

**THE CHIBOK GIRLS' KIDNAPP CONTROVERSIES: ANALYSIS OF NIGERIAN  
NEWSPAPERS' COVERAGE**

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**Abstract**

*The agenda setting role of the media which is considered one of the key functions of the media is often reflected in news media framing and coverage of issues. This relates to the notion that the media by selecting what content to publish and how and what language to use and even the quantity of informed coverage succeeds in telling people what to think and in raising, awareness, knowledge or at times controversies and misconceptions about national issues. This premise foregrounds the argument of this study. Though some studies had examined the Chibok girls abduction of April 14, 2014, in Borno State yet the nature of informed coverage by the Nigerian news media has not been adequately engaged. This paper interrogates the “how” of Nigerian print media coverage of the Chibok Girls Abduction to understand the degree of coverage by the Nigerian Newspapers; dominant focus; the newspaper’s sources of information and how the newspapers frame the Abduction. With the use of Content Analysis, this work studied reports of the Chibok girls in the Nigerian Newspapers from April 16, 2014 to September 22<sup>nd</sup>, 2014. Four newspapers were sampled based on national spread and their owners’ ethno-religious backgrounds as follows: Daily Sun, Daily Trust, Nation and Guardian. Selection of one newspaper edition per week was considered appropriate and for each of the four newspapers used, 24 editions were selected (one from each of the 24 weeks that make up the six months period – April 16, 2014 to September 22, 2014), which amounts to 96 editions. Even as the study found a widespread coverage and prominence of the Chibok girls’ issues by the Nigerian newspapers, which corroborates existing studies in this area, the study found that majority of the coverage was non investigative, with episodic frame that could be possible because of Nigerian news media use of mostly government sources. The study findings point to the fact that informed coverage of conflict situations in Nigeria is still a major challenge for the Nigerian media and this could probably lead to a lot of misconceptions regarding conflict situations by the Nigerian publics.*

**Keywords:** Nigerian Newspapers, Chibok Girls, Terrorism, Framing, Controversies, Conflict Reporting

**Introduction**

**Setting The Scene**

It is three years to date of the April 14, 2014 abduction of more than two hundred (276) female students from a Government Girls Secondary School GGSS, Chibok in Borno State Maidugri. Yet up until now the controversies surrounding the incident have not yet abated, creating a spiral of confusion and unanswered questions about the reality or otherwise of the whole incident and the need for further discourse on the issue. The recent media report of the release of eighty three (83) of these girls and others seem to ignite more controversy instead of dousing it. The condition of the girls, their whereabouts is still divergently reported in the mainstream and the new media. All these, escalate the controversies surrounding the issue. Dominant among the controversies is the argument that the abduction is a mere hoax that never occurred. Several

reports had it that Chibok Girls predicament became subject of campaign during the 2015 race for the Nigerian presidency, with opponents at various platforms tongue-lashing the then Jonathan-led government for security breaches and inability to rescue the abducted girls; Some, politicians reportedly challenged the abduction, interpreting same as a scam that is politically driven, tagging it the missing “*nonexistent*” *Chibok girls*; Few months after the kidnap, the leader of Niger Delta Peoples Volunteer Force (NDPVF), Mujahid Dokubo Asari reportedly doubted the abduction, describing it as inconsistent, given also the controversial testimonies of some of the witnesses and contradictions about the exact number of students kidnapped and the possibility that two hundred and seventy six (276) girls could be abducted in that manner without any interference from the Nigerian security service in a state under emergency rule.

The students’ population also became controversial as many question whether all the students are from Chibok or whether Chibok is an exam center that draws students from other schools that resulted in 276 girls taking a Physics exam. A debatable and very contentious proposition they argue for a region with known low school enrollment especially for girls and then the possibility of 276 girls taking a Physics WAEC exam, a non compulsory science subject in a region with abysmally poor girls’ attendance to school. If it is a center, how many were represented there? Where are they from? What is their population? Why Chibok and not other place or a bigger town than Chibok? The release of eighty three (83) of the girls has also raised questions concerning the appearance and age brackets of the girls suggesting that they do not look like abducted suffering girls and questions also the non release and identification of these girls to their community. All these arguments point to the need to ascertain the “*how*” of Nigerian media report and coverage of this issue. It is within the light of these unending controversies that we analyze Nigeria print media coverage of this issue.

## **INTRODUCTION**

Public awareness, knowledge and reaction to issues are often related to the quantity and quality of media coverage of such issues. This is because the media remain a major vehicle by which the public learn and follow events as they unfold especially conflicts and terrorisms. Given the continued diverse and contrasting views from the Nigerian audience concerning the incidence of the Chibok girl’s abduction and its political undertone, this paper interrogates Nigeria newspapers’ coverage of the issue. The concern is to determine through Newspaper coverage, whether these controversies were in any way informed and exacerbated by the nature of media coverage of the whole incident. As documented, although the television & radio offer viewers & listeners immediate sight, sound & motion, newspaper provides a rather broad source of information that is readily available for use at any time (Wanta, 1997). Newspaper content according to Pratt et al (2002) reflects the content and order of priority in a permanent form.

