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ARTICLE

MEDIA, TERRORISM REPORTING AND LESSONS IN AWARENESS SUSTENANCE:

the Nigerian newspapers' coverage of the Chibok girls' abduction

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ABSTRACT – This study investigated how Nigerian newspapers contributed to sensitizing and sustaining public attention on the issue of the schoolgirls that were abducted by the Boko Haram group in Chibok, northeastern Nigeria. The study analyzed the direction/slant, frequency, and prominence of news stories, feature articles, editorials, special reports, interpretative articles, and news analysis on the abduction as published in three major Nigerian newspapers. Using the content analytical technique, the study found that there was no day in the period under investigation that the issue of the abducted Chibok girls did not get attention in the press. The study also found that the press discharged its corporate social responsibility by setting and sustaining public consciousness on the injustice and inhumanity of the abduction. Furthermore, a connection was established between the unrelenting crusade mounted by non-governmental organizations, especially the #BringBackOurGirls movement, for the release of the abducted girls, sustained public interest provided by the Press, and the eventual government action that culminated in the release of 164 out of the 276 girls initially abducted. This study, therefore, recommends continued publicity by the media in its role as a social crusader to ensure that the remaining Chibok and other abductees are rescued from their Boko Haram abductors.
Key words: Terrorism. Abduction. Agenda setting. Chibok girls. Nigerian newspapers

MÍDIA, REPORTAGENS SOBRE TERRORISMO E LIÇÕES DE SUSTENTAÇÃO DA CONSCIÊNCIA: a cobertura dos jornais nigerianos sobre o sequestro das garotas Chibok

RESUMO – Este estudo investigou como os jornais nigerianos contribuíram para sensibilizar e manter a atenção do público sobre a questão das estudantes que foram sequestradas pelo grupo Boko Haram em Chibok, no nordeste da Nigéria. O estudo analisou o direcionamento/ ponto de vista, a frequência e proeminência das notícias, artigos de destaque, editoriais, reportagens especiais, artigos interpretativos e análises de notícias sobre o sequestro nas publicações dos três principais jornais nigerianos. Usando técnica analítica de conteúdo, o estudo identificou que, no período investigado, não houve um dia em que a pauta do sequestro não tenha recebido atenção da imprensa. O estudo descobriu também que a imprensa cumpriu sua responsabilidade social corporativa ao estabelecer e manter a consciência pública sobre a injustiça e desumanidade do sequestro. Além disso, uma conexão foi estabelecida entre a cruzada incessante montada por organizações não governamentais, especialmente o movimento #BringBackOurGirls, pela libertação das meninas, e sustentou o interesse público proporcionado pela imprensa e a eventual ação governamental que culminou com a libertação de 164 das 276 garotas inicialmente sequestradas. Portanto, este estudo recomenda a continuidade da visibilidade proporcionada pela mídia no seu papel de cruzada social para assegurar que Chiboks e outros raptados sejam resgatados dos seus sequestradores do Boko Haram.
Palavras-chave: Terrorismo. Sequestro. Agenda setting. Garotas Chibok. Jornais nigerianos.

MEDIOS DE COMUNICACIÓN, INFORMACIÓN SOBRE TERRORISMO Y LECCIONES EN MATERIA DE SENSIBILIZACIÓN: cobertura de periódicos nigerianos sobre el secuestro de las niñas de Chibok

RESUMEN – En este estudio se investiga cómo los periódicos nigerianos contribuyeron a sensibilizar y mantener la atención pública sobre la cuestión de las niñas secuestradas por el grupo Boko Haram en Chibok, al noreste de Nigeria. El estudio analizó la dirección/ orientación, frecuencia y prominencia de las noticias, artículos de fondo, editoriales, informes especiales, artículos interpretativos y análisis periodísticos sobre el secuestro, publicados en tres importantes periódicos nigerianos. Mediante el uso de la técnica del análisis de contenido, el estudio llegó a la conclusión de que no había ningún día en el período investigado en que el asunto de las niñas Chibok secuestradas no recibiera atención en la prensa. También se encontró que la prensa cumplió con su responsabilidad social corporativa al establecer y mantener la conciencia pública sobre la injusticia y

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la falta de humanidad del secuestro. Además, se estableció una conexión entre la implacable cruzada montada por organizaciones no gubernamentales, especialmente el movimiento #BringBackOurGirls, por la liberación de las niñas secuestradas, el interés público sostenido proporcionado por la prensa, y la eventual acción gubernamental que culminó en la liberación de 164 de las 276 niñas inicialmente secuestradas. Por lo tanto, en este estudio se recomienda que los medios de comunicación continúen otorgando publicidad, en su rol público de luchadores sociales, para garantizar que los restantes Chibok y otros secuestrados sean rescatados de sus secuestradores de Boko Haram.
Palabras clave: Terrorismo. Secuestro. Agenda setting. Niñas Chibok. Periódicos nigerianos.

1 Introduction

There is no gainsaying that the media has a fundamental responsibility in framing and showcasing public opinion in any civilized society (Jerit & Barabas, 2012). The power of the media lies in its capacity to inform and shape society's self-perceptions in such ways and manner that it erodes the individual's capacity to act autonomously. In the contemporary world, there is a subsisting relationship between the media and society. This relationship makes it possible for people to variously interpret and evaluate the media and its messages. With the rise of the internet in the twenty-first century, the two-way relationship between the mass media and public opinion is beginning to change (Stivers, 2012).

Although the key role of the media in society is in the realm of disseminating information, yet it may decide to do so or refrain from doing so. In other words, it is either the media takes a position on an issue that concerns the majority of the populace such as the abduction of 276 Chibok girls in Nigeria in 2014 or stays aloof. The role the media plays in a given situation depends on a complex set of factors, including the relationship that the media has with the actors, its level of independence, and its economic interests.

The abduction of 276 girls from Government Girls' Secondary School, Chibok, a town in Borno state, Nigeria, in 2014 by the Boko Haram terrorist group was quite shocking to Nigerians and the global community. Thus, the campaign for their release, which was coordinated under the auspices of the #BringBackOurGirls movement, was a cardinal social issue for the press and other social crusaders. The campaign attracted notable personalities and celebrities across the world, thus giving it added global relevance and significance (Olson, 2016; Matfess, 2017; Sesay, 2019). The Nigerian press gave salience to news stories connected with the abduction, which contributed to compelling the government to take every action necessary for their rescue. The publicity blitz accorded the abduction played out in the campaigns for Nigeria's 2015 general elections. It has been suggested that the non-resolution of the abduction saga contributed to Goodluck Jonathan's loss in the 2015 presidential election (Olson, 2016).

