. File-Muriel (2013) also investigated the problem of kidnapping but set focused mainly on political kidnapping. A closer study was conducted by Uzorma and Nwanegbo-Ben (2014) on the subject of kidnapping and hostage-taking in the South-eastern Nigeria.

However, in conflict situations, such as the kidnapping and banditry in Nigeria, the media have a cardinal duty of providing the public with relevant information. The media have a core task of properly giving good accounts of the crises. Media reports can essentially contribute to the ignition or resolution of any crisis whether in Nigeria or elsewhere. The broadcast media enjoy credibility, reliability and currency (Item & Nwokafor, 2018 as

cited in Nkwam-Uwaoma, Ojiakor & Dike, 2019) but it is doubtful that the broadcast media have contributed immensely to the issue of kidnapping and banditry in Nigeria. Therefore, it becomes pertinent to determine the extent to which the Nigerian broadcast media cover the issue of kidnapping and banditry, and how Benin City residents perceive the broadcast media coverage banditry and kidnapping in Nigeria.

Objectives of the Study

The objectives of the study are to

1. To determine the extent to which the Nigeria broadcast media cover the issue of banditry and kidnapping.
2. To ascertain the broadcast media that cover the issue of kidnapping and banditry more.
3. To determine how Benin residents perceive the effect of broadcast media coverage of banditry and kidnapping in on the audience.

Research Questions

1. To what extent does the Nigeria broadcast media cover the issue of banditry and kidnapping?
2. Which broadcast media covers the issue of kidnapping and banditry more?
3. How did Benin residents perceive the effect of broadcast media coverage of banditry and kidnapping?

Literature Review

Conceptualising Kidnapping

Kidnapping is defined by various scholars with varying degrees of success. Firstly, Inyang and Abraham (2013, p. 532) define it as "the forcible seizure, taking away and unlawful detention of a person against his/her will. It is a common law offence and the key part is that it is unwanted act on the part of the victim". Another definition is offered by Fage and Alabi (2017, p. 289) who conceive kidnapping as "forceful or fraudulent abduction of an individual or a group of individuals for reasons ranging from economic, political, and religious to [struggle for] self-determination". They however add that the forcefully or fraudulently abducted

individuals are carried off as hostages for ransom purposes. This implies that while political and economic factors can instigate kidnapping, the economic reason is the most common predisposing factor of the phenomenon.

Uzorma and Nwanegbo-Ben (2014, p. 132) also define kidnapping as the “act of seizing and detaining or carrying away a person by unlawful force or by fraud, and often with a demand for ransom. It involves taking a person from their family forcefully without their consent with the motive of holding the person as a hostage and earning a profit from their family”. From the foregoing, the definition of kidnapping has no one best way to describe it, but it is clear that for an act to be deemed kidnapping, it shall involve coercive movement of a victim from one place to another, detention or seizure of that person be it a child or an adult. That is why Inyang and Abraham (2013) added that it is legally regarded as a restriction of someone else's liberty which violates the provision of freedom of movement as enshrined in the constitution of Federal Republic of Nigeria, where every other law takes its cue from. Kidnapping can be targeted at individuals or at groups. School children have been kidnapped in groups in various parts of Nigeria. Usually, the prime targets of kidnapping for ransom are those considered to be wealthy enough to pay a fee in exchange for being freed.

The Concept of Banditry

Banditry means occurrence or prevalence of armed robbery or violent crime. It involves the use of force, or threat to that effect, to intimidate a person with the intent to rob, rape or kill. Banditry is a crime against persons. It has been a common genre of crime as well as the cause of violence in contemporary societies (Nigeria Watch, 2011). Banditry violence is not a new phenomenon in Nigeria. The history of banditry in Nigeria can be traced to pre-civil war period when government deteriorated in certain parts of the old Western region resulting in political violence, crime and organised insurgency (Odinaku, 2018). Accordingly, during the civilian reign, local bandits were reportedly stealing domestic animals (Ndama,

2019).

