

## **Nigerian Audience Appraisal of Propaganda in Reportage of the Kidnapped Chibok Girls**

Ignatius Obi Edogor<sup>1</sup>, Kingdom Dike<sup>2</sup>, Olubunmi Funmilayo Agbana<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Department of Mass Communication, University of Nigeria, Nsukka, Nigeria

<sup>2</sup>Department of Mass Communication, Federal Polytechnic, Bida, Niger State, Nigeria.

<sup>3</sup>Department of Mass Communication, Kogi State University Ayingba, Nigeria

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**Abstract:** Propaganda has become a tool governments often use to lessen the intensity or utterly deny its failure on any assignment, political rivals deploy it to discredit or denigrate their opponents. This work investigated Nigerian audience's appraisal of propaganda in reportage of the kidnapped Chibok girls. Survey research was used with 300 respondents as sample; multi-stage sampling technique was applied in choosing the samples and questionnaire was the instrument for data collection. The study found out that propaganda was used in the reportage of the phenomenon. Other findings include that: the audience accepted that Nigerian government made meaningful efforts to secure the freedom of the abducted girls; they (the audience) estimated the abduction as a terrorist attack and not a fault of President Jonathan-led administration. With these findings, the paper among other things recommends that Nigerian government should be more pro-active in their fight against terrorism using the appropriate media for communication to the public about the incident and its hazards.

**Keywords:** Appraisal, Audience, kidnapped, propaganda, reportage.

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### **I. Introduction**

Nigerian nation has been waging an internal war against the onslaughts of Boko Haram, an Islamic sect which began with propagating the ideology that westernization is an anathema. It mostly detests in particular western education and canvasses to stamp it out of Nigeria. Okemi (2013, p.2) explains that "the term "Boko Haram" comes from the Hausa word boko figuratively meaning "western education", literally from English word "book" and the Arabic word haram figuratively meaning "sin" or "forbidden"). When loosely translated from Hausa, the name means "western education is forbidden". The group earned this name due to its strong opposition to anything Western, which it sees as corrupting Muslims."

Essentially from the foregoing, the original ideology of the sect was to oppose western ideas and things which it considered as inimical to the progression of the version of Islamic religion which the group promotes. So, from its inception, Boko Haram was conceived to champion religious mission of Prophet Mohammed in the order the sect perceived it. According to Babatunde, Unwana-Obong and Olanrewaju (2014, p.61) "the Boko Haram Movement founded by Ustadh Muhammed Yusuf in the North- Eastern part of Nigeria is officially recognized by its members as Jama'at Ahlis-sunnah Lid-Da'wat wal Jihad, meaning people committed to the propagation of the Prophet's teachings and Jihad."

However, the militant Islamic sect later changed its modus operandi in 2009 by turning the fang of their attacks to all government apparatus, private citizens, religious buildings, markets, commercial motor parks and some other public places in Nigeria. Okemi (2013, p.2) has it that Boko Haram "became known internationally following sectarian violence in Nigeria in July 2009, which left over 1000 people dead." From this pattern of operation, it becomes obvious that the sect was out for warfare against the Nigerian-state as a whole. P.M News explains the gravity of Boko Haram's havoc on Nigeria in one of its editorials in 2012 as it states that "ethnic conflict has never taken as much toll as on human lives and property in many parts of the country as we have with the emergence of Boko Haram sect. Terrorism has crept into the psyche of the nation that to many, especially in the North, the fear of Boko Haram is now the beginning of wisdom." Thus it is becoming more understandable that they are insurgents hiding under the cloak of religion in pursuance of their ulterior motive best known to them and their cohorts alone.

Meanwhile, the abduction of some hapless and unsuspecting girls from Government Girls' Secondary School in Chibok, Borno State was the most incredible onslaught of Boko Haram. It added another dimension to the hue of the sect's nefarious activities. This dastardly act of the Islamic extremists elicited huge public outcry from Nigerians, corporate bodies, international organizations, countries and reputable citizens of the world. Different groups embarked on series of peaceful protests demanding the sect to release the abducted girls. The demonstrations for the release of the girls were carried out using the code: '#Bring-Back-our-Girls'

inscribed on placards displayed on the social media and on the ones (placards) carried around the streets of major cities of Nigeria as well as some foreign countries of the world.

The effrontery of Boko Haram to abduct the young school girls generated national and global outrage evident in wide public protests beyond the shores of Nigeria over the liberation of the abducted students. Perhaps, many women construe the abduction of the girls as one of the injustice meted out to women in Africa. As such, reputable women committed their time to champion the course of liberating the girls. As reported in Daily Sun (Ezekwesili, 2015, p.5) states it clearer when she notes that “our Chibok girls are the global symbol for the defence of the dignity and sanctity of...the girl child, women, for all those oppressed, repressed, disadvantaged...everywhere.” Maybe that perception necessitated the active and massive participation of women folk in the peaceful campaigns for the release of the kidnapped girls.

One of the women of international stature that took part in the protest on social media was the American First Lady, Michelle Obama. She personally displayed a picture of herself on Twitter holding a placard with a sign reading “Bring-back-our-girls’, accompanied by the caption: ‘Our prayers are with the missing Nigerian girls and their families. It’s time to #Bring-Back-Our-Girls. –mo.’ The sign-off ‘mo’ means that the tweet was written by the First Lady herself and not a staffer,” (Lyons, Robinson and Chorely, 2014). Similarly, Daily Sun (2015,p.15) adds that “high profile figures such as Nobel Peace Prize winner Malala Yousfzai and US First Lady Michelle Obama were among those who drew attention to their (the abducted girls’) plight on Twitter...under the #Bring-Back-Our-Girls hashtag.” In a nutshell there was hyper media hype on the abduction saga with full combination of conventional and social networking sites.

With the magnitude of media hype over the abduction of the school girls, the military might of Nigerian soldiers to suppress insurrection and maintain the nation’s territorial sovereignty was nearly brought to disrepute. The main opposition party in the country then saw the abduction and the insurgency as a weakness of the ruling party. For instance, the Director of Media and Publicity of the major opposition party, All Progressives Congress (APC) Campaign Organization, Mallam G. Shehu pointed out that “since the girls went missing, ... all Nigerians have had since then was nothing but failed promises and dashed hope.” So, over the abduction issue, they heaped allegations of inertia or gross failure of Nigerian Government to gain freedom for the kidnapped victims.