The Nigerian press deployed the strategy of media framing, which enabled it to maintain an influence on the trajectory of the readers' consciousness and understanding concerning the abduction (Cissel, 2012; Muobike, 2017). As Powell (2011) has pointed out, framing goes beyond phrases as it incorporates the selection of some aspects of a perceived reality and the conferment of salience to it in the communicating text. Frames enable the construction and sharing of social realities persistently over time, which invariably shape and structure the social world in a certain determined manner.

This study examined the first one-year coverage of three major Nigerian newspapers, namely *The Nation*, *The Guardian,* and *The Punch* with regards to the abducted Chibok schoolgirls and how this subsequently set the tone for the coverage of the abduction. In examining the newspapers, the study evaluated the nature of the coverage given to the abduction. It also interrogated the extent to which the prominence dedicated to the abduction contributed to eliciting action from the government that led to the freeing of some of the girls from their Boko Haram abductors. The study found a connection between the unrelenting press coverage of the abduction, sustained public interest, and government action, culminating in the securement of the release of 164 out of the 276 girls initially abducted.

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2 Terrorism and media coverage in the global context

Terrorism is a global phenomenon and an integral part of the social reality in today's world. Thus, terrorist activities are sources of threat to peaceful existence not only in developing countries but also in the world's richer and developed countries. As Beckett (2016) has observed:

> Terrorism is a brutal and violent practice, but it is also a media phenomenon. Terror is vital news: a dramatic, important story that the public needs to know about and understand. But terrorism also relies on such publicity to disrupt society, provoke fear, and demonstrate power. (Beckett, 2016, p.4).

Counter-terrorism measures to contain terrorist activities across the globe, including the human sufferings associated with them, have been a subject of discussion and international collaborative efforts. The advancement in information and communication technology such as the rise of global television news channels, online news outlets, mobile telephony, and social media has enhanced real-time dissemination of terrorism-related information, including the expansion of the reach of such information. The coverage of national and international crises has been the cornerstone of journalism for centuries (Mogensen, 2008). However, the countless sources through which information is disseminated have created what O'Loughlin (2019, p.1) termed "a diffusion of communication power". The effect is that new digital technologies have further whittled down the overall impact of the traditional media outlets in disseminating information. The rise of various genres of "citizen journalists" as a result of the new digital technologies has placed a burden on journalism. As Dahlgren (2019) has noted, while they have helped in extending the reach of information in real-time, they have also undermined the professionalism associated with journalism.

Terrorism, like other forms of disasters, receives instant global media coverage in diverse forms. Often such journalistic reportage is accompanied by shocking descriptions and images of death and destruction, all of which play some prominent role in capturing public attention, promoting compassion, and nudging governments into humanitarian actions (Papacharissi & de Fatima Oliveira, 2008; Pantti, 2019). Journalism performs a leading role in the coverage of terrorism across the globe. The influence of journalism is diverse, especially in terms of framing and setting agenda which has

determined how terrorist activities have become known, defined, and responded to by governments and the general public (Pantti, 2019; Dahlgren, 2019).

Terrorism coverage has two sides: the terrorist's side and the victim's side. As Cohen-Almagor (2006, p.184) has pointed out, "today's terrorists are well aware of the power of the media, and manipulate them to their own advantage and need". Besides, terrorists have leveraged their knowledge of digital technologies to further their agendas. For instance, in 2016, the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) organized hacking groups under the auspices of the "United Cyber Caliphate" to conduct cyber warfare against the West (Institute for Economics and Peace, 2016). Additionally, the cyberspace affords terrorists operational latitude to publish kill lists, distribute guidelines on terror and cyber operations and conduct secret and untraceable transactions online (Institute for Economics and Peace, 2016). Thus, covering terrorism poses a dilemma for journalists, media organizations, and social media companies. While reporting terrorist attacks constitutes part of the responsibilities of media organizations, such publicity serves the aims of terrorism itself as it spreads fear. How terrorist activities are reported contributes to influencing public perception, including the level of demonization or glorification that ensues within the public sphere (Papacharissi & de Fatima Oliveira, 2008). On the other hand, stifling coverage can fuel distrust and erode public trust and confidence in the news media (Beckett, 2016).

The coverage of terrorist activities also involves the interpretation of such terrorist actions by journalists. The interpretations often ascribed to terrorist activities contribute to the trajectory of public perceptions and reactions. The slant of such interpretations often shapes and spawns competing perceptions, including a kindly consideration of terrorists in some instances as freedom fighters (Cohen-Almagor, 2006; Papacharissi & de Fatima Oliveira, 2008). Notwithstanding the strategies often adopted by terrorists to mobilize legitimacy and public support, the international community has denounced their activities, as their victims are often innocent citizens with no connections to their grievances (Cohen-Almagor, 2006; Mogensen, 2008). The end of the hegemonic struggle between the Western and Eastern powers created some consensus in the international arena that strengthened counterterrorism efforts and paved the way for the restoration of the international principles of legitimacy and order (Farnen, 2014).

The denouncement of terrorism by the international community is encapsulated in the various conventions and resolutions of the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) and the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) respectively (Institute for Economics and Peace, 2016; Minnella, 2019). Before 2001, the Security Council had imposed sanctions against Libya in 1992 and Sudan in 1996 for sponsoring acts of terrorism (Institute for Economics and Peace, 2016). However, the watershed in the fight against terrorism was 2001, after terrorists had attacked the United States. Since then, the UNSC has issued several resolutions to confront terrorist threats starting with Resolution 1373 (2001), which required every state to consider terrorism-related offenses and terrorist financing as serious crimes. The UNSC has passed a motley of resolutions, which focused on weakening the capacity of terrorists. Among these resolutions were Resolution 1540 (2004), urging states to prevent terrorists from acquiring weapons of mass destruction, Resolution 2178 (2014), demanding states to criminalize traveling abroad by their citizens to join terrorist groups, and Resolution 2482 (2019), requiring states to prevent terrorists from benefitting from proceeds of organized crimes (United Nations Security Council, 2001, 2004, 2014, 2019).