The prevalence of banditry in Nigeria appears to have been high and rising over the years. According to Rotberg (2007), "Crime against persons, including murder, rape, and robbery has grown in scale and viciousness in Nigeria since 1999". This has been demonstrated by the pervasive trend of armed robbery in the country, which in effect mirrors the Africa-wide experience. In this regard, Onimode (2001) notes that car snatching, robbery of homes and offices, way-laying of travelers (highway robbery) are common forms of armed robbery in African countries. Their incidence has been rising since the African crises started in the 1980s (cited in Chukwueme, Phinos, & Agaba, 2019). The incidence of kidnapping and banditry has affected the image of the country both domestically and internationally. It has affected Nigeria's quest to attract foreign direct investment (FDI) and also an attempt to develop a viable tourism industry as visitors are regularly warned by their countries to be wary of coming to Nigeria. Many would-be investors have also stayed away for fears of being kidnapped (Ekpe, 2009, as cited in Chukwueme, Phinos, & Agaba, 2019).

Causes of Kidnapping and Banditry in Nigeria

Many reasons are given as probable causes of kidnapping and banditry in Nigeria. Inyang (2009) links the problem of unemployment as one of such reasons why kidnapping and banditry in Nigeria is often associated with youth unemployment. He uses the widely acknowledged adage, which says that “an idle man is the devil's workshop” to present the situation of unemployment in Nigeria. He notes that there are uncountable able-bodied men and women in Nigeria roaming the streets in search of non-existing job. Out of frustration together with mounting responsibilities to tackle, many idle young persons have ventured into criminal activities of which kidnapping is not an exemption. Inyang further acknowledges that a graduate who is unable to secure a job is psychologically bereft of other means of survival. In such a situation the young person could develop a negative attitude towards society

and attribute his failure to that society. Furthermore, Inyang (2009) also believes that the proliferation of arms as a result of political patronage of miscreant who were dumped after elections may indirectly encourage and enhance kidnapping.

Also, Inyang likens today's kidnapping situation to the scourge of armed robbery in the early eighties where many young able-bodied men who fought during the Nigerian civil war were discharged and sent home with nothing. Meanwhile since the schools they left behind were destroyed and there were no jobs to engage them and keep them busy, many of them took to armed robbery. given that as ex-soldiers they were armed with weapons and have acquired the skills of using guns during the war. The story is almost the same today as politicians employ most idle youths as political thugs and later dump them after elections. Therefore, the youths (thugs) who have been abandoned by their masters after winning elections are now busy kidnapping innocent persons and relatives of those persons they consider to be wealthy (Chukwueme, Phinos, & Agaba, 2019). The issue of "moral decadence" and the "**get rich quick**" syndrome have been identified as some of the causative factors of kidnapping. Again Inyang (2009) confirms these in his proposition that in Nigeria, nobody asks questions on how people make their wealth. According to him, a poor person today can show up with an expensive car tomorrow and nobody dare to question the sudden wealth.

In Nigeria and many other developing countries of Africa and Asia, political factors, poverty, lack of legal/available employment opportunity among the youths are also playing a fundamental role in the rise of kidnapping. In line with the above, Tepperman (2006, as cited in Ibrahim & Mukhtar, 2016) observes that Nigeria has a large number of adolescents living and making a living on the streets. This has been attributed to economic factors and exposure to all forms of risks.

Closely related to Hazen and Horner's typology is that given by Zannoni (2003), who mentioned that motivations and mode of operation vary, but generally there are two main kinds of kidnapping for

ransom. These can be roughly categorised as "criminal kidnapping", where the main motive is to obtain a ransom from the family or business of the victim. This category includes instances where criminals take hostages as a shield to help them escape from the scene of a crime, or use them to obtain money or valuables, or the keys or secret codes needed to access areas where these are stored. The other type of kidnapping, according to Zannoni (2003), is "political kidnapping", where the foremost objective is to further the political aims of a particular political group or movement. In this case, a ransom is usually demanded to obtain money for the group to fund their activities. This made the dividing line between economic and political kidnappings so blurred. In addition, religious and other political extremists use kidnapping as political weapons and as a means of financing their activities (Catlin Group, 2012).