Critics of the Nigerian media have accused the Nigerian journalist of inadequate and unprofessional coverage of conflict in its various forms. Some have argued that this is related to journalists’ lack of knowledge and training concerning conflict reporting while others point to other challenges such as the practice of journalism of convenience, which has the Nigerian journalists reporting conflict situations from the comforts of urban centres, miles away from the conflict zone. All these, underscore the need to examine the media reportage of the Chibok girl’s abduction under the following objectives:

1. To establish the frequency of Nigerian Newspapers’ coverage of Chibok Girls abduction;
2. To establish the dominant focus of these media coverage;
3. To determine the nature/tone of newspaper’s coverage of the issue; that is the extent of glamorisation or dramatisation of issues *visa a vis* in depth thematic / episodic coverage, that may result in conflicting and controversial information;
4. To determine how the newspapers frame the Chibok Girls Abduction

## **A REVIEW OF LITERATURE**

Media studies document that the most obvious effect of media is in its ability to increase *cognitive knowledge* by supplying people with information. The information supplied provides the basis for informed decision concerning national events in the society. That is why the quantity of information presented during a conflict situation such as Chibok girls Kidnap becomes important. In its oversight function of providing information to the public, the media help to set public agenda and frame the scope of public discussion by providing and limiting the range of ideas from which we can choose. That is why the way the news media choose to report violent conflict situations becomes significant. No wonder McCombs & Shaw (1972) argued that the ability to affect public perception and knowledge among individuals is one of the most important aspects of the power of mass communication, which is intensified by the process of framing news. This arguably could

inform audience understanding or misconceptions or divergent views concerning national issues such as the Chibok Girls Kidnap.

Many assessment of media's role in reporting conflict/violent conflict situations in literature documents two strands of dominant arguments- Media as a perpetuator of conflict or agent of peace in one hand and in the other hand as a crucial vehicle in informing publics about conflicts, and influencing their perceptions and behaviour. All these as argued by scholars depend on the framing and agenda setting of the media, which is evident in the way the news media reports and covers conflict and violent conflict. Lynch & Galtung (2010) emphasize that if the agenda of media is non-violence and the framing is peace-oriented aimed to reduce the conflict and support the rapprochement, it can de-escalate the violence and influence the public opinion towards resolving conflict.

As argued by scholars, the media via Priming and Agenda Setting tells the audience what to think and talk about; they achieve this through the different frames they create using language and graphics to paint pictures in the presentation of issues in the public arena which will set the parameters for public discourse and if swayed subsequently lead to public action.

Framing is the selection of some aspects of a perceived reality and making them more salient in a communication text, in such a way as to promote a particular problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation and/or treatment recommendation for the item described. This is related to agenda setting concept of which is considered one of the key functions of the media. The agenda setting role of the media relates to the notion that the media are often successful in telling people what to think about (McCombs & Shaw, 1972; Lang & Lang, 1983) by selecting what content to publish, where to publish it (placement), and what language (framing) to use. These media processes are relevant to the coverage of conflict as they are to the coverage of other public issue. In social constructivism, two types of media frames exist – the episodic and thematic frames (Iyengar 1991 cited in Baysha and Hallanan 2004, p.24). Episodic framing according to Baysha and Hallanan (p. 234) “depicts public issues as concrete instances or specific events that are the results of actions by individuals.” In thematic media frames, issues are usually reported in a more abstract level as a form of general outcomes. In any case the type of media framing used by the news media usually influences how the audience attributes responsibility. In the realm of conflict communication, media framing of issues and events has considerable influence on the public. The attitude of people, most times, in political crisis can be traced to the kind of images the media placed on people's minds. Lee & Park (2011) argue that there is assumption that the framing of outcomes and contingencies may induce different decisions. This agrees with Cappela & Jameson (1997) suggestion more than a decade ago that the way news is framed activates certain inferences, ideas, judgments and contrasts concerning issues, policies and politicians.

Media studies also suggest that the society expects the journalists to be the eye of the society in following the unfolding drama of violent conflicts. As Ross (2007) argues “...citizens are dependent on the media to provide information of distant events” (p.54) and journalists act as the communication agents to provide the information. The nature and quantity of information provided create the opportunity for public perceptions or misperceptions of these events. As submitted earlier, the media can affect the scope and form of public knowledge, values, and action. The media do these by representing issues, interpreting and evaluating them and in the process helping make sense of the world and events on behalf of their audiences (O'Shaughnessy & Stadler, 2008). In fact, the way people understand conflict /violent conflict is influenced to a significant extent by media coverage, framing and interpretation. For this reason, any attempt to understand, how conflict is captured in the public imagination – would be incomplete without analyzing the media coverage of conflict. What all these evidence from literature tells us is that the media are selective in what they cover and how they cover it. Whereas the public interest philosophy is often quoted as the key determinant of media coverage of issues, there are other underlying factors that determine how and why an issue is covered.

From the journalists' perspective, news coverage of conflict /violent conflict is shaped by the following: level of understanding of conflict; time and space limitations; news format requirements; editorial control; human interest; policy activity on the issue; commercial pressures; significance of risk factor; nature of conflict; and available resources for news coverage .Such factors, as argued serve to frame conflict stories in ways that are likely to engage the audience interests, but sometimes may appear to distort or misrepresent the fundamental issues concerning the conflict situation. All these suggest that controversies or otherwise emanating from the public concerning the Chibok Girls Kidnap issue could be related to the way and manner the Nigerian media reported and covered the incident. Lake & Rothchild (1996,p.73) point out that information failures of the media in providing timely and credible information can become a “primary

contributor” in escalating conflicts, or as the case maybe in creating controversies concerning the issues surrounding the conflicts.

Such failures however, occur when the media constructs and reinforces simplistic or negative portrayals of those representing the other side (Hofman.1972; Ibrahim.1972), or when the media due to the factors of time and competition or lack of access to the conflict environment provide contradictory, speculative reporting often sourced from second hand unofficial and sometimes not too credible persons. In the Nigerian media coverage of the Chibok Girls kidnap the media have been accused of a journalism of convenience, with journalists not reporting stories beyond the relative comfort of urban centres, much less one in the conflict zone. According to Idowu, (2014), Nigerian media managers are seen as generally satisfied with coverage that guarantees advertisement patronage from various tiers of government and business interests. State correspondents have conditioned themselves to “pack journalism” of reporting events from the prism and precincts of Government houses.