The collective posture of the international community has been a unifying factor in the fight against terrorism, especially in the area of controlling the information gateway. Although concerted efforts are underway to fully control the information gateway, it does not appear that terrorists would be shut out any time soon. As observed by Christina Schori Liang of the Geneva Centre for Security Policy, laws and other efforts by the Global Internet Forum to Counter Terrorism (comprising *Facebook*, Microsoft, *Twitter*, and *YouTube* among others), have proved insufficient to keep extremists from using the internet as a strategic asset (Institute for Economics and Peace, 2019).

Journalism still occupies a strategic place at the gate of information dissemination despite the influence of the internet in liberalizing the propagation and access to information. In other words, the slant which journalists give to terrorism in terms of their decision on what to report and how to report it can create a climate of public support, apathy, or anger (Cohen-Almagor, 2006). Similarly, the international media determines the nature of coverage to accord to terrorist events across the world. As such, there could be a disproportionate coverage of terrorist events to achieve some

predetermined objectives by media organizations and their sponsors. As observed by Nevalsky (2015), media organizations often change their agendas and frames based on the geographic location that an event has taken place in deference to the interest of their readers. Thus, the consideration of the affluence and affinity of countries to the developed countries contributes to determining the quality and amount of international news coverage they receive (Nevalsky, 2015).

In the milieu of contemporary liberalization of information, journalism enjoys some advantages. These include positive public perception, the ascription of the *ethos* of responsible reportage, which keeps the journalist in the realm of professionalism, public trust in the media as credible sources of authentic news, and journalism's moral burden of ensuring the ascendancy of truth. Thus, in covering the activities of extremists, the journalist constantly contends with ethical issues, which ultimately guide their conduct (Abubakar, 2020). An important point to note is that media coverage of terrorism varies by country because journalism varies by country (O'Loughlin, 2019). Similarly, the nature of terrorist attacks also determines the nature of coverage. Concerning the abduction of Chibok girls by Boko Haram, it was not a single act of terrorism that left ruins in its wake. Rather, it was a traumatic experience in which innocent schoolgirls were at the epicenter of a terrorist saga with their families and friends thrown into emotional distress. The coverage of the abduction was hinged on the campaign for the release of the girls under the auspices of the #BringBackOurGirls movement.

3 Brief background: Boko Haram and abduction of women

Since the Boko Haram group began its terrorist campaigns in 2009, it has masterminded many attacks that led to fatalities running into tens of thousands. There is no unanimity in the major databases about the number of attacks or consequent fatalities. According to Campbell and Harwood (2018), the Boko Haram group masterminded lethal attacks in the range of between 2.021 and 3.346 incidents, which led to the death of between 34.261 and 37.530 people. In addition to these fatalities, the Boko Haram group is responsible for a myriad of miseries across northern Nigeria where their activities have grounded normal routines of livelihood pursuits. Apart from inducing and sustaining internal displacement, the terrorist activities of the

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Boko Haram group have completely multiplied hardship, especially in the north-eastern region of Nigeria. According to the United Nations Refugee Agency, more than 2.4 million people stretching from northeastern Nigeria, Cameroon, Chad to Niger, have been internally displaced due to the activities of the Boko Haram (UNHCR, 2018).

Additionally, more than seven million people have been identified as being at risk of starvation due to dislocation from their traditional sources of livelihoods. Furthermore, Boko Haram's activities have disorganized the socio-economic wellbeing of the people resulting in a lack of access to education, healthcare facilities, and other infrastructural facilities. All of these have resulted in what Campbell and Harwood (2018) have described as "disrupted communities" and "stunted economic development" in northeastern Nigeria where the Boko Haram's presence is quite dominant.

The initial source of recruitment for the Boko Haram was the *almajiri* system that is operational in northern Nigeria. The term *almajiri* is derived from the Arabic term *al-muhajir,* meaning "the person who migrates" (Loimeier 2012; Nwozor et al., 2020). In Northern Nigeria, the *almajiri* system is as old as Islam because of the emphasis on Islamic knowledge and education as well as the itinerant nature of acquiring it (Nwozor, 2016). Under this system, young moslem students move from teacher to teacher to acquire knowledge. Because of the lack of formalization of these Qur'anic schools owing to their innumerability and extreme personalization, they do not receive adequate institutional support and, therefore, rely on individual benevolence (*zakat)* and direct alms for their sustenance (Nwozor, 2016). The effect of this is that these students live in destitution and constitute easy prey for recruitment into radical and rogue groups (Onuoha, 2012; Loimeier, 2012).

However, since 2013, the Boko Haram changed tactics, targeting young girls who were often abducted to further its terrorist agenda. The United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) estimated that since 2013, over 1.000 children have been abducted by the Boko Haram in northeastern Nigeria (Busari, 2018). In a similar estimate, Amnesty International put the number of girls abducted by the Boko Haram at over 2.000 girls, with many of them presumably forced into sexual slavery and taught how to fight (Amnesty International, 2015; Shearlaw, 2015). The data on abduction include the 276 girls that were abducted from a government secondary school in Chibok in 2014. The Chibok girls' abduction sparked national and global

outrage and ignited a social crusade under the auspices of the #BringBackOurGirls movement (Matfess, 2017). Also, it is estimated that over 1.400 schools have been destroyed with at least 2.295 teachers killed (Winsor, 2018).

The pressure to rescue the girls was mounted by the #BringBackOurGirls movement. This group sustained its campaign for the release of the girls through protest marches, rallies, and sit-ins (Busari, 2018). As the #BringBackOurGirls movement organized protest marches in the capital city of Abuja and other major cities in Nigeria demanding government action towards the rescue of the girls, the global social media community rallied around them through the continuous creation of awareness via #bringbackourgirls on various social media platforms (Shearlaw, 2015; Olson, 2016; Sesay, 2019). Key international figures such as Michelle Obama, former US first lady; Malala Yousafzai, the young Pakistani that was shot by the Taliban for attending school; Hilary Clinton, the former US secretary of state and presidential candidate of Democratic Party; Anne Hathaway, an award-winning actress; Angelina Jolie, a world-class actress and United Nations Special Envoy; and Alicia Keyes among others supported the campaign in diverse ways (Dearden, 2014; Olson, 2016; Matfess, 2017; Sesay, 2019).