The then ruling government through their own media organs with other relevant personnel was seriously presenting their own version of the Chibok School girls’ abduction tale and efforts to liberate them. For instance, the Senior Special Assistant to President Jonathan on Public Affairs, Dr. D. Okupe, disclosed that the abduction was a gimmick to portray his principal’s administration in bad light. According to the presidential aide, “the Chibok girls were kidnapped in order to present the Jonathan administration as incompetent and hold it to ransom.” The government’s repeated avowals that they would ensure that the girls would be rescued alive never allayed the media attacks from the then opposition party, even one year after the incidence. So, there were recriminations all over as the incidence lingered.

How the Nigerian audience deciphered their government’s communication in the whole scenario replete with allegations and counter allegations is still buried in oblivion. The need to know the view of the audience or the people in a matter of such human significance cannot be over-labored. Thus this paper is set to find out how the Nigerian audience assessed the communication from their government over the abducted girls. It systematically examined how the people viewed the roles of their government in the bid to free the abducted girls. Also, the work was set to methodically ascertain whether the masses construe the abduction phenomenon as a symptom of inefficiency of the then Nigerian Government headed by Dr Goodluck Jonathan or a political conspiracy by the opposition to portray the government in bad light. Therefore, the study seeks to provide empirical picture of the audience’s assessment of the reportage of the kidnapped Chibok School girls, based on the government’s information to the populace.

## **II. Statement of problem**

In the contemporary world, terrorism is a common phenomenon directly or indirectly affecting virtually every part of the globe. In the annals of the world, it was the singular act that made September 11, 2001 an unforgettable date for the Americans. Globally Islamic fundamentalist group, Al-Qaeda led by the late Osama Bin Laden has reportedly been the main sponsors and trainers of terrorists who unleash havoc in many countries of the world.

However, in Nigeria terrorism has a different brand, but shares similar characteristics with the Al-Qaeda, in that both among other things claim to wage a ‘holy war’ against their alleged infidels and ensure propagation of the terrorists’ brand of Islamic dogmas. The terrorists holding Nigerian-state to ransom operate under the appellation Boko Haram which suddenly altered the mode of perpetration of their atrocities in the country in (2014), by embarking on abduction of school girls in Chibok community of Borno State.

That incident raised a lot of frenzy which the mass media were awash with plenty irreconcilable stories bordering on the adequacy, inadequacy or rather utter lack of government of the day’s commensurate effort to

secure the release of the kidnapped girls. The opposition political parties saw the avenue as the opportune moment to discredit the country's leadership as being inept. The ruling government on its own was making concerted efforts to prove their opponents wrong as at the period of conducting this research. Within the time under review the attempts to gain the liberation of the girls were like a mirage as they remained in the custody of their abductors.

Nigerians and non-Nigerians took to the streets in some of their major cities as well as the social media and staged torrential peaceful protests to encourage the government to facilitate the processes of bringing the girls back. The government and the nation's defence apparatus frequently publicized their serial attempts to ensure the emancipation of the girls from the hands of the insurgents. Starting from the date the incidence took place, the government through the mass media kept on updating the audience, about their efforts to ensure that the girls are returned. There are also counter efforts from the nation's main opposition political party to portray the delay in releasing the girls as a defect of the then government in power.

Meanwhile the snags are, given the forgoing scenario how did the Nigerian audience see the communication from their government about the Chibok girls' abduction episode? How did the masses perceive the efforts of the government to free the girls? Did the audience understand the abduction as inefficiency of the then Nigerian leadership? These highlighted points are the issues this study addresses scientifically.

### **III. Objectives of the study**

This paper is guided by the following objectives

1. To find out how Nigerian audience construe their government's communication about the abducted Chibok girls' saga.
2. To ascertain how the masses perceive the effort of the government to free the girls.
3. To unravel whether the audience understood the abduction as inefficiency of the then Nigerian leadership.

### **IV. Research questions**

The research questions below guide this paper

1. How did Nigerian audience evaluate the communication from their government about the kidnapped Chibok girls?
2. How did the masses perceive the effort of the government to free the Chibok girls?
3. Did the audience understand the abduction of the Chibok girls as ineptitude of the current Nigerian leadership?

### **V. Literature Review**

Some literature and empirical studies that are relevant to this paper were examined to provide conceptual background and focus to the study. Thus, the review was done under the following sub-headings

- 5.1 Mass media and Conflict reporting
- 5.2 Propaganda and Reporting conflicts
- 5.3 Nigerian Government and the Boko Haram menace
- 5.4 Nigerian Government and propaganda over the abduction of Chibok girls
- 5.5 Empirical review

#### **5.1. Mass Media and Conflict Reporting**

Mass media as purveyors of public information are always engrossed with the task of delivering messages that are of immense significance to the generality of the populace. Conflict-oriented issues form parts of the things the media consider as indispensable for their coverage. This is apparently because conflict involves people as both the subjects and or the objects of it, so, human beings are bound to be interested in the reports about the consequences. Why people have not and cannot be dispassionate about conflict is obviously because fellow human beings and or their means of livelihood are usually involved. For this reason the audience wants to know about a crisis and the media want to report every fragment of it.

The comingling of these interests of both the news gatherers and the receivers make conflict a compulsory matter to be reported on the mass media. People pilot the affairs of media operations and human activities (including conflicts) are at the nucleus of their operations, the import is simply that the mass media reflect what affects humans. Edogor, Idowu, Ezugwu and Dike (2015, p.87) underscore the significance of reporting of crises on the media as they submit that "it is pertinent to assert that reportage of any conflict is non-negotiable for the media." Perhaps, Manoff (2011) cited by Adamu (2013, p. 82) puts it better by noting that 'journalism is the handmaiden of conflict. The epistemology of journalism is inherently conflictual in the same way our system of jurisprudence is inherently adversarial.' Therefore, broadcasting or publication of conflicts is an unavoidable venture for the mass media. That they do to present the picture of a crisis to the public who are either affected or who are sympathizers to the victims.