A recount of ‘The Chibok Girls Kidnap’ shows that it spurred action from the global media who immediately pitched their tents in Nigeria and vigorously covered the ensuing saga. Interestingly, it is from the foreign media that Nigerians learnt firsthand of the state of the Government Girls’ Secondary School after the Boko Haram invasion and abduction. CNN for instance, visited Chibok and updated Nigerians by providing them with a guided visual tour of the burnt school in order to comprehend the enormity of the damage. It was also from CNN that the public’s had a glimpse of a victim’s account of her ordeal on television. It was also from them that probing questions on the issue, resurfaced on Nigerian televisions.

As recounted by Idowu (2014) on the Vanguard Newspaper, in an article entitled “Chibok and the Failure of Reporting”, the *Daily Mail*, *Reuters*, *BBC*, the *New York Times* and *Los Angeles Times*, to mention a few, have joined *CNN* to explain developments in the Chibok story that are lost on the Nigerian media. Regrettably, Nigerian dailies, without a touch of irony, dutifully reproduced these reports for their readers’ consumption. The Nigerian pathfinders that should guide the rest of the world on the happenings in their backyard have been reduced to playing catch up. From this account it is possible to argue that the Nigerian media may have been ill- equipped or lack the requisite training and knowledge for reporting such conflict despite the fact that Boko Haram menace has bedeviled the country for more than five years then. The extent of the foreign media coverage during this time emphasizes the symbiotic relationship as argued, that exist between the media and terrorism. As commonly claimed, terrorists and the media both benefit from high levels of media attention to terrorism (Hoffman, 2006). Terrorists gain from media attention that communicates their goals and grievances to a wider audience. The media gain larger audiences because, terrorist attacks has many of the characteristics that communication research identifies as important for media attention.

Though many scholars have looked at the Chibok girls media coverage, few has however engaged in detail analysis of the way this coverage have been constructed by the Nigerian media in the way the media viewed, sourced and narrated the kidnap, to determine, if there is any relationship between these media coverage and the spate of controversies surrounding the issue. This is the focus of this work. Media attention in this work as highlighted in previous studies (see; Chermak & Gruenewald, 2006; Delli Carpini & Williams, 1987; Weimann & Winn, 1994), is measured by the number of newspaper stories, style of words in newspaper stories, depth/length of newspaper story and the tone of these stories.

In reporting violent news stories, media’s selection of who to include and omit and how to write these stories are also a reflections of among other factors, journalists’ knowledge and training concerning conflict sensitive reporting, the use of different sources and journalists willingness to engage in in-depth coverage. Ross (2007) in a study, deconstructing conflict reporting, also listed the following factors that contribute to the contemporary reporting of conflict which also applies to the Nigerian case ; government pressures, political influences, propaganda mechanism, foreign policy issues, commercial considerations, structural constraints, political cultures, norms and traditions of societies and nationalistic emotions.

Zebulon (2017) adds that Journalists through poor professional judgment and insensitivity in reporting local conflicts have unwittingly become part of the problems as instigators. The Nigerian journalist, as argued, is confronted with the challenge of low specialized knowledge and high personal risk because their training hardly prepares them for the realities of reporting violent conflicts in volatile environments as they occur. Idowu’s (2014) extensive explanation captures Nigerian news media challenges in reporting conflict as he writes with regards to the Chibok girls kidnap:

This turning point in Nigerian regarding terrorism obviously calls for more robust coverage and analysis of the Boko Haram Menace. Regrettably, the Nigerian media have shown limited capacity to rise to the occasion. Beyond the reactive

reports, which are filed hundreds of kilometers from the trouble spots, Nigerians have had to rely on the foreign media to get a clearer understanding of the issues at stake. To begin with, the Nigerian media like the Nigerian presidency have shied away from visiting Chibok for any meaningful on-the-spot-reporting. By so doing, they have denied the public a firsthand pulse of the sense of life and living there and dismissed the Chibok people as not being important enough to have their experience directly mediated by the media. True, Chibok, linked to Maiduguri, Borno State capital, by a 134 kilometer lone dusty road, is nobody's favourite destination. But the magnitude of its loss compels a better reporting response, which has eluded the Nigerian media. That can be blamed on the parlous state of the media

Key points in Idowu's (2014) Nigerian media coverage of the Chibok Girls Kidnap summarized below, paints a clear picture of how violent conflict is reported in the country, as he submits: non-robust, reactive reports filed kilometers from troubled spots, characterized by half-hearted reporting by the media, lack of media engagement by the military and security community. Lack of appreciation of conflict-sensitive communication that differentiates underlying issues from the eye-catching ones, that explains the process, not just the consequence, and distinguishes the predisposing factors from the immediate trigger. All these instances point to the fact that the media probably as a result of the manner they covered conflicts in Nigeria do sometimes fan into flames the embers of the conflicts they ought to help resolve causing more controversies than provision of adequate knowledge for informed decision making by publics.