Undoubtedly, the coordinated activities of the #BringBackOurGirls movement contributed immensely to retaining the plights of the abducted girls and their families in the public domain thus providing a constant opportunity for newspaper coverage. Abductions of young boys and girls have been going on in northeastern Nigeria since Boko Haram became a full-fledged terrorist group. However, these abductions tended to be in small numbers, which made its media reportage almost negligible. The motives for the Boko Haram abductions have often revolved around proselytizing and radicalizing the abductees, using them as sex slaves, or brainwashing them to become human bombs (Diep, 2019). The Chibok girl's abduction opened a new vista of high politics. The Boko Haram used the abducted girls as pawns in the big chess game of securing the release of its members captured by government forces (Diep, 2019)

Since the Chibok girls' abduction, there have been spates of Boko Haram orchestrated abductions in which young girls were the major targets. The major one was the abduction of 110 students from a girls' boarding school in Dapchi, a town in the

northeast of Nigeria, on 19 February 2018. Although about 104 of these girls were released slightly above a month later, six of the abductees, including Leah Sharibu who refused to denounce her Christian faith and convert to Islam, are still unaccounted for (Winsor, 2018). In all of these abductions, the Nigerian press has continued to beam its searchlight on them through the assistance of non-governmental organizations.

4 Research problem

This study investigated the press coverage in the adjoining one-year period after the Boko Haram terrorist group abducted 276 Chibok secondary school girls. The coverage given to the incident by the press helped to stir up and sustain emotions in various quarters, both domestic and international. The questions that this study investigated were:

i.   How robust was the coverage of the abduction of Chibok girls in the period under review?
ii.   To what extent did the prominence dedicated to the abduction elicit positive action from the government?

5 Brief literature review and theoretical framework

5.1 Brief literature review

Terrorism became a global subject following the terrorist attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon in the US on September 11, 2001. The attacks not only changed the U.S. government's handling of terrorism, but they also induced a global domino effect on the perception and attitude towards terrorist attacks. Thus, terrorism moved from being perceived as a minor concern to being designated a major global problem. The re-designation led to a subsequent declaration of war on terror by world leaders (Powell, 2011). As a social construct, the concept of terrorism defies a universal consensual definition. In extant terrorism literature, the concept has been defined in several ways resulting in multiple meanings. The lack of consensus on how terrorism should be defined prompted Greene (2017) to advocate the adoption of a multi-definitional approach.

A key challenge associated with defining terrorism is that its meaning is shaped by the subjective perspectives of the categorizer. In other words, certain factors determine how people understand and use the concept of terrorism. These may include the society and circumstances in which people find themselves, the dominant historical and political contexts, and their overall perceptions (Greene, 2017). While the study by Schmid and Jongman (1988) identified 109 definitions of terrorism, a later study by Jeffrey Simon (as cited in Matusitz, 2013) indicated the existence of 212 definitions of terrorism. However, following the 2001 terrorist attacks in the US, Schmid (2012) has chronicled 260 definitions of terrorism. Based on the foregoing, Matusitz (2013, p.4) has opined that "trying to define terrorism is like being in an Alice-in-Wonderland universe; it is a concept that no one can clearly define and even involves actors that no one can specifically identify".

Notwithstanding the divergences in the definitional arena of terrorism, three common elements tend to exist in the legal definitions of terrorism of most countries, namely the deployment of violence, political objectives, and the propagation of fear in the target population (Matusitz, 2013; Nwozor, 2016). Concerning the domains of manifestation, terrorism could be grouped into three, although with interconnections. These are international terrorism, domestic terrorism, and transnational terrorism (Egbo, n.d.). Despite the lack of definitional unanimity in the domains of terrorism study, terrorism embodies a method, intent, and goal and thus, connotes the use and threat of the use of violence to intimidate, pressure, or persuade targeted groups or agencies of government to achieve designated goals be they political, religious, socio-economic or ideological. Essentially, terrorist activities are carried out through the instrumentality of groups or organizations that may be clandestine. A terrorist organization could be structured or unstructured and might have an identifiable or non-identifiable chain of command or a cell structure with provisions for lone wolves (Matusitz, 2013).

Terrorism deploys violence that has far-reaching impacts on the state and society. The Global Terrorism Database (GTD) recorded over 170.000 terrorist incidents around the world for the period 1970 to 2017 (Institute for Economics and Peace, 2019). Accompanying these incidents were human fatalities running into hundreds of thousands. For instance, according to the Global Terrorism Database (GTD), terrorism was responsible for 26.445 fatalities in 2017, and

between 2017 and 2018, terrorism was responsible for 15.952 deaths (Institute for Economics and Peace, 2019). The nature of terrorism and the imperative of ethical considerations place a very difficult demand on journalism. Terrorism coverage impacts the personal safety and professional sustainability of journalists as they resolve the dilemmas in content selection, source relationships, framing stories, and dealing with victims (Beckett, 2016; Abubakar, 2020).

The relationship between the media and terrorism reporting has been a subject of intense discourse in scholarly writings (e.g. Rohner & Frey, 2007; Shoshani & Slone, 2008; Iqbal, 2015; Rivera, 2016). Terrorism coverage poses a series of dilemmas for news media. Despite the brutal and violent nature of terrorism, it is a media phenomenon (Beckett, 2016). The journalist must inform and exercise his rights to the free press (O'Loughlin, 2019). The dilemma is that despite terrorism being newsworthy, its impacts are often shocking and distasteful. The question is whether the public should be informed or not if terrorism is happening in their society. As O'Loughlin (2019, p.1) has noted, "terrorism coverage is an intrinsic part of the very act of terrorism. News images are integral to the attack. Acts of terrorism are planned to ensure coverage that reaches the wider public".

The coverage of terrorist activities puts terrorism on the front burner of society's consciousness and gives it the desired exposure. In our contemporary world, the media (old and new) provide the platform for both moderates and extremists to share their principles, embolden prospective proselytes, frighten perceived enemies, justify their terrorist activities and recruit new members (e.g. Farwell, 2014; Burke, 2015). Studies show that terrorists are progressively making use of the media as a publicity device (Smith, 2015). The media unwittingly empowers extremists in varied ways. The capacity of various extremist organizations to circulate videos via the new media empowers terrorists to depend less on mainstream news media to distribute messages to widespread audiences (Seib & Janbek, 2011). Nevertheless, the press coverage of terrorism is still extremely relevant because of the credibility that traditional media outfits have built over the years and their capacity to provide in-depth details and analyses (Nacos, 2007).