Above the notion of some school of thoughts that the media embark on such reportage often because of the pecuniary benefits, it is becoming a common trait in their operations that wherever crisis occurs, the press converges more than where the routine takes place. That is in line with an age-long maxim in journalism that 'what makes news is when a man bites a dog and not when a dog bites a man.' Such a bizarre episode elicits attention and curiosity. With that, no responsible media institution would fail to give coverage to a crisis; otherwise it shall create the impression that the institution does not know all what constitutes the news. Amakiri (2007, p.131) corroborates that view when he asserts that "conflict attracts the mass media for the fact that its occurrence is hot news, which is the staple food for the media."

In our subject matter, the abduction of the Chibok girls was strange, but the other aspect of it that formed a crisis of its own was the media war which the ruling government waged against their then political opposition party which was poised to deploy the situation and hoodwink the people to perceive the former as inept.

Dart Center (2003) asserts that "news crews are involved in the coverage of many tragedies... They range from wars to terrorist attacks to airplane crashes to natural disasters to fires to murders. All affecting their communities." Therefore, it is not surprising that the mass media pay attention to issues like the Chibok girls' abduction with the recriminations surrounding it as well as the insurgency in general. The motivating factor for the role of the media in consistently reporting conflicts like that is because human lives are the issues at stake in the whole conflict scenario. Amakiri (2007: p, 132) quoting Lewis (1969) sees conflicts as "struggle over values and claims to scarce status, power, resources in which the aims of the opponents are to neutralize, injure, or eliminate their rivals." From the meaning of conflict as offered above, the covert reason behind the abduction of the Chibok girls and the concomitant recriminations in relation to the incidence could be deciphered. Those involved at various points of the case have divergent interests. There was obvious struggle for supremacy of political and propaganda power between the parties in the issue.

## **5.2. Propaganda and Reporting of Conflicts**

We shall like to look at the meaning and brief origin of propaganda before examining its application in reporting. According to Agba (2002, p. 253) propaganda entails any attempt to manipulate information shrewdly packaged to achieve predetermined goals." This view portrays the negative connotation which propaganda is construed to be in the present times. "The basic aims of propaganda are: (a) to discredit an opponent (b) to divert public attention from an important issue (c) to change views, behaviour and beliefs of a people (d) to capture (not win) public support," (Nkwocha, 2004, p.114). From the points elucidated as the aims of propaganda, it is not hidden that the contemporary use of the term is synonymous with dishing out bunches of doctored information to deceive or divert people's attention from some negativities. It is often manipulation of figures, hyping of naked lies or painting of falsehoods concocted to intentionally swindle the masses in situations like the abduction of Chibok girls. The application of propaganda altered since the word landed into the hands of the political class starting from the first and second World Wars. The etymological meaning of the term and the original application of it could be seen in the words of Agba (2002, p. 253) who succinctly explains that:

Propaganda has its root in the Latin name of a group of Roman Catholic Cardinals, the Congregation de Propaganda Fide, meaning congregation for the propagation of faith. Pope Gregory XV had set up this committee in 1622 to oversee the work of missionaries. The object of the committee was to teach the truth about the Catholic faith to counter heresies and contradictions that made rounds following the Reformations and Counter-reformations of the 15<sup>th</sup> century.

So, propaganda was initially used to teach the real truth about the doctrine of the church which some individuals have deviated. However, the contemporary usage of the word in the secular political scenes sways its application in journalism, especially in reporting conflicts. In reportage of national or regional crisis, the journalists are bound to observe and respect certain interests of the nation. Those interests range from political, economic, defence, religious and other reasons. Amakiri (2007, p. 135) for instance concurs with the view as he observes "it is true that the imperative of national security always introduce propaganda into journalistic practice, thus establishing propaganda as a concept in conflict analysis and crisis reporting." The import of this submission is that for the interest of the nation of their operation, the media are like bound to apply propaganda in their routine reportage of violence or crises-ridden situations which has a national outlook.

That stance negates the ideal principle of journalism which confers on the journalists the obligation of objectively reporting to the audience what transpired in a scenario. So, in the reportage of conflicts, the necessity to protect certain national interests ties the hands of journalists to sacrifice the principle of truthful and fair journalism on the altar of upholding set(s) of objectives of the country. In a bid to attain the said objectives, journalists most especially from the government media certainly have to manipulate words, facts and figures to suit the expected interests of their nation or political party they have bias for. In doing that, propaganda is being

employed in the reporting of the situation. Thus, protection of national or group interests by the media breeds their usage of propaganda in reportage of conflicts.

### **5.3. Nigerian Government and the Boko Haram menace**

The Boko Haram menace has consistently and persistently kept Nigeria in a state of guerrilla warfare for many years without any sign of abating. Edogor et al (2015, p.88) state it well as they note that “the Boko Haram incidence is a grievous conundrum threatening Nigeria as a sovereign nation. The country is really not at war but the Boko Haram insurgents have held some parts of the country hostage that is more dangerous than being at a full warfare.” The sect has been using explosives to kill and maim people in the Northern part of the country. The government of the country in reciprocation defends innocent Nigerians as demanded by the constitution of the land which conferred on it the responsibility to protect lives and properties of the citizens.

At the beginning of the Boko Haram crisis which openly kicked-off violently in 2009 within Maiduguri, Borno State, the government applied military might to eliminate the insurrection then, and thought that they had nipped it in the bud. But that military combat against the insurgents later proved to have not yielded the exact expected result as shown by their renewed attacks on people repeatedly. Gambo (2014) describes it well by noting that, “after the federal government’s violent suppression of the sect’s 2009 uprising in Maiduguri, it had come under the erroneous illusion that the crisis...had been eliminated. But ironically...the group re-emerged...using guerilla tactics...in its war against the state.” Their attack that culminated in the abduction of young secondary school girls further exposed another dangerous clandestine tactics they have been using.

### **5.4. Nigerian Government and propaganda over the abduction of Chibok girls**

Over the years, propaganda has come to be a veritable instrument which governments deploy to present their image, deeds, omissions, commissions, actions or inactions acceptable to the public, ostensibly to sustain their legitimacy before the latter that holds sovereignty in a democratic society. Governments understand the costly implications of losing confidence of the people for whatsoever in a democracy, thus they took to the media regularly to clarify their stand on any matter in the midst of crises. The mass media give priority to coverage of serious crisis situations, as Okunna (2007) cited in Edogor et al (2015, p.86) argues that “what honey is to bees is what crisis is to the journalists (the mass media).” The kidnapping of Nigerian damsels from a female public secondary school in Chibok community, elicited huge negative public reactions that were greatly worrisome to the country and her people. Due to the reactions from across the world, Nigerian media were replete with the reportage even one year after the incidence.