Given these, it can be argued that the way media covers violent conflict news stories has a crucial impact on the way the audience understands and interprets the situations. Such that divergent information from the media without attendant in-depth clarifications that explains and link behind the scene facts of events are prone to cause controversies and confusion among the audience. Lippmann (cited in Papacharissi and Oliveira, 2008, p. 52) avers "that news is responsible for providing the "pseudo environment" upon which people rely to experience and understand events they cannot observe directly and that news frames are important in how these events are reported since they reflect a process of recurring selection and emphasis in communicating perceived reality". Iyenger (1987) is then right as he argued that readers are most times sensitive to contextual cues when their reasoning is challenged about national affairs like the Boko Haram Crisis. Media framing of issues as argued are important since such frames constructed in prejudice or wrongly could provoke unintended meaning from the masses and lead to disparate views and misconceptions among the public about national issues.

Looking at the strands of argument from literature it becomes evident that Agenda Setting of the media, well supported by research, is significant since it shows that most members of the public do not hold stable, independent opinions on public concerns and therefore depend upon the news media to prioritize these issues for them (Shah, Watts, Domke and Fam, 2002). According to the theory, because of the fact of paying attention to some issues and neglecting and ignoring some others, the mass media will have an effect on public opinion. People will be inclined to know about those issues highlighted by the mass media and adopt the order of priority assigned to different issues. Similarly, the social responsibility theory will help interrogate the ethics of the Nigerian newspapers coverage of the Chibok Girls Abduction; are they in consonance with the people's right to know? Have they favoured sensationalism? Have they aided or abated controversies; given also that the theory rests on the notion of free press acting responsibly in Nigeria in their presentation and clarification of the Chibok Girls abduction. This is also based on the premise that Freedom carries obligations; and carrying out certain essential functions with emphasis on responsible reportage of the Chibok Girls abduction to see whether their coverage in any way aided controversies.

## **METHODOLOGY**

The study design is content analysis with the entire newspapers published in Nigeria within the period of the Chibok Girls abduction; April to September 2014 as the universe of the study. The sample frame comprised of all the national dailies, their year of establishment, location and owner. The sample size of the study was 96 editions of selected newspapers. This size was selected based on Basden and Wright's (1997, p.312) recommendation that selecting one edition per week would be appropriate for a study extending up to a period of six months. Hence, selection of one newspaper edition per week was considered appropriate and for each of the four newspapers used, 24 editions were selected (one from each of the 24 weeks that make up the six months period – April 16, 2014 to September 22, 2014), which amounts to 96 editions. Each newspaper edition had the duration of six months, from April 16, 2014 to September 22, 2014 and the

reviewed editions were picked alternately. By examining one edition per week, each paper had a total of four editions per month except the month of April which had two editions because the counting started on the 16<sup>th</sup> which was the day after the abduction of the Chibok girls, thereby totaling 24 editions for the six months. This sampling was executed in two stages as follows:

- Stage One: Selecting newspaper titles
- Stage Two: Selecting newspaper editions

### **Stage One: Newspapers Titles**

At this stage, the purposive sampling procedure was employed which does not guarantee randomness as the elements of the population do not have the privilege of having equal chance or known probability of being selected in the sampling process (Asika1991, p.45). In selecting the newspaper titles, two major characteristics were considered. First was the market strength of a title and second was its ethno-religious background, i.e. ethnic cum religious affiliation of the ownership. Consequently, four newspapers were chosen based on their owners’ ethno-religious backgrounds as follows: *Daily Sun* (Igbo/Christian), *Daily Trust* (Hausa/Muslim), *The Nation* (Yoruba/Christian) and *The Vanguard* (minority/Christian). The fact that only one Muslim ownership was selected as against three Christian ownerships is because among the 10 newspapers with the highest circulation, only one (*Daily Trust*) has Moslem ownership.

**Table 1:**

**Sample of Nigeria Newspapers, Year Established, Location and Owners**

S/N	NEWSPAPER	YEAR	LOCATION	OWNER
1	Sun	2001	Lagos	Orji Uzor Kalu
2	Daily Trust	2001	Abuja	Media Trust
3	Nation	2006	Lagos	Bola Tinubu
4	Guardian	1983	Lagos	Alex Ibru

### **Stage Two: Selecting newspaper editions**

The second stage of the sampling involved choosing particular editions of the four newspaper titles. The systematic sampling procedure was employed to ensure that every day of the week (excluding Saturdays and Sundays) was duly represented. The weekend editions were excluded being that their content and style is more in the nature of magazine than newspaper. In other words, they do not usually represent the typical newspaper traditions in terms of content and style.

**Table 2:**

**Frame of Selected Newspapers**

Newspapers	April (2014)	May (2014)	June (2014)	July (2014)	August (2014)	September (2014)	Total N/Ps
Daily Sun	2	5	4	5	4	4	24
Daily Trust	2	5	4	5	4	4	24
The Nation	2	5	4	5	4	4	24
The Guardian	2	5	4	5	4	4	24
<b>Total</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>96</b>

For each of the four newspapers, one edition was chosen per week. Using the interval of 8 (n=8) for each week, the first week, the Wednesday edition (April 16, 2014), was chosen and on the second week, the Thursday edition (April 24, 2014) chosen. This continued up to the last week of the sixth month where the Monday edition (September 22, 2014) was picked. This summed up to 24 editions for each of the four newspapers and 96 editions for the entire four newspapers. To ensure inter-coder reliability the three research assistants used for the study were trained extensively on the content categories and the unit of analysis. There was a pre-coding period (pilot coding) that lasted for one week which further enhanced the inter-coder reliability of the work. The main coding process was a period of one month. Most of the Newspapers used were sourced from the catalogue section of the University Library.