Effects of Kidnapping and Banditry in Nigeria

According to the law of physics, for every action here is a corresponding equal and opposite reaction. This implies that for every action one takes in life there is a consequent reaction. In the same vein, kidnapping and banditry activities carried out have corresponding consequences, which unfortunately largely affect the third party such as the victims and the society at large. Some of the effects of banditry and kidnapping include:

- i. Banditry violence has affected populations living in Nigeria's Zamfara, Kaduna, Niger, Sokoto, Kebbi and Kastina states in the Northwest. About 21 million people living in these states have been exposed to insecurity from activities of bandits (www.acaps.org)
- ii. **Psychological stress and trauma:** The traumatic experience that the victims of kidnapping and banditry undergo usually leaves an indelible mark on them that last a life time. This has a negative psychological effect, especially in children and in most cases leads to depression, anxiety and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) which unfortunately has a long lasting effect.
- iii. **Atmosphere of fear and general distrust:** In

society where the incidence of kidnapping is high, there is usually an atmosphere of fear and general lack of trust; this tends to limit people's lives and actions which translates to reduced economic activities.

- iv. Reduction of foreign direct investment:** The high rate of kidnapping and banditry in certain areas of the country has made such area high risk zones for foreigners. This scares away foreign investors from investing in that region, as can be seen in the northern part of Nigeria where Boko Haram and bandits are operating everywhere.

Empirical Review

Ngwu, Efetober, Ekwe and Chukwuma, in 2012, did a study on "Rethinking Terrorism Reportage for Sustainable Development: An Analysis of Media Coverage of the Boko Haram Terrorism in Nigeria." The study took a national scope in Nigeria, with the collection of primary data from six randomly selected cities, one from each of the six geopolitical zones of the country. Using survey research method, questionnaire was employed to collect primary data for the study. The researchers found, amongst others, that media reports on Boko Haram activities in Nigeria are glorifying terrorism act.

Ezegwu, Udoyo and Onuama (2019) examined framing of Islamic Movement of Nigeria (IMN) clashes with security forces in select Nigeria Mainstream newspapers (*The Guardian and Punch*). Content analysis method was adopted by the researchers. The findings revealed that the sampled newspaper's reported the clashes, but an abysmal number of 57 stories were published out of 192 editions of the newspaper studied, while a total of 6 frames were used to report the issue. The authors recommended that newspapers in Nigeria should employ more frame especially positive frame in reporting crisis/conflict matters. This will facilitate peaceful resolution of such issues.

Adisa (2016, as cited in Amannah & Nimaa, 2019) in his study examines the effect of media frames on ethnic conflicts. The study which specifically seek to understand the extent to which media frames about ethnic issues contribute to

fueling of volatile ethnic group in Nigeria utilized primary data generated from 26 ethnic group leaders in Nigeria. The study found that the way newspapers frame ethnic issues contributed towards inciting double standard, name calling, all of which stemmed from the ownership interest and these widens ethnic differences and eventually stimulates ethnic groups into conflict/crisis. The study recommended that the Nigerian government must shed its insensitivity and confront the problem with sincerity and purpose.

Danladi and Mohammed (2012) worked on press coverage of the post-election violence in Bauchi and Kaduna. The study examined roles the Nigerian press played, especially, during and after the 2011 presidential election. The study employed content analysis method. The researchers found that both papers showed restraint in the way they reported the post-election violence. The study concluded that the post-election violence in Nigeria was managed and the general fragile situations. Shehu (2017) studied newspapers coverage of herder/farmers conflict in Nigeria. Content analysis method was used. The study found that the headlines in the papers content analysed suggested that Fulani groups are being framed by the newspapers as "conflict mongers".

It could be seen from the above empirical studies carried out by various researchers on their area of concentration that most of the researchers used different methodologies to get results. However, audience perception of broadcast media coverage of banditry and kidnapping in Nigeria: A study of Benin residents has not been covered in previous studies. This is the major gap which this study will fill.