Perhaps, to shield itself from the unwholesome media bombardment the main opposition political party threw, the government cleverly and deliberately refused to provide the accurate number of the abducted girls. That was evident in the continuous variations in the number of the girls quoted in various mass media to have been kidnapped from the government’s owned secondary school. If it was not a propaganda strategy, it is easy to get the accurate number of the abducted girls as they were all candidates sitting for Senior Secondary School Certificate Examination when the tragedy befell.

Sequel to the above, not a few Nigerians have doubts over the reality of the incidence save for the trauma and angry outburst of the parents and the relations of the victims. This deliberate attempt to conceal the exact number of the abducted girls to the masses is perceived as a shrewd manner of mellowing the irate audience, maybe not to react more negatively over the matter.

Besides the unruly media salvo from the then opposition political party, another great force that hit the ruling government was the highly organized public peaceful demonstrations from women folk. Former education minister of Nigeria, Dr Ezekwesili led other Nigerian women activists to press home their demand that government intensify efforts to bring back the abducted girls alive. The pressure from the women folk activists in respect to the incidence is only comparable to the Aba Riot of 1929 in the then Eastern Nigeria, where over 25,000 women were reportedly involved in a protest against colonial government officials over imposition of tax payment on women, which they construed as an obnoxious policy.

### **5.5. Empirical review**

Some scholars have conducted empirical studies that are related to our discourse particularly on terrorism, which the kidnapping of the Chibok girls with its concomitant propaganda is an integral offshoot of. One of the researches in that aspect was done by Kellner (2007) who critically reviewed some works of different authors about the terror attack on the World Trade Center Twin Towers in New York and the Pentagon, Washington, D.C. Citing one of the reviewed works, Kellner (2007, p.129) submits that “the attacks changed the alignment of forces on the planet. Russia’s foreign policy turned toward the West sharply. Russian President, Vladimir Putin was the first foreign leader to call U.S. President, George W. Bush and offer condolences and support” (165). The author concludes that: “Overall the Russian media have been supportive of the American

response.”” This was quite unlike the Nigerian scenario where the political parties and their agents trade words instead of teaming up to find solution to a perceived terror tragedy against Nigerian school girls.

In another study, entitled ‘UK media coverage of September 11,’ McNair (2010, p. 29) explains the devastating effect of what has a mere semblance of terrorism attack, according to him “the Spanish have seen it in their cities and coastal resorts, where, at the height of the holiday season in 2002, an ETA bomb killed a child and the resulting publicity seriously damaged the local tourism industry.” This is one of the few effects of terrorism which the mere thought of its consequences on the economy, sovereign image of their nation would have made Nigerian leaders both the then leading party and the then major opposition political party to devise means of rescuing the abducted children notwithstanding their political differences. But far from that, Nigerian politicians saw the abduction saga as an avenue to display political supremacy of those who can and those who cannot pilot the affairs of the nation, that was the picture discerning minds get as long as the abduction problem lasted.

Besides, Hawdon, Agnich and Ryan (2014) conducted a study hinged on media framing of a tragedy in which they empirically examined the press coverage of gunman attack leading to death of many individuals on a campus in America. The scenario as featured in the media seemed like a terrorist incidence and yet it was never twisted to be political motivated or inability of the government to protect the citizenry like the coloration partly given to the Chibok girls issue in Nigeria. According to the researchers:

On April 16, 2007, a gunman attacked the Virginia Tech (VT) campus killing 32 people, wounding 17 others, and tearing at the social fabric of the community. The deadliest school shooting in American history quickly attracted the media. As journalists from every major domestic and foreign media outlet reported on the events of April 16 and its aftermath, the world saw images of and read stories about fragile individuals, a shocked and grief-stricken student body, and a community united in its grief. Hawdon, Agnich and Ryan (2014, p.199).

From the above submission, the community grasped the attack as a tragedy to all of them, little wonder, it elicited communal grief and in spite of the full media coverage reported to have been given to it, never did any political group point accusing finger to their government on the matter. So, the world sees terrorist attacks as offence to humanity anywhere, but perhaps Nigerian politicians perceive the phenomenon from a different angle vis-à-vis the abduction of the Chibok school girls which was gradually turned into a serious political propaganda experiment.

The Pew Research Center: Journalism & Media staff (2006) study shows how the September eleven 2001 attack in the US altered the time which the mass media dedicated to coverage of issues in the country. According to the Center “The number of minutes devoted to coverage of foreign policy was up 102%, according to ADT’s data. Coverage of armed conflict rose 69%. Coverage of terrorism rose 135%. At the same time, there has been a serious decline in reporting about domestic issues. Coverage of crime and law enforcement dropped by half (47%). Science and technology coverage fell by half (50%)...” (Pew Research Center: Journalism & Media Staff, 2006). This revelation shows how the magnitude of attention of the media as institution shifted greatly toward coverage of terrorism, perhaps to through more light on the mode of operations of those behind the crime and remedies for the members of the public to avoid falling victims.

It is instructive to examine few works on propaganda which form another part of this study. Amakiri (2006) in a paper entitled ‘conflict reporting and propaganda: the challenge to objective journalism’ examines the correlation of propaganda, conflict and the mass media in crisis situation. The study found out that “propaganda tends to introduce bias in the media coverage of conflict thereby compromising objective journalism,” (Amakiri, 2006, p.131). Generally, the application of propaganda through the Committee on Public Information (CPI) during the World War I was one of the most notable uses of it and since then it has become a subject of academic discourse. Jowett and O’Donnell (1992) express that point as they remark “researchers began to investigate propaganda after World War I...” From the experience, politicians and or bureaucrats have hitherto deployed propaganda as a technique to achieve their predetermined goals. At the time of conducting this study, such was what played out in the abduction of the Chibok girls’ case.

## **VI. Theoretical framework**

This paper is anchored on Social Construction of Reality theory. According to Baran (2010, p.375) the theory was propounded in 1966 by Berger and Luckmann. The major proposition of the theory that is relevant to this study states that “people who share a culture also share ‘an ongoing correspondence’ of meaning. Things generally mean the same thing to me as they do to you.” From that view, one could visualize the correlation of the theory to this paper as what constitutes propaganda to an enlightened person provides the same meaning to another person of similar maturity and or status from the same socio-cultural milieu.