### **UNITS OF ANALYSIS**

The unit of analysis was newspaper stories that appeared in any content of the newspaper such as; features, editorials, pictorials, opinion articles and cartoons relating to the controversies surrounding the Chibok girls abduction. Coding sheet was employed as the data collection instrument with a number of content categories

to aid the coding. These include: Newspaper Title, Ethnic Background of Ownership, Religious Background of Ownership, News Type, News Placement, Page Rating of News, Theme, Prominence, Ideological judgments on Boko Haram, Sectional Attributions in Portraying Boko Haram, Tone, Depth, Frequency, Direction. Quantitative method of data analysis was employed. Computation was computer-assisted via the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS). The research questions were answered by interpreting the statistical relationships among the relevant variables.

## RESULTS

**Table 3:**  
**Frequency of Coverage**

Newspapers	April (2014)	May (2014)	June (2014)	July (2014)	August (2014)	September (2014)	Total N/Ps
Daily Sun	5 8.5%	27 45.8%	8 13.6%	8 13.6%	7 11.9%	4 6.8%	59 27.6%
Daily Trust	5 10.0%	19 38.0%	10 20.0%	8 16.0%	4 8.0%	4 8.0%	50 23.4%
The Nation	4 5.5%	44 60.3%	14 19.2%	0 0.0%	7 9.6%	4 5.5%	73 34.1%
The Guardian	3 9.4%	9 28.1%	7 21.9%	5 15.6%	4 12.5%	4 12.5%	32 15%
Total	17 7.9%	99 46.3%	39 18.2%	21 9.8%	22 10.3%	16 7.5%	214 100.0%

Table 3 displays the regularity of reports on Chibok girls' abduction across the newspapers studied within the prescribed time frame. Among the four newspapers studied, Nation newspaper had the highest volume of Chibok girls' reports with 73 issues. This is followed by Daily Sun newspaper with a total of 59 reports, Daily Trust had 50 reports and the Guardian had 32 reports giving a total of 214 stories. From this data, one can infer that the Chibok girls' story received a very high and frequent coverage within the period of study especially in the month of May, June and July.

**Table 4:**  
**Newspaper Contents**

Contents	Daily Sun	Daily Trust	Nation	Guardian
News Story	51% (n=30)	40% (n=20)	56% (n=41)	22% (n=7)
Feature	10% (n=6)	2% (n=1)	8% (n=6)	9% (n=3)
Pictorial (stand alone)	31% (n=18)	38% (n=19)	23% (n=17)	63% (n=20)
Pictorial (with story)	3% (n=2)	12% (n=6)	0% (n=0)	6% (n=2)
Cartoon	2% (n=1)	2% (n=1)	4% (n=3)	0% (n=0)
Editorial	0% (n=0)	2% (n=1)	4% (=3)	0% (n=0)
Opinion Articles	3% (n=2)	3% (n=2)	4% (n=3)	0% (n=0)
TOTAL	100% (n=59)	100% (n=50)	100% (n=73)	100% (n=32)

Table 4 shows that 51% of Chibok girls abduction reports published in *Daily Sun* were published as news, 10% were features, 31% were pictorial (stand alone), 3% were pictorials (with story), 2% was cartoon, no editorials, while 3% were opinion articles. Similar results were found in the other newspapers sampled, though Daily Trust and the Nation both had editorials unlike the Daily sun and Guardian. The low use of editorials to explain newspapers stand on the Chibok Girls Kidnap is telling, as it suggests lack of resolute standpoint of Nigerian dailies concerning the issue. This can be interpreted in several ways. But the dominant interpretation may point to a case of inadequacy in the coverage which may as well give room for the public's many assumptions. The dominant use of pictures in the reports can be seen as a strategy to get the audience attention. The fact remains that the Nigerian media provided high quantity of straight news report of the issues during the period under study.

**Table 5:  
News Theme across the Newspapers**

Theme	Daily Sun	Daily Trust	Nation	Guardian	Total
Abduction	9% (n=5)	26% (n=13)	11% (n=8)	6% (n=2)	13% (n=28)
Terrorists' Threat	3% (n=2)	4% (n=2)	3% (n=2)	3% (n=1)	3% (n=7)
Rescue Measures/Agitations	24% (n=14)	24% (n=12)	23% (n=17)	9% (n=3)	22% (n=46)
Counter Terrorism	7% (n=4)	2% (n=1)	0% (n=0)	0% (n=0)	2% (n=5)
Protests	31% (n=18)	24% (n=12)	29% (n=21)	66% (n=21)	34% (n=72)
Others	27% (n=16)	20% (n=10)	34% (n=25)	16% (n=5)	26% (n=56)
Total	100% (n=59)	100% (n=50)	100% (n=73)	100% (n=32)	100% (n=214)

Table 5 shows the distribution of news reported on Chibok girls kidnapping across the various relevant themes. It indicates that 34% were centered on protests, 26% centered on other unspecified themes, 22% were on rescue measures/ agitations, 13% on Chibok abduction, and 3% on threat by terrorists, while 2% were on counter-terrorism initiatives. This table indicates an uneven distribution in news themes covered by sampled newspapers. Reading this data critically may point to a focus not on the main issue (Chibok Abduction) which will help the audience understand the conflict, rather the concentration was on the protests which may indicate direction of the news media interest in the issue.