The webpages of extremist organizations oftentimes serve as sources of information to journalists. This is a departure from the practice of terrorists in the pre-digital technology era when the media effectively kept the gates of information dissemination. According to Farnen (2014),

In more technologically primitive days, terrorists frequently demanded media interviews, press releases, printing of demands, statements, or photographs, and the like. More recently, however, terrorist (or quasi-terrorist) groups have produced videotaped reports on the condition of hostages, used hostages as spokespersons, spoken directly to television audiences, or even compiled a documentary record for publication of their exploits (as the Animal Liberation Front did in 1985 after a California laboratory break-in). (Farnen, 2014, pp.258–259).

The role of the media in terrorism coverage has generated many controversies. Some see media reports from such sources as irresponsible based on their conviction that terrorists do not deserve media coverage (Doward, 2015). However, the media is under obligation to report what constitutes a danger to society including terrorist activities, no matter how abhorrent they could be to human sensibilities. Thus, terrorism cannot be ignored by the media. Extremist groups have been recording videos of executions and making the same available on social media thus bypassing the gatekeeping role of the media.

Scholars agree that the Boko Haram is a terrorist organization. It evolved before transforming into a terrorist group (Onuoha, 2012; Bagaji et al., 2012; Maiangwa & Uzodike 2012). The initial agenda of the original group from which the Boko Haram group emerged as a splinter group was not the Islamization of the country (Walker 2012; Karmon, 2014). Its key agenda was the pursuit of the religious goal of disseminating its own variant of Islam with a social focus on the economic hardship and poor living standard of the people (Karmon, 2014). Scholars have emphasized that Boko Haram was not the name the group called itself (Waldek & Jayasekara, 2011; Onuoha, 2012). The name came into use because of the group's strong disparagement of western education (Nwozor, 2016).

From its initial socio-Islamic crusade, the Boko Haram became radicalized. Onuoha (2012) periodizes the radicalization of the group and the emergence of Boko Haram to 2002. This was when Mohammed Yusuf assumed the headship of the group and its name changed variously until Boko Haram. The metamorphosis of the Boko Haram and its ultimate radicalization was built on the utopian ideals of eliminating corruption in Nigeria (Onuoha, 2012), and creating a pure Islamic state ruled by sharia law (Walker, 2012). By placing a searchlight on the Boko Haram due to the regularity of their terrorist attacks and in many circumstances, their sheer daredevilry, the Nigerian media was able to keep the group's terrorist activities in the public consciousness.

On the night of 14 April 2014, the Boko Haram group invaded the Government Girls Secondary School in Chibok, Borno State, and abducted a total of 276 female students (*BBC News*, 2017; Golubski, 2019). It was speculated that the schoolgirls were moved to Konduga, a part of Sambisa forest where the Boko Haram group has its fortress (Maclean, 2014). The initial efforts of the Nigerian government to rescue the abducted girls did not yield fruits. However, with the help of the Swiss government and other major stakeholders, about 164 of the schoolgirls were rescued, thus leaving 112 girls still unaccounted for (International Crisis Group, 2018). It has been speculated that the Boko Haram group's motive for invading Chibok, which is a Christian village, was to create religious tension that would deepen distrust in the polity. A justification for this line of thinking was the video clip released by the Boko Haram leader, Abubakar Shekau saying, "the girls that have not accepted Islam are now gathered in numbers and we treat them well the way the Prophet Muhammad treated the infidels he seized" (*BBC News*, 2014; Smith & Sherwood, 2014).

On record, 530 students from several villages preparing for their final Senior Secondary Certificate Examination were in the school. However, there was no clear record showing the number of girls present during the attack (Perkins, 2014; Maclean, 2014). A combination of feedbacks from the military, parents, and those that escaped confirmed the abduction and helped to reconstruct the number of girls abducted (Dorell, 2014; Martinez, 2014). Several reports indicated that security agencies, especially the military received intelligence of the impending attack but could not do much to thwart the attack owing to their inability to mobilize the necessary resources for either a preemptive attack or a counterattack (Hamish & Omisore, 2014; Hill, 2014). Scholars have pointed at the similarity between the Chibok abduction and the series of abductions of young girls in Algeria in the 1990s and early 2000 by the Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb. These abductions were aimed at debasing womanhood and intimidating the civilian population (Hill, 2014; Lazreg, 2009).

The media can be a significant force in influencing public debate both on issues concerning the elites and in holding authorities and powers in the society accountable (Stivers, 2012). In other words, the force of media crusade can foster public debate and exert pressure on decision-makers to bring about change on matters that affect the generality of the people. The advocacy role of the media

can be tactical, especially in showcasing social concerns and working towards the actualization of desired social change (McBrien, 2005).

Media advocacy emphasizes the use of the media for social and public policy advancement (Puddephatt, 2006). It also attempts to frame and reshape public conversations to generate adequate backing necessary to advance such social issues. Within this context, the success of media advocacy is dependent on the support of the public and other forms of social partnership with the media on such issues (Robinson & Tuchman, 1981).

5.2 Theoretical underpinning

Lippmann (2004) suggests that the mass media often has a searchlight that roves endlessly, revealing events one after the other. Thus, journalists can "influence both the importance and content of a reader's beliefs by employing certain news frames in their writing" (Nevalsky, 2015, p.466). Media advocacy has two attributes that are in line with Lippmann's image of what the mass media should stand for. The first is the attribute of agenda-setting (Nevalsky, 2015). This implies placing focus on an issue by exposing what is in the dark. In other words, it is bringing an issue that would otherwise be forgotten to the front burner. This is an agenda-setting process. Scholars have asserted that oftentimes the media agenda controls the public agenda, which means what is in people's minds is a reflection of what is in the media (McCombs & Shaw, 1991; Dearing & Rogers, 1996; Lippmann, 2004).

The second is the attribute of framing. According to Vultee (2010, p.35), a media frame portrays "a 'central organizing idea' that helps journalists and audiences alike in 'making sense of events'...or as an instrument that allows a story teller 'to select some aspects of a perceived reality and make them more salient in a communicating text'". This connotes beaming searchlight on an issue and pointing out its causes as well as delineating other people's reality by highlighting one interpretation while de-emphasizing a less favored one (Papacharissi & de Fatima Oliveira, 2008; Falkheimer & Olsson, 2014). What this implies is that social issues are framed in the news in association with what is seen as being accountable for them (Iyengar & Kinder, 1987; McQuail, 2010). Framing is often connected to the level of coverage the media gives to an issue as well as the nature

of prominence given to such an issue. As Powell (2011, p.93) has noted, "frames 'highlight some bits of information' thus 'elevating them in salience'". The mass media informs the public about what they should think. However, the frequency of media attention on an issue determines how the public takes such an issue (McCombs & Shaw, 1991; Dearing & Rogers, 1996; DeFleur et al., 1985; Iyengar & Kinder, 1987). A critical question to be answered is how an average individual gets access to the media? Individuals who want the media to serve as their crusaders gain access by interpreting issues in terms of newsworthiness (Chang et al., 1987; Baresch et al., 2012).