So, it implies that Nigerian audience’ impression of deployment of propaganda or not in their government’s information vis-à-vis the abduction of the Chibok girls would amount to similar if not exactly the same thing to all of them (the audience). A serious matter like keeping unsuspecting girls hostage for no fault of

theirs is a social menace that virtually all sensible adults would be keen to measure the actions and inactions of a responsible government towards.

Therefore, as the theory posits that people who share a culture can as well share an ongoing correspondence of meaning, we believe that Nigerian audience although is multi-cultural in composition shares similar meanings over certain social and other realities. The economic and socio-political affinities the people share are factors that would imbue the audience with a sense of concern over the plight of the girls held captive, the trauma of their parents, kith and kin as well as the efforts of the government to salvage them.

However, it is important to aver that the dimension which the then major opposition political party (All Progressives Congress, APC) in Nigeria drove the attention of the people to decode the abduction saga made the whole matter highly political. For instance, the National Publicity Secretary of the party, Alhaji Lai Mohammed, in one of his press conferences in Abuja “blasted Jonathan government for... insecurity of lives and property, as can be seen in the failure of the government to rescue the 219 Chibok girls and the killing of over 15,000 innocent Nigerians by the insurgency sect Boko Haram.” That was one of the many occasions the party openly alleged that the delay or rather the abduction of the girls was a mark of failure of the government to deliver on the security of the citizenry. So, instead of painting a picture of the act as terrorism that the country has to collectively fight to death, the party misconstrued it as a deficiency of the Jonathan-led administration particularly.

The then government in power was propelled to apply all defensive mechanisms to convince the populace that they were working round the clock to rescue the girls from their captors. The valuable poser is how did the Nigerian mass media structure the whole political scenario before the people? With these explained facts, the relevance of social construction of reality theory to this paper could be better deciphered; as Baran (2010, p.376) rightly argues that “social construction of reality is...applied when looking at how media, especially news, shape our political realities.”

Generally, the mass media have been extolled as the body that frames realities for the people in their economic, religious, cultural, political and social aspects of life in the sense that they (the media) mingle all these daily life factual and subtly draw the attention of the audience toward them. With the images of realities the mass media created in the psych of the people about a given event, the audience in a particular society could easily form their perceptions and meanings.

## **VII. Methodology**

Survey research design was adopted for this study as people’s opinions constituted the major source of primary data used for the paper. The population of the study comprises all workers in the ministry of National Planning Commission (NPC), Central Business District, Diplomatic Zone, Abuja, Federal Capital Territory (FCT). The total population of the staff is estimated to be one thousand, one hundred persons. The choice of the staff of the commission was informed by the point that being workers in one of the ministries located at the centre of the (FCT), most of them read newspapers, magazines, listen to radio and or watch televisions available in the offices. This puts them in a good position to have reasonable knowledge of the phenomena under the study. The commission is housed by one five-stored building, with six floors including the ground floor.

From the staff of the commission, we selected the senior civil servants among them. These people have more access to the office newspapers and the televisions installed in the offices and could as well afford to buy newspaper, magazine, radio or television sets for themselves. Additionally, in our pilot survey 97% of them accepted having access to the internet, newspapers, magazines, television and the radio. The opinion of Okoro (2001, p.7) that “population in research ... stands for all elements of concern in a given study,” informed the decision we took above with regard to the selection of senior civil servants of the NPC as the core population to be studied.

The sample size is 300 which was chosen in accordance with the guideline given by media researchers, Wimmer and Dominick (2011:103) who suggests that one rule recommended for a multivariate studies like this “is as follows: 50=very poor; 100=poor; 200=fair; 300=good; 500=very good; 1,000=excellent” (Comprey & Lee, 1992).

For sample technique, multi-stage sampling was used as both probability and the non-probability techniques were applied in the selection of the samples. With the use of simple random sampling, the workers occupying the ground floor, second floor and the fourth floor were selected. Through the use of quota sampling technique, we chose to study equal number of senior staff in each of the selected floors.

The instrument of data collection for the paper was the questionnaire. The content of the instrument was structured using the Modified Likert-type Scale (proposal 2) as recommended by Nworgu (1986) cited by Nworgu (2006, p. 146) because we (the researchers) deemed it most suitable for meeting the objectives of this work. With this modified scale the responses were assigned values as follows: Strongly agree=4, Agree=3, Disagree=2, Strongly Disagree=1 and Undecided=0. However, the part of the questionnaire dealing with demographic details was framed in close-ended questions.

For test of validity, a draft of the measuring instrument was submitted to a senior academic in mass communication that went through it and noted some points to add and the ones to be discarded. That was done and by face validation, the academic confirmed that the questionnaire contain useful statements that would elicit suitable answers to the research questions for the paper.

The reliability of the measuring instrument was confirmed by conducting a pilot study, carried out with a pre-test questionnaire randomly administered to respondents within the premise of the (NPC). Meanwhile the result gotten from the pilot study was not displayed in the analyses of this study. It was strictly used for ascertaining the reliability of the questionnaire, the purpose which it served accordingly.

**VIII. Data presentation and analysis**

The data used for this study were presented and analyzed to proffer answers to the research questions raised.

Three hundred copies of the questionnaire were administered, while two hundred and eighty-six were intelligibly completed, returned and were used for the analysis in the study. In our data presentation and analysis, we used three charts (see figs. 1, 2 and 3) in presentation and analyses of the age and gender distribution of respondents as well as ascertaining their sources of information respectively, the remaining demographic details of the respondents like religious background and educational qualifications were analyzed using a table with simple percentages; also tables with standard deviation and mean were used in analyzing the respondents’ views about the statements on the measuring instrument.

The standard deviation cut-off mark used is 2.5 and the mean cut-off point for the responses in this study is 2.