**Table 6  
Prominence of the Reports on Chibok**

News Placement	Daily Sun	Daily Trust	The Nation	The Guardian	Total
Front Page	33% (n=22)	40% (n=14)	39% (n=34)	59% (n=23)	44% (n=93)
Back Page	2% (n=1)	0% (n=0)	9% (n=7)	12% (n=6)	7% (n=14)
Inside Page	51% (n=24)	62% (n=24)	38% (n=33)	41% (n=20)	47% (n=101)
Editorial Page	5% (n=2)	3% (n=1)	4% (n=3)	0% (n=0)	3% (n=6)
Total	100% (n=49)	100% (n=39)	100% (n=77)	100% (n=49)	100% (n=214)

Table 6 shows the placement of news across the Newspaper pages. It reveals that 43.5% of the news was placed on front pages, 6.5% on the back pages, and 47.2% on the inside pages while 2.8% appeared on the editorial page. The placement as indicated explains that the news media attached some level of prominence to the issue. However, since the sum of the placement was evenly distributed between the front and inside page one can infer that the level of prominence in relation to the nature of the story was just average.

**Table 7:  
Ideological Judgment on Boko Haram**

	Frequency	Percentage
Legitimate Intention Pursued With Legitimate Means	0	0%
Legitimate Intention Pursued With Illegitimate Means	0	0%
Illegitimate Intention Pursued With Illegitimate Means	80	59%
Neutral/Uncertain	55	41%
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>135</b>	<b>100%</b>

Table 7 shows the ideological opinion in the reports on Chibok girls' abduction. In other words, the value judgments or opinions projected in the reports. The data show that 59% projected it as a group with illegitimate intention pursued with illegitimate means, while 41% of the reports had neutral value judgment about the sect. Although the ethnic and religious beliefs of the newspapers owners could affect their framing



of the sect, it is rather dominant that the news media viewed and portrayed this sect as having illegitimate intention which they pursue with illegitimate means.

**Table 8:  
Ethno-Religious Influences / Sectional Attribution**

	Frequency	Percentage
Religious Attribution	39	29%
Tribal Attribution	4	3%
Religious & Tribal Attribution	5	4%
Neutral	87	64%
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>135</b>	<b>100%</b>

In line with results in the previous table, this table shows the frequency at which the newspapers attached religious attributions like “Islamist,” Islamic,” etc or tribal attributions such as “Hausa,” “Fulani” or “Northern” to Boko Haram to their stories. It found that 29% of the reports contained religious attribution, 3% contained tribal attribution, and 4% contained both religious and tribal attribution, while 64% remained neutral. This suggests dominance in the non use of ethnic and religious influences on the framing of the stories by the various newspaper organizations.

**Table 9:  
News Depth**

	Frequency	Percentage
Investigative	4	3%
Interpretative	68	38%
Investigative cum Interpretative	12	9%
Neither	51	50%
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>135</b>	<b>100%</b>

Table 9 shows how in-depth the reportorial approach of the newspapers was in covering Chibok girls’ abduction. The data indicate that 3.0% of the reports were investigative, 50% were neither interpretative, nor investigative while 9% were both investigative and interpretative, and 38% were interpretative which validates our previous finding that stories on Chibok girls were mainly straightforward news that were reported as they occurred.

**Table 10:  
Framing of the stories**

	Daily Sun	Daily Trust	The Nation	The Guardian	Total
Episodic Framing	86% (n=50)	90% (n=45)	93% (n=68)	78% (n=25)	88% (n=188)
Thematic Framing	15% (n=9)	10% (n=5)	7% (n=5)	22% (n=7)	12% (n=26)

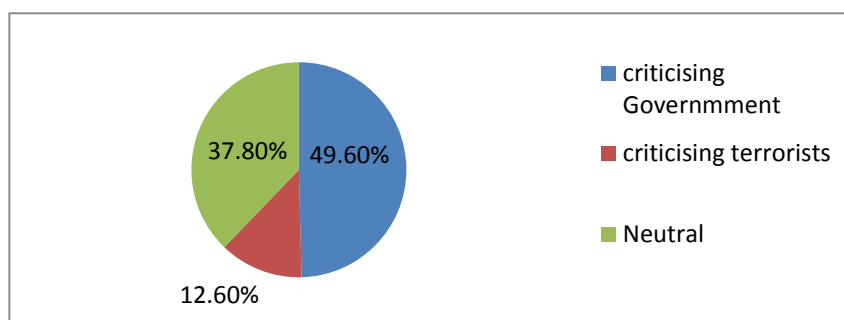
This table shows that out of the 214 Chibok issues contained in the four newspapers, 88% (188 issues) were episodically framed which involves a shallow sprouting of figures and casualties without an in-depth reportage and analysis while only 12% of them were thematically framed, suggesting therefore that the newspapers were often sequentially representing the events as they occur and not giving voices to diversity of sources who will provide different perspectives that will result in informed coverage of the issue, that would have helped readers determine the reality or otherwise of the whole incidents. In terms of ranking, the study found that the Guardian recorded 22% thematic framing of the abduction, followed by the Daily sun with 15%, the Daily Trust with 10% and then the Nation with 7% of thematic framing.

**Table 11:  
Sources of the Stories**

Sources	Daily Sun	Daily Trust	The Nation	The Guardian	Total
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Government Sources	36% (n=21)	34% (n=17)	68% (n=50)	53% (n=17)	49% (n=104)
News Agencies	34% (n=20)	10% (n=5)	26% (n=19)	31% (n=10)	26% (n=55)
Ordinary people	13% (n=8)	26% (n=13)	3% (n=2)	10% (n=3)	12% (n=26)
Security Agencies	17% (n=10)	30% (n=15)	3% (n=2)	6% (n=2)	14% (n=29)
	59	50	73	32	214 issues

This table presents that 49% of the stories were sourced through the government officials, 26% of the issues were received from the News Agencies. The stories sourced from the eyewitnesses and ordinary people recorded 12% while 14% of them were given by Security Agencies. The implication is that the government sources dominated as sources of the abduction story which can be attributed to the newspapers’ dominant episodic framing whereby the focus was more on unfolding developments of the abduction as well as the opinions of prominent government officials. This also corroborates evidence from literature on how the Nigerian media may have been conducting coverage of convenience without attendant in-depth investigative reporting.