The ultimate goal of the media crusade is to induce changes in issues of concern to the members of a given society. The media is sometimes used to mount pressure on policymakers as well as influential individuals to deal with specific social problems like the abduction of the Chibok girls. However, for problems to become part of the public agenda, members of the society must clearly articulate the desired solutions before the media could make a crusade out of them. The abduction of the Chibok girls attracted media attention because of its newsworthiness and social dimensions. Thus, the media was able to maintain a sustained crusade that kept the issue on the front burner of public consciousness in the period under study.

6 Methodology

The major thrust of this study is to evaluate the nature of coverage that Nigerian newspapers accorded to the abduction of Chibok girls. Within this context, the study attempts to determine whether there was a robustness in the coverage of the abduction by Nigerian newspapers and the extent to which their coverage sustained public consciousness and contributed to the release of some of the girls. Understandably, different framings of the same events can affect people in many different ways (O'Loughlin, 2019). What this study intends to achieve is to illuminate how newspaper coverage framed and sustained public consciousness of the abduction of the Chibok girls by Boko Haram.

Although there are about 40 newspapers in Nigeria, many of them do not have a national focus in their coverage of news stories. The criteria used for selecting newspapers for this study are national coverage, national circulation of hard copies, consistent publication,

high rating status among newspaper readers, and their consistent editorial position on key national issues in Nigeria. Based on these criteria, three popular Nigerian newspapers, namely, *The Nation, The Guardian,* and *The Punch* were selected for this study. The period of coverage for this study is between April 2014 and April 2015.

A sample size of 156 issues of the newspapers was used for this study. The sample size was drawn from a total of 1.185 issues (that is, an aggregate of 395 issues for 13 months multiplied by the three newspapers). A simple random sampling technique was adopted in selecting the issues that formed the sample size for the study. Four (4) issues of each newspaper for each month of the study period were selected. Thus, a total of twelve (12) issues per month for the three newspapers for the 13 months of the study were selected (see Table 1 below). The study adopted a mixed method of content analysis and descriptive statistics to evaluate the data generated for the study.

Table 1 – Sample of newspaper issues studied

Month selected	The Nation /The Guardian /The Punch (randomly selected)	Monthly issues per paper	Total issues considered for the three papers
April 2014	14, 15, 16, 17	4	12
May 2014	1, 5, 3, 21	4	12
June 2014	2, 10, 18, 26	4	12
July 2014	1, 7, 16,24	4	12
August 2014	4, 12,20,28	4	12
September 2014	1,9,17,25	4	12
October 2014	1,9, 13,21	4	12
November 2014	3, 11, 19,27	4	12
December 2014	1,9,17,25	4	12
January 2015	1,5, 13,21	4	12
February 2015	2,10,18,26	4	12
March 2015	2,10,18,26	4	12
April 2015	8, 9, 13, 14	4	12
13 Months	**X**	**52**	**= 156 issues**

Source: the authors

7 Data presentation and analysis

As established earlier, three (3) national newspapers were selected for this study (*The Guardian* (G), *The Punch* (P), and *The Nation* (N). A total of twelve (12) issues of selected newspapers were studied per month. The twelve (12) issues were arrived at, having selected four (4) issues per week for the study using the simple random sampling technique. The random sampling technique was chosen because it affords each unit of the population an equal chance of being selected in the sample. All the issues for the study were chosen from a total aggregate of 1.185 issues (that is, 395 issues per newspaper for the 13 months of this study). A total of 392 stories were covered by the three national dailies within the first year of the abduction. Based on the research questions of this study, the data and interpretations are presented below:

Research question 1: how robust was the coverage of the abduction of Chibok girls in the period under review?

Table 2 – Distribution of story type

S/N	Story type	Punch		Guardian		The Nation		Grand total	
		Freq.	%	Freq.	%	Freq.	%	Freq.	%
1	NS	71	54.20	57	47.50	66	46.81	194	49.49
2	FS	8	6.11	5	4.17	6	4.26	19	4.85
3	NA	15	11.45	8	6.67	10	7.09	33	8.42
4	ED	4	3.05	5	4.17	3	2.13	12	3.06
5	SP	15	11.45	10	8.33	16	11.35	41	10.46
6	IA	6	4.58	4	3.33	8	5.67	18	4.59
7	PC	9	6.87	4	3.33	8	5.67	21	5.36
8	CTN	1	0.76	0	0.00	2	1.42	3	0.77
9	GI	2	1.53	27	22.50	22	15.60	51	13.01
	Total	131	100	120	100	141	100	392	100

Key: NS – News Story, FS – Feature Story, NA – News Analyses, ED – Editorials, SP – Special Reports, IA – Interpretative Articles, PC – Pictures, CTN – Cartoons, GI – Graphic Illustrations

Source: the authors

Graph 1 – Type of story across the three newspapers
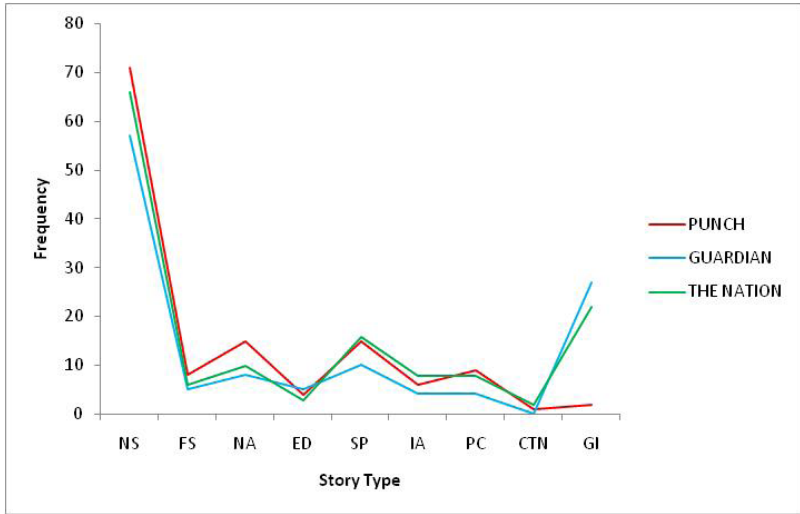
Source: the authors

Table 1 shows the frequency distribution of the various types of news and story items analyzed in this study namely, news story (NS), feature story (FS), news analyses (NA), editorials (ED), special reports (SP), interpretative articles (IA), pictures (PC), cartoons (CTN) and graphic illustrations (GI). The three newspapers covered 392 stories in the period under review. Out of this figure, *The Punch* had 131, *The Guardian* 120, and *The Nation* 141. Considering that the three national dailies had 392 stories, this shows clearly that there was no day the issue of the abducted Chibok girls did not get media attention.