To get the Mean cut off point =  $(SA+A+ SD+D+U) \div 5$

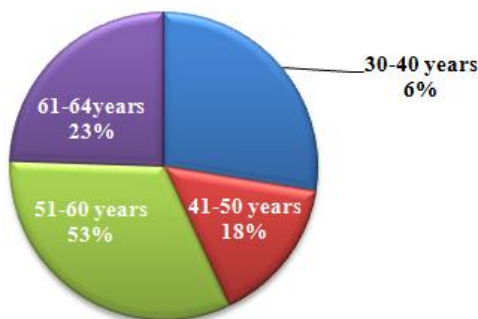
$$(4+3+2+1+0) \div 5$$

Therefore, the mean cut-off point =  $(10) \div 5 = 2$

To get the standard deviation cut-off point =  $\frac{(4-2)^2 + (3-2)^2 + (2-2)^2 + (1-2)^2 + (0-2)^2}{5-1}$

$$\frac{2^2 + 1^2 + 0^2 + 1^2 + 2^2}{4} = \frac{4+1+ 1+4}{4}$$

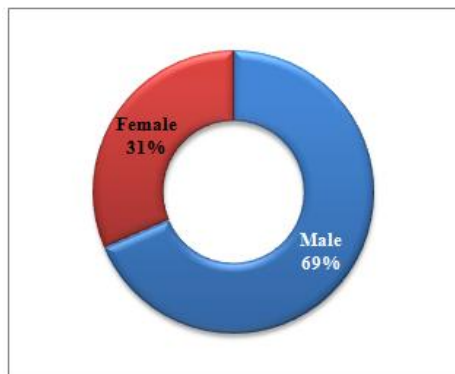
Therefore the standard deviation cut-off point  $10 \div 4 = \sqrt{2.5}$



**Figure1: Age distribution of respondents**

Source: the researchers’ field work, 2015

The data on fig. one above show that respondents on the age brackets of 51-60 representing 53% dominated in the sample, they were followed by the respondents in the age brackets of 61-64 representing 23%, then the respondents in the age brackets of 42-50 years representing 18% followed and those within the age of 30-40 years representing 6% of the sample came last.



**Figure2: Gender classification of respondents**

Source: the researchers’ field works, 2015

The data presented on figure two above show that male respondents representing 69% have preponderance of the sample as the female respondents representing 31% followed.



**Table 1: Religious Background and Educational Qualifications of the Respondents**

Religion	Frequency	Percentages	Educational Qualifications	Frequency	Percentages
ATR	Nil	Nil	BA/B.Sc./HND	180	62%
Christian	187	65%	NCE/OND	14	4.2%
Islam	99	34.1%	MA/M.Sc./MBA	79	27%
Others	Nil	Nil	PhD	13	4.1%
-----	286	100	-----	286	100

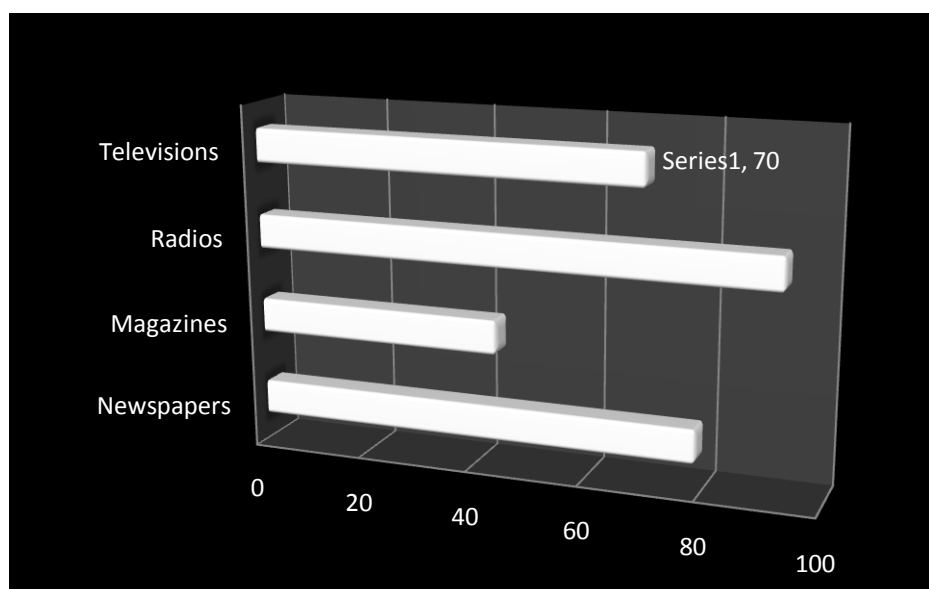
Source: The researchers' field works 2015

The data presented on Table 1 show that none of the respondents is an adherent of African Traditional Religion (ATR), while 187 respondents representing 65% of the sample were Christian faithful and 99 other respondents representing (34%) were Moslems. On the educational qualifications, 180 respondents (62%) were holders of BA/B.Sc.; 14 respondents (4.2%) were holders of HND; while 79 respondents (27%) were holders have MA/M.Sc./MBA; and 13 respondents (4.1%) were holders of doctorate degrees.

**8.1. Ascertaining whether the respondents had access to the channels through which the Nigerian Government disseminate information or news to the people**

This part of the questionnaire was used to find out whether the respondents had access to various mass media through which Nigerian Government pass information or news to the people.

In their responses all the responses affirmed that they have access to the conventional media channels of radio, television, newspaper and magazine. Moreover, in their separate responses, the respondents disclosed the main medium through which they get their news and information as follows: 79 respondents accepted that they read newspapers, 44 respondents accepted that they read magazines, while 93 respondents listen to radio, 70 accepted that they watch television. The responses are presented in the chart below:



**Figure3:** Respondents' major sources of information about the abduction of the Chibok girls  
Source: the researchers' field work, 2015

**8.2. Research question one:** How did Nigerian audience evaluate the communication from their government about the kidnapped Chibok girls?