Theoretical Framework

Perception Theory

The study used perception theory to explain the study. Perception according to Bovee, Thill, Dovel and Wood (1995, cited in Agbo, 2016) is the process of being exposed to a stimulus, paying attention to some degree, and then interpreting the received message. Hence, perception involves the process of exposure, attention and interpretation. In other

words, for perception to take place there must be exposure to stimuli with certain level of attention paid to stimuli and finally the stimuli are interpreted by the audience (Ezinwa, 2014).

Perception theory helps to explain the process by which an individual selects, organizes and evaluates stimuli from the environment to provide meaningful experiences for him or her. This means that people focus on certain features of their environment to the exclusion of others. The audience automatically chooses which information to notice and this kind of selection is dependent on different perceptual filters which are based on the consumer's earlier experiences (Smith, 2011, cited in Agbo, 2016). The theory provides explanation on why audience members react to particular message differently. This implies that the way a particular audience views a given message may differ from the perception of the message by another audience.

This theory is relevant to this study because of the differences in the way the audience perceive or react to broadcast media coverage of banditry and kidnapping in Nigeria. Each audience or group of audience comes up with their own interpretation of the banditry/kidnapping activities based on how the broadcast media report it. Some may view the reportage as good and efficient, while some others may perceive the reportage as not too good or inefficient depending on their level of exposure and knowledge on the issue.

Methodology

This study adopted the survey method of research because it is capable of studying both large and small populations. The population of this study comprises Benin City residents estimated at one million, seven hundred and twenty-seven thousand (1,727,000) people based on the National Population Census projected figure of 2020. Benin City is the capital of Edo State. It is predominantly urban and is home to famous Benin Museum. Benin City and its environs have more than 7 broadcast media stations. Some of them include: Edo Broadcasting Service, Independence Television and Radio (ITV), KU FM 92.7, Nigeria Television Authority (NTA), Silverbird TV, Vibes 97.3 FM

Federal Radio Cooperation of Nigeria (FRCN) and Speed 96.9 FM, etc.

The sample size of 400 respondents was selected as a representative sample for this study, using Taro Yamane statistical formula. Considering the population of this work, the researchers used multi-stage sampling method in order to reach the target respondents. Benin City metropolis was divided into 10 zones/major roads. The zones/major roads are: Ring Road, Airport Road, Sapele Road, Forestry Road, Akpakpava Road, Ugbor Road, Old Sakpoba Road, Agbor Road, Etete Road, and Ogida Police Station Road. Cluster sampling was used to divide Benin City into 10 clusters for easy access to respondents. In the second stage, purposive sampling was employed on the basis that respondents must be residents of Benin City metropolis and its environs. The formula used to calculate the number of respondents sampled per zone/roads is presented as follows:

$$\text{Sample Size} = \frac{\text{Sample}}{\text{Number of Zones/Major Roads}} = \frac{400}{10}$$

The research instrument used to elicit responses from respondents was the questionnaire. The questionnaire was administered in the 10 zones/major roads in Benin City.

Data Presentation and Analysis

Out of 400 copies of questionnaire administered to respondents in Benin City, Edo State, only 370 (92%) were returned and found useable, thus giving the questionnaire a mortality rate of 30 (8%). Therefore, only 370 copies of the questionnaire were used for the purpose of data analysis.

The demographic data of the respondents indicates that 202 (55%) are males, while 168 (45%) are females. The age brackets of the respondents indicates that 41 and above (47%) accounted most, while the age bracket of 18-30 (21%) were the smallest number of the respondents sampled. Most of the (55%) respondents were married. Also, a majority of the respondents (52%) have acquired first degree certificate, while 48 (13%) respondents have post graduate qualification. Also, 151 (41%)

were civil servants, which incidentally accounted most in the sampled respondents.

Table 1: The extent to which the Nigeria broadcast media cover the issue of banditry and kidnapping

Response	Frequency	Percentage
Very high	112	30
High	127	34
I can't tell	39	11
Low	50	14
Very low	42	11
Total	370	100

Source: Field Survey, 2021.

A total of 64 % (very high and high) of the respondents clearly agreed that the broadcast media covered the issue of banditry and kidnapping in Nigeria to a reasonable extent.