The Nigerian press was indeed alive to its corporate social responsibility as it led and sustained the crusade for the release of the girls. The attention paid to the abduction by the Nigerian press kept the issue in the public domain. It provided the necessary fillip to various groups and non-governmental organizations to sustain pressures on the Nigerian government, the international community, and other stakeholders. Without the sustained attention which the press created, the Chibok abduction would have gone into the dustbin of history like many other issues that were major news items when they occurred, but which subsequently fizzled out into oblivion. Thus, the release of 164 out of the 276 girls that were initially abducted could be linked to sustained press coverage. The distribution of figures shows that *The*

Nation devoted more content space in the coverage of the abducted Chibok girls in comparison to other newspapers. Cumulatively, news stories accounted for 49.49% compared to other story types.

Table 3 – Distribution of press coverage of Chibok girls and Boko Haram activities

SN	News category	Punch		Guardian		The Nation		Cumulative	
		Freq.	Per cent	Freq.	Per cent	Freq.	Per cent	Freq.	Per cent
1	CHR	127	40.32	122	44.53	143	45.25	392	43.31
2	BHR	188	59.68	152	55.47	173	54.75	513	56.69
	Total	**315**	**100**	**274**	**100**	**316**	**100**	**905**	**100**

Key: CGR – Chibok Girls Reports, BHR – Boko Haran Reports
Source: the authors

Graph 2 – News categories across the three newspapers
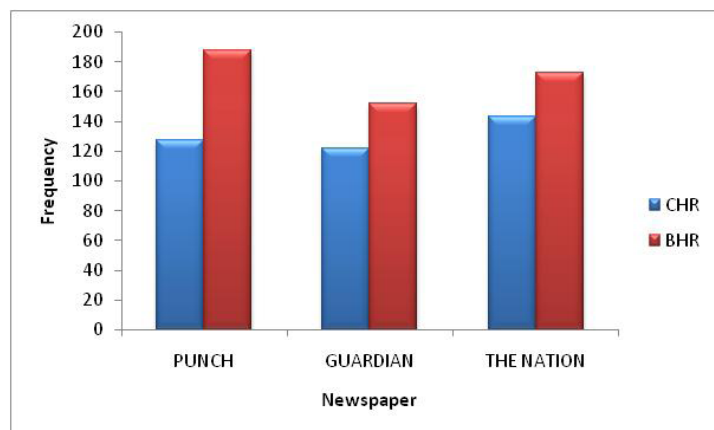
Source: the authors

In comparison to the coverage of Boko Haram's other activities vis-à-vis the Chibok girls abduction, it was not surprising that the three national dailies devoted a cumulative 57.77% to the former and the remaining 42.23% to the latter. The press did not do badly considering the diversity in the terrorist operations of the Boko-Haram group. It was a great credit to the press that despite the competing events demanding coverage in the polity, including terrorist activities of the Boko Haram, an appreciable percentage of coverage was devoted to sustaining public consciousness on the abducted Chibok girls.

Research question 2: to what extent did the prominence dedicated to the abduction elicit positive action from the government?

Table 4 – Prominence distribution

SN	Promi-nence	Punch		Guardian		The Nation		Cumulative	
		Freq.	Per cent	Freq.	Per cent	Freq.	Per cent	Freq.	Per cent
1	FPL	15	11.72	11	9.57	17	11.41	43	10.97
2	FPM	1	0.78	17	14.78	15	10.07	33	8.42
3	IP	107	83.59	82	71.30	113	75.84	302	77.04
4	BPL	3	2.34	4	3.48	4	2.68	11	2.81
5	BPM	2	1.56	1	0.87	0	0.00	3	0.77
	Total	**128**	**100**	**115**	**100**	**149**	**100**	**392**	**100**

Key: FPL – Front Page Lead, FPM – FrontPage Minor, IP – Inside Page, BPL – Back Page Lead, BPM – Back Page Minor
Source: the authors

Graph 3 – News prominence across the three newspapers
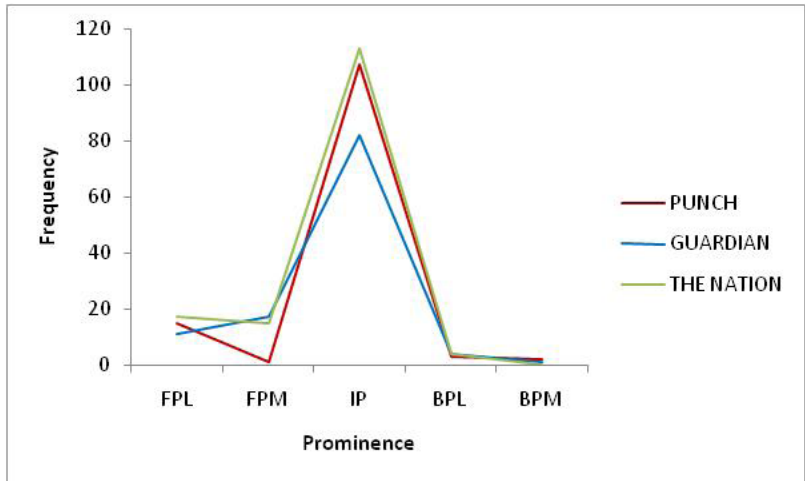
Source: the authors

The coverage of the press was impressive within the first 13 months of their abduction. However, in terms of prominence, less strategic attention was given to their placement. An examination of the frequency distribution of prominence given to stories on Chibok girls was not impressive. The bulk of the stories were not on the front page. A cumulative 77.08% of the stories were located on the inside pages of the three national dailies. This is understandable considering that the front and back pages of any newspaper are their most unique selling point pages. Again, newspapers must flow with breaking news and give such news the prominence they deserve based on their philosophy and interest. It is always a difficult situation for newspapers to balance their role as society's watchdog and advocates of the voiceless in the society and their survival as economic entities.