This question was used to assess Nigerian audience's evaluation of the communication from their government over the abducted Chibok girls. That is to examine how the audience assesses information or news from the government sources on the Chibok girls' abduction saga. The answers to the question were elicited from the respondents' responses provided to the statements on the table below:

**Table 2: Items used to answer research question one**

Responses	News and information from the Nigerian Government about the kidnapped Chibok girls are always accurate	News and information from Nigerian Government about the kidnapped Chibok girls are often false	The number of the kidnapped Chibok girls as Nigerian Government supplied is reliable	Nigerian Government give regular information to the public about the kidnapped Chibok girls
Strongly agree	5	133	8	101
Agree	14	117	10	158
Strongly disagree	146	6	128	10
Disagree	119	14	134	12
Undecided	2	16	6	5
STD	.66684	1.07590	.72463	.82621
Mean	1.6538	3.1783	1.5804	3.1818

Source: the researchers' field works 2015

From the information provided on column 2 of Table 2 above, there is a mean of 1.6538 with standard deviation of .66684. The low mean recorded on the column was precipitated by the fact that in their responses to the statement, 'News and information from the Nigerian Government about the kidnapped Chibok girls are accurate,' greater respondents (146 and 119) respectively did not choose the options 'Strongly Agree and Agree' which have the greatest weight in the Modified Likert-type Scale (proposal 2) used for the study. These responses show that the respondents declined to the statement in the column.

The data presented on the third column of Table 2 above has the mean of 3.1783 with the standard deviation of 1.07590. A higher mean rate was recorded, because in their response to the statement 'News and information from Nigerian Government about the kidnapped Chibok girls are often false,' greater respondents (133 and 117) chose the options 'Strongly Agree and Agree,' which have the greatest weight on the measurement scale used for the responses. The result shows that the respondents upheld the statement on the column.

The data displayed on fourth column of Table 2 above has the mean rate of 1.5804 and the standard deviation of .72463. The mean on this column was low because in their responses to the statement, 'the number of the kidnapped Chibok girls as Nigerian Government supplied is reliable,' greater number of the respondents (128 and 134) did not choose the options 'Strongly Agree and Agree,' which have the greatest weight on the scale used for the study. The meaning was that the respondents declined to the statement on the column.

The data displayed on column five of Table 2 above has a mean score of 3.1818 and the standard deviation of .82621. This high mean score was recorded because in answer to the statement 'Nigerian Government give regular information to the public about the kidnapped Chibok girls,' greater respondents (101 and 158) ticked the options 'Strongly Agree and Agree,' which have the heaviest weight on the scale rate used for the study. The result is an indication that there was respondents' acceptance of the statement on the column.

### 8.3. Research question two: How did the masses perceive the effort of the government to free the girls?

**Table 3: Items used to proffer answer to research question 2**

Responses	Nigerian Government is silent over the issue of the kidnapped Chibok girls	Nigerian soldiers do not make efforts to rescue the kidnapped Chibok girls	Nigerian soldiers make good efforts to rescue the kidnapped Chibok girls	Nigerians detest government's stoppage of protests in Abuja on the abducted Chibok girls
Strongly agree	5	6	143	109
Agree	10	3	120	150
Strongly disagree	139	137	5	9
Disagree	126	129	14	13
Undecided	6	11	4	5
STD	.67879	.68908	.85105	.84361
Mean	1.5874	1.5245	3.3427	3.2063

Source: the researchers' field works, 2015

The data presented on column two of table 3 above has mean score of 1.5874 with the standard deviation of .67879. The mean score on this column was low because in their answer to the statement 'Nigerian Government is silent over the issue of the kidnapped Chibok girls,' greater respondents (139, 126 and 11) did not choose the options 'Strongly Agree and Agree,' which has the heaviest weight on the scale, applied for the study. The result shows that the respondents declined to the statement on the column.

The data on column 3 of Table 3 above has the mean rate of 1.5245 with the standard deviation mark of .68908. The mean score on the column was below the cut-off point because in response to the statement 'Nigerian soldiers do not make efforts to rescue the kidnapped Chibok girls,' fewer respondents (6 and 3) chose the options 'Strongly agree and Agree' which have the greatest weight on the scale used for the study. The reason for the standard deviation figure recorded was because greater respondents (137, 129 and 11) chose the options with the highest weight on the scale used for the paper.

The data presented on column 4 of Table three above show a mean score of 3.3427 with a standard deviation of .85105. The high mean score recorded was because in their response to the statement ‘Nigerian soldiers make good efforts to rescue the kidnapped Chibok girls,’ greater respondents (143 and 120) chose the options (strongly agree and agree) which have the greatest weight on the scale used for the study. This accounts for the low standard deviation obtained on the column. The result indicates the respondents’ acceptance of the statement on the column.

On column five of Table three above, the data show a mean score of 3.2063 and standard deviation of .84361. The high mean score recorded was because in their response to the statement ‘Nigerians detest government’s stoppage of protests in Abuja over the abducted Chibok girls,’ greater respondents (109 and 150) chose the options (strongly agree and agree) which have the greatest weight on the scale used for the study. The result indicates the respondents’ acceptance of the statement on the column.

**8.4. Research question 3: Did the audience understand the abduction of the Chibok girls as ineptitude of the current Nigerian leadership?**

**Table 4: Items used to answer research question three**

Responses	The abduction of the Chibok girls is a result of inefficiency of current Nigerian leadership	The abduction of the Chibok girls is an attempt to impose Islam on people	The abduction of the Chibok girls is a terrorist attack	The abduction of Chibok girls was an attempt to discredit Nigerian leadership
<b>Strongly agree</b>	9	116	127	109
<b>Agree</b>	21	101	140	103
<b>Strongly disagree</b>	129	42	5	19
<b>Disagree</b>	125	17	3	50
<b>Undecided</b>	2	10	11	5
<b>STD</b>	.75319	1.05240	.87642	1.14066
<b>Mean</b>	1.3853	3.0350	3.2902	2.9126

Source: the researchers’ field works 2015

The data presented on column 2 of Table four above has a mean score of 1.3853 with a standard deviation of .75319. The low mean rate recorded on the column was because in their response to the statement ‘the abduction of the Chibok girls was a result of inefficiency of current Nigerian leadership,’ fewer respondents (9 and 21) chose the options (strongly agree and agree) which have the highest weight on the scale used for the study. The implication of the result was that the respondents declined to the statement on the column.

The data presented on column three of table four above show a mean rate of 3.0350 with a standard deviation of 1.05240. The high mean was recorded because in their response to the statement ‘the abduction of the Chibok girls is an attempt to impose Islam on people,’ greater respondents (116 and 101) chose the options (strongly agree and agree) which have the highest weight on the scale used for the study. The result showed that the respondents accepted the statement on the column.