**Figure 1: Direction of News story**

Figure 5 shows the direction of the news stories across the studied newspapers. The data reveal that half of the stories published on Chibok girls focused on criticizing government’s seemingly inability to rescue the girls. This aligns with data in Table 5 which demonstrated that the newspapers focused more on the themes of protests and rescue. Interestingly, a minimal percentage of the reports 12.6% focused on criticizing terrorists. This could suggest a political undertone in the newspapers coverage of the issue since their focus was not on the kidnapped girls or even the terrorists but on government’s action concerning the Kidnap.

## DISCUSSION

This study sought to establish the quantity and nature of Nigerian newspaper coverage of the Chibok Girls Kidnap. From the data, it is clear that Chibok Girls Kidnap was adequately covered. Results from analysis of newspaper contents conducted for this research seem to corroborate claims from previous studies which attest to a high frequency of coverage of the Chibok girls Kidnap by Nigerian news media. As shown from the study, there was a widespread coverage of the Chibok girls abduction by the Nigerian newspapers at (96.9%). This validates the popular views among scholars that terrorism, especially kidnappings and hostage crisis, is for mass media a source of news that enjoys high media coverage (Hoffman 2003, p.118).

The high frequency of coverage given to the issue was also demonstrated in the substantial amount of prominence to the Chibok abduction within the period under study. Apart from the fact that stories in Chibok girls abduction appeared mainly as “news stories”, they were given prominence based on news type, position and space. This also was evident in previous studies in this area (see; Ngwu, Ekwe, & Chiaha, 2015). In the study, news had more coverage while editorial was insufficiently covered. Predominance of news as opposed to other genres could be attributed to the currency of the issue. This corroborates previous studies of the Chibok Girls issue on low level of reportage dedicated to editorials as compared to other genres reported.

Result from the study further demonstrates that the focus of the report was not on the conflict (the Kidnapp and factors surrounding it) but rather has political undertone. For instance, Protests came first with (33.6%)

as the most reported aspect of the story followed by rescue agitations/measures (21.5%). The direction of the stories points to criticism of government's seemingly inability to rescue the abducted girls (49.6%). Little wonder the editorials in the newspapers – being the official opinionated positions of the media – was minimal regarding the Kidnap. It is instructive that results from the study indicate that majority of the news report (49%) were sourced from government officials as opposed to other sources such as the public and security agencies, that could have provided in-depth and investigative reporting to the coverage. This explains why majority of the content were reported as straight news with 88% (188 issues) episodically framed while only 12% (26 issues) of them were thematic and in-depth. As argued in literature, the best way to ensure that a news story is fair, balanced and informative in journalism practice is to have more than one voice. Using multi- sources not only authenticate or verify stories but also provide multiple perspectives of the story, and are also important in conflict reporting so that the publics are provided with accurate information. The non use of multiple sources is also reflected in the fact that Nigerian newspapers nature of media coverage was non investigative. Rather “protest” was found to be dominant theme in the newspapers coverage. This could possibly point to sensationalism reporting with underlying political undertone. We also established that the newspapers framed Boko Haram as a group without a legitimate intention suggesting that they are a terrorist organization using illegitimate means to achieve their means. It was also found that the ethno-religious background of the ownerships of Nigerian newspapers did not significantly influence their portrayal of Boko Haram. The newspapers were found to have, irrespective of ethnic and religious backgrounds, generally “condemned” Boko Haram as negative in ideology.

## **CONCLUSION**

What this study and survey of the literature did, is to appraise the factors that may possibly inform media coverage of Chibok Girls Kidnap, and what theoretical arguments can be advanced to explain the possible relationship between news media coverage of conflict and audience perception of these reports. The literature suggests that the nature of coverage is a consequence of the media seeking to set the agenda, to frame issues, and to prime the public to attend to particular issues. It is also a consequence of low knowledge of conflict reporting by journalist (Zebulon, 2017). As gleaned from literature, although the media are interested in conflict, there are numerous challenges to contend with regarding the coverage and presentation of conflicts. Most of these relate to critics observation of the low knowledge level of journalists regarding conflict reporting, the perceived risks associated with covering conflict stories and the fact that conflict /violent conflict are complex issues requiring expert knowledge.

Though the Nigerian news media provided high frequency of coverage of the Chibok Girls Kidnap, yet the study observed a lack of in-depth analytical coverage of the whole incident. The inability of journalists to provide the Nigerian audience with informed coverage regarding Chibok Girls Kidnap is in part ascribed to gaps in journalism training. Howard (2009) captures it succinctly this way; “traditional journalism skills development has not included the study of how best to cover violent conflict and has ignored any understanding of violent conflict as a social process”. He further submits that while other areas such as business, sports, music, etc. had commanded attention, the dynamics of violent conflict, its instigation, development and resolution, were poorly understood and inefficiently handled and reported by most journalists. That put many of them in disadvantaged positions where they “find themselves ill equipped to address” conflict issues.