Table 2: The identities of broadcast media with higher frequency of coverage for kidnapping and banditry in Nigeria

Response	Frequency	Percentage
ITV	105	28
Silverbird TV	118	32
Speed FM	47	13
Vibes FM	51	14
FRCN	19	5
EDS	16	4.33
NTA	14	3.78
Total	370	100

Source: Field Survey, 2021.

The implication of data on table two above is that the private stations with a total of 87% covered kidnapping and banditry in Nigeria more than the government owned stations.

The implication of table 3 is that 69% of the respondents had a good perception of the coverage of banditry and kidnapping in Nigeria.

Table: 3 Respondents perception of the coverage of banditry and kidnapping in Nigeria

Response	Frequency	Percentage
Very good	85	23
Good	169	46
Can't tell	62	17
Poor	34	9
Very poor	20	5
Total	370	100

Source: Field Survey, 2021.

Discussion of Findings

To what extent does the Nigeria broadcast media cover the issue of banditry and kidnapping?

The table one showed that 112(30%) respondents said the broadcast media have to a reasonable extent covered the issue of banditry and kidnapping in Nigeria, 127 (34%) respondents said the coverage was high, 39 (11%) respondents can't tell, 50 (14%) respondents said the coverage was low while 42 (11%) respondents said the coverage was very low. The implication is that a majority (64%) of the respondents clearly agreed that the broadcast media covered the issue of banditry and kidnapping in Nigeria to a reasonable extent. These findings agree with Wimmer and Dominick's (2000) observation which indicates that the kinds of things people discuss, think and worry about are powerfully shaped directed by what the media choose to discuss.

Which broadcast media cover the issue of kidnapping and banditry more?

On the issue of broadcast media that has more coverage of the issue of kidnapping and banditry more, the private broadcast media as shown in Table 2 has a total of 87% covered kidnapping and banditry in Nigeria more than the government owned stations, which has 13%. This revealed that the private broadcast media covered kidnapping and banditry in Nigeria more than the public broadcast media. This may be attributed to the fact that their news and programmes were not censored by the government or ruling party.

How do Benin residents perceive the effect of broadcast media coverage of banditry and kidnapping?

From the analysis in table 3 showed that 69% of the respondents have a good perception of the coverage of banditry and kidnapping in Nigeria. This findings are in agreement with Pate, Nwabueze and Idiong's (2013) view that the explicit role of the broadcast media in promoting democracy was always visible and could easily be measured by impact on the citizens' will and capacity to exercise their political power. These findings support the use of the perception theory in the study. The theory provides explanation on why audiences react to particular messages differently. This implies that the way a particular audience views a given message may differ from the perception of the message by another audience. Each audience or group of audience comes up with their own interpretation of the banditry/kidnapping activities based on how the broadcast media reported it. Some may view the reportage as good and efficient, while some others may perceive the reportage as not too good or inefficient depending on their level of exposure and knowledge on the issue.

Conclusion

Banditry and Kidnapping are on the increase in Nigeria and prevalent across all the geopolitical zones namely the Niger Delta Region or the South-south and the South-east, North-east, North-west and North-central. The activities of bandits have even become more prevalent in the Northern part of Nigeria where school children are kidnapped at the whims and caprices of kidnappers. This study results showed that the audience had a positive perception and clear understanding of the threat posed by activities of kidnappers and bandits through continuous media coverage of the issue. The study concludes that private broadcast media covered the issue more than the government owned station to a significant extent.

Recommendations

Based on the findings, the study makes the following suggestions:

- i. The broadcast media should give prominence to

the reportage of cases of banditry and kidnapping, and should organise debates on the issue as well as enlighten the public about the incidents.

- ii. The broadcast media should set agenda on the issue of banditry and kidnapping in a manner that would engage the audience participation in the tackling or proffering solutions to banditry and kidnapping in our society.
- iii. The public broadcast media should devote more air time in covering issues of kidnapping and banditry, as this is part of their social responsibility roles to society.
- iv. Researchers should undertake the conduct of a similar study in other parts of Nigeria in order to establish the impact of kidnapping and banditry on the audience.
- v. Jobs should be created to unemployed Nigerians so as to keep them busy and engaged, this will help to reduce the issue of banditry and kidnapping.

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