The data presented on column four of table four above show a mean score of 3.2902 with the standard deviation of .87642. The reason for the high mean score was because in their response to the statement ‘the abduction of the Chibok girls is a terrorist attack,’ greater respondents (127 and 140) selected the options (strongly agree and agree) which have the highest weight on the scale used for the paper. The result means that the respondents affirmed the statement on the column.

The data displayed on column five of Table four show a mean record of 2.9126 with a standard deviation of 1.14066. The high mean score on the column was because in their response to the statement ‘the abduction of Chibok girls was an attempt to discredit Nigerian leadership,’ greater respondents (109 and 103) chose the options (strongly agree and agree) which have the heaviest weight on the scale used for the study. The result showed that the respondents were affirmative to the statement on the column.

**IX. Discussion of research findings**

The results generated in this study have shown Nigerian mass media audience’s assessment of the use of propaganda in reportage of the Chibok girls’ abduction saga. In the contemporary era, propaganda is a parlance associated with deliberate and most often frequent dishing out of pieces of information characterized by half-truths, withholding of statistical facts or figures, utter lies purposely packaged to launder the face of failure of authorities. It is also tactics used to mellow or cover up certain glaring negativities by reduction in figure, magnitude, frequency and or intensity of an undesirable reality.

The governments of most developing countries of the world that have some skeleton in their cupboards usually apply propaganda to swindle the populace and present a semblance of positive pictures as the face of an ugly trend. The mass media have been the major channel through which the governments churn out their

propaganda. This is why this paper examined mass media audience's assessment of propaganda vis-à-vis the reportage of the allegedly abducted Chibok girls by the Boko Haram terrorists.

The study found out that Nigerian Government was not mute on the issue of the kidnapped Chibok girls. However, the government's not keeping silence over the problem was not that they feed the people with the accurate and true facts about the phenomenon. This was disclosed where the audience adjudged news and information from the Nigerian government about the abduction as frequent but inaccurate and often false. With the revelation, it is imperative that propaganda was appropriated by the government through the media in the reportage of the abduction saga. This is in line with the attitude of some governments mostly in the period of conflicts and or mayhem within their administrative territory. This result is similar to one of the findings of Kellner (2007) with regard to media representations of September 11 attack in the USA, which was a terrorist issue, but the difference is the use of propaganda in the reportage of the abduction stories. "The terror spectacle took over live global media for days to come, becoming an emblematic event in media history, ... The attacks arguably inaugurated a new era in history in which global Terror War exploded, and countries legitimated political repression and military intervention as part of a "war against terrorism," (Kellner, 2007, p.124).

Also, this study has revealed that in the estimation of the audience, Nigerian government through their soldiers was making intensive efforts towards securing the freedom of the abducted Chibok girls. The meaning of this finding is that in spite of government's propaganda in the reportage of the incident, Nigerians still appreciate the efforts of the country's defence apparatus toward securing the liberation of the victims of the abduction. It implies that in the views of the audience, Boko Haram insurgency has not lowered Nigerian military's combat reputation in the eyes of Nigerian citizens. This invariably means that in the opinions of the audience, Nigerian government has put in significant efforts towards the release of the kidnapped girls.

Another finding of the paper indicates that the audience did not perceive the abduction as a mark of inefficiency of Nigeria's national leadership. This finding seems incredible because through an overt militant political opposition characterized by propaganda; many would have ordinarily thought that the then major political opponent had succeeded in portraying the abduction of the Chibok girls as a sign of ineptitude of the Nigerian Government. The finding above confirms beyond every justifiable doubt the magnitude of notoriety which Boko Haram has earned for itself in Nigeria. Hence the audience did not estimate the abduction case as a foible of the then Nigerian Government in spite of the ploys of their major opponent, it shows how Nigerians detest Boko Haram per se and not their government as the opposition plotted. In comparison with the reportage of September 11, the finding is similar to the submission of McNair who "notes that there were only a few examples of anti-Americanism that blamed the attacks on U.S. policy..." In the Nigerian case, it was mainly the opposition party that apportions the blame of the abduction on the country's government apparently as a gimmick to denigrate the latter for a political advantage.

## **X. Conclusion**

The tale of abduction of young girls from Government Girls' Secondary School, Chibok in Borno State of Nigeria has since over a year formed a thorny subject across all mass media in the country. The manner at which the then opposition party attempted to use the ugly trend and score political goals was depicting the issue as a problem caused by the government. This paper examined the audience's evaluation of the matter with regard to the information, their government provided to them about it. The study probed to ascertain the use of propaganda or not by the government. In a nutshell, the finding of the study portray that there was application of propaganda in the reportage, but that notwithstanding, the audience did not adjudge the abduction as a fault of the then Nigerian government. The audience assessed the abduction saga as a terrorist attack geared towards imposition of Boko Haram sect's version of Islamic dogma on other people in Nigeria. With the findings of this paper, it could be deduced that Nigerian audience understands the Boko Haram phenomenon as a terrorism which menace stares the whole world at the face. Also, it was perceived as a subtle political strategy to discredit the then government of the country. This work has shown that the mass media tilt towards the direction of the governments or the political parties in crisis-laden situations.

## **XI. Recommendations**

From the findings of this paper we recommend that

- a. Nigerian Government has to be pro-active in their war against terrorism which is becoming a contemporary global phenomenon. The abduction of the Chibok girls is a manifestation of terrorist attack which Boko Haram allegedly spearheaded. With the seemingly unending menace of the insurgents' in Nigeria, the government has to be at alert in provision of security over all the public institutions, building and market places to avoid the easy penetration of the sect in such areas within the states of the country where insurgency exists.
- b. Communication to the public over any attack of the terrorists has to depict the true facts and accurate figures about the incident as the audience knows that terrorism is not a problem of the government but an

attempt by disgruntled religious bigots to foist their self-styled dogmas on others. In the United States of America for instance, the government was able to provide the accurate figure of the casualties, Nigerian state has to emulate that in other related terrorist incidents.

- c. Religious organizations within Nigeria have to put more efforts towards providing the real teachings of the tenets of their religion to their adherents. This shall be instrumental in stemming the tide of religious bigotry which was one of the factors that gave birth to Boko Haram which allegedly spearheaded the abduction incidence and the ongoing violence in North-Eastern part of Nigeria.
- d. Nigerian mass media have to eschew reportages that give support to any political party in any matter considered as terrorist invasion.

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