It is, for example, widely acknowledged that journalism training institutions in the country only recently started to offer conflict studies. At most Nigerian school of Journalism, they do not place conflicts and conflict sensitive reporting techniques seriously. The emphasis is only peripheral so that most times whatever knowledge of conflict that journalists acquired was through on the job experience and seminars and workshops from international agencies. The minimal level of in-depth coverage that conflict reporting receive can also be attributed to lack of capacity building coupled with the little investment made by media houses to enhance the competences of their journalists to enable them give conflict issues informed coverage. The study concludes that although conflict/violent conflict are ideally of great interest to the media because of the import of such issues to society. Unfortunately, there is a widely held view that in reporting conflict especially violent conflict journalists and the media often do not possess the knowledge and resources to adequately provide informed coverage. Therefore the media in providing information about important issues such as violent conflict, some reports are often “inaccurate, exaggerated or inadequate”, with focus on conflict problem, statics, and causalities recorded ignoring the causes, consequences and outcome. This demonstrates the incapacity of the media to offer critical and meaningful coverage on some of the difficult issues like those related to terrorism. The failure to adequately cover conflict or sensationalization of conflict,

may have an adverse impact on the public's ability to participate in policy discussions and in making informed decisions as well as the utilization of relevant information because it creates inflated perceptions and misperceptions of the high risks of the conflict incident .

The recommendation for this work is aptly captured with this quote from Idowu (2014) as the way forward as he emphasizes:

Ultimately, Nigeria with active support from the media, the military and the security community must galvanize the people to be more security-conscious and conflict-sensitive to tackle the BHM and other conflicts. As long as conflicts result from divergent interests, perceived injustice, clash of values, and communication breakdown, the Boko Haram Menace(BHM) is not about to disappear from Nigeria. The war against terror cannot be won by half-hearted reporting by the media or lack of media engagement by the military and security community but by all parties leveraging on each other's strength. The BHM discussion will benefit more from greater appreciation of conflict-sensitive communication that differentiates underlying issues from the eye-catching ones, that explains the process, not just the consequence, and distinguishes the predisposing factors from the immediate trigger. The media and the military-security community obviously have a lot of catching up to do in this area for the good of our land.

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**APPENDIX A**  
**CODING GUIDE**

S/No	Data items	Definitions and Code Numbers
1	Newspapers	Daily Sun – 01 Daily Trust – 02 Nation – 03

		Guardian – 04
2	Ethnic Background of Ownership	Igbo – 01 Hausa – 02 Yoruba – 03 Minority – 04
3	Religious Background of ownership	Christian – 01 Muslim – 02
4	Newspapers Contents	News story – 01 Feature – 02 Pictorial (stand alone) – 03 Pictorial (with story) – 04 Cartoon – 05 Editorial – 06 Opinion Articles- 07 Others- 08
5	Placement	Front Page – 01 Back Page – 02 Inside Page – 03 Editorial Page – 04
6	Theme	Chibok abduction – 01 Terrorists’ threat – 02 Rescue measures– 03 Counter-terrorism initiatives – 04 Protests – 05 Others- 06
7	Ideological Judgment on Boko Haram	Legitimate intention pursued with legitimate means – 01 Legitimate intention pursued with illegitimate means – 02 Illegitimate intention pursued with illegitimate means – 03 Neutral – 04
8	Framing	Episodic Framing-01 Thematic Framing-02
9	Sectional Attributions in Portraying Boko Haram	Religious attributions – 01 Tribal attributions – 02 Religious/tribal attributions – 03 None – 04
10	Sources of the Stories	Government Sources-01 News Agencies-02 Ordinary People-03 Security Agencies-04
11	Depth	Investigative – 01 Interpretative – 02 Investigative/Interpretative – 03 None – 03
12	Direction	Criticising Terrorists -01 Criticising Government-02 Neutral -03

**APPENDIX B**

**CODING SHEET**

- |  |  |   |  |
|--|--|---|--|
| <p><b>Ethnic Background of Ownership</b><br/>Igbo – 01<br/>Hausa – 02<br/>Newspaper Title<br/>Daily Sun – 01<br/>Daily Trust – 02<br/>Nation – 03<br/>Guardian – 04</p> <p><b>Ideological judgments on Boko Haram</b><br/>Legitimate intention pursued with legitimate means – 01<br/>Legitimate intention pursued with illegitimate means – 02<br/>Illegitimate intention pursued with illegitimate means – 03<br/>Neutral – 04</p> <p><b>Framing</b><br/>Episodic Framing<br/>Thematic Framing</p> | <p><b>Religious Background of Ownership</b><br/>Christian – 01<br/>Muslim – 02</p> | <p><b>Newspaper Content</b><br/>News story – 01<br/>Feature – 02<br/>Pictorial (stand alone) – 03<br/>Pictorial (with text) – 04<br/>Cartoon – 05<br/>Editorial – 06<br/>Opinion Articles – 07</p> <p><b>News Placement</b><br/>Front Page – 01<br/>Back Page – 02<br/>Inside Page – 03<br/>Editorial Page – 04</p> <p><b>Sectional Attributions in Portraying Boko Haram</b><br/>Religious attributions – 01<br/>Tribal attributions – 02<br/>Religious/tribal attributions – 03<br/>None – 04</p> <p><b>Sources of the Stories</b><br/>Government Sources-01<br/>News Agencies-02<br/>Ordinary People-03<br/>Security Agencies-04</p> | <p><b>Theme</b><br/>Chibok abduction – 01<br/>Terrorists’ threat – 02<br/>Rescue measures – 03<br/>Counter-terrorism initiatives – 04<br/>Protests – 05<br/>Others – 06</p> <p>gative – 01<br/>etative – 02<br/>gative/Interpretative – 03</p> |
|--|--|---|--|

S/N	News Headline	Newspaper Title	Ethnic Background of Ownership	Religious Background of Ownership	News Contents	News Placement	Theme	Ideological judgments on Boko Haram	Framing	Sectional Attributions in Portraying Boko Haram	Sources	Depth	Frequency	Direction