Table 5 – Distribution of news direction

S/N	Direction	Punch		Guardian		The Nation		Cumulative	
		Freq.	Per cent	Freq.	Per cent	Freq.	Per cent	Freq.	Per cent
1	F	108	82.44	102	87.18	100	69.44	310	79.08
2	U	11	8.40	7	5.98	33	22.92	51	13.01
3	N	12	9.16	8	6.84	11	7.64	31	7.91
	Total	131	100	117	100	144	100	392	100

Key:　　　　　　　F – Favorable　　　U – Unfavorable　　　　　N – Neutral.

Source: the authors

Graph 4 – News direction across the three newspapers
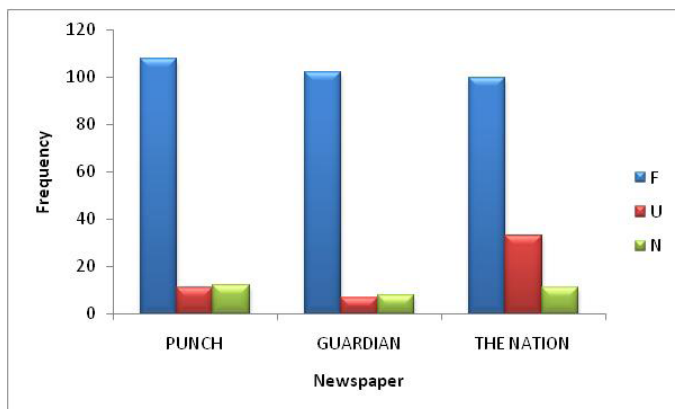
Source: the authors

The tone or direction in news reporting has a huge influence on how the public perceives media messages. If a message is framed negatively, there is a tendency for people to have a negative disposition to such a message (Ngwu et al., 2015). Media framing and coverage of any event have a way of influencing public perceptions. Looking at the cumulative of 79.08% in Table 5, it is obvious that the press used various reports to call attention to the need for all hands to be on deck towards the agitation for the release of the Chibok girls in Boko-Haram's captivity. While the 7.91 neutrality maintained is quite understandable, the 13.01% unfavorable came as a result of resenting voices in the press coverage of the incident.

Table 6 – Distribution of the source of news

S/N	Sources	Punch		Guardian		The Nation		Cumulative	
		Freq.	Percent	Freq.	Percent	Freq.	Percent	Freq.	Percent
1	In-House	94	73.44	90	78.26	119	79.87	303	77.30
2	External	24	18.75	19	16.52	23	15.44	66	16.84
3	Foreign	10	7.81	6	5.22	7	4.70	23	5.87
	Total	128	100	115	100	149	100	392	100

Source: the authors

Graph 5 – News sources across the three newspapers
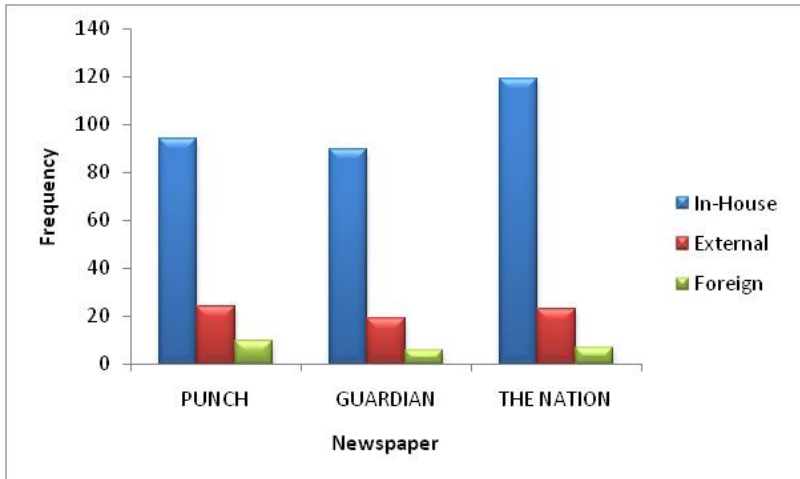
Source: the authors

Although press organizations have correspondents and reporters spread across the world, still they are not omnipresent. They still improvise in order to achieve their desired aims and objectives. What this implies is that most newspapers do not solely rely on information gathering of their in-house reporters and beat correspondents. They make use of external/freelance journalists and foreign sources amongst others. The three national newspapers mostly made use of their in-house resource persons (professionals). About 303 news stories representing 79.87% came from in-house reporters of these newspapers. This suggests that the slants, tones, or directions were not influenced, as the press was not solely dependent on external and foreign sources who could have written about the abduction of the Chibok girls to suit their intended purposes.

A major impetus to the continued coverage of the Chibok girls' abduction saga was the sustained campaign of the #BringBackOurGirls movement. The #BringBackOurGirls movement used the social media platform, especially *Twitter* and *Facebook* to mount and sustain the campaign for the release of the girls (Olson, 2016). The campaign attracted global leaders and celebrities. Additionally, the movement broadened the arena of its campaign beyond the release of the abducted schoolgirls to discuss the general rights of female children and girls to formal education (Chiluwa & Ifukor, 2015).

8 Conclusion and recommendations

The significance of this study lies in the lessons of how consistent coverage of an issue will retain it in the public consciousness and impel groups to mount pressures on relevant authorities for action. The sustained campaign of the Nigerian press invariably contributed to mounting pressure on the Nigerian government, which culminated in the securement of the release of some of the abducted girls. The release of some of the girls, which has linkage to the sustained public awareness campaigns mounted by the press, provides insight into the paramount role of the press as a social crusader.

Media advocacy/crusading are grand pianos waiting for musicians. If the press should strike the right chords through a news story, a guest column, editorial, or other forms of media framing and agenda-setting, it always has a huge impact on society. The media's responsibility to the society as the watchdog is to hold the government at all levels accountable to the people, as guaranteed by section 22 of

the 1999 Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria (as amended). This study advocates unbiased news reportage as the necessary ingredient to make media advocacy thrive and extract action from leaders. It also recommends that the press must continue to cover the Chibok abduction until all the girls are either rescued or accounted for.

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