DEPLOYING COMMUNITY RADIO TO ARREST THE SPATE OF KIDNAPPING IN NIGERIA

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Abstract

A global study of the top 10 kidnap-for-ransom risk countries ranked Nigeria as the second riskiest country in the world (Constellis, 2017). This situation has become a constant news item on conventional media; this is including reporting it on social media outlets to such an extent that news of kidnapping is now commonplace. Be that as it may, the concern of this paper therefore is explore the effectiveness of community radio in curtailing the increasing menace of kidnapping in Nigeria. The paper was guided by Democratic Participant Media Theory, a framework that focuses on the right of the individual or a minority to have direct access to the media This theory applies to this paper succinctly in that it creates a diversity of voices and opinions on air through its openness to participation from community members. The paper adopted a Library-Based Research method by generating necessary information through a literature review using academic journal articles, newspaper reports, bulletins, and e-books among others. The paper established a correlation between kidnapping in Nigeria the country's development in addition to the positive place of community radio for rural development. The paper recommended that the establishment of community media in our rural communities is a requirement that governments at all levels should set forth to guarantee that the synergy between the media and the law enforcement agencies, local authorities, and civil society organizations becomes feasible in combating kidnapping incidents in Nigeria as well as the strengthening of community's resilience against

kidnappings by developing and deploying participatory community engagement programmes on community radio stations.

Keywords: Community Radio, Kidnapping, Security Threats, Rural Conflict Reporting

Introduction

Globally, the criminal phenomenon and behaviour such as kidnapping, is not new. It is a worldwide phenomenon with differences in criteria and scenarios. In the Nigerian context, before the 1990s, the issue of abduction was rare, and it was not reported in the Eighth United Nations Survey on Crime Trends and Operation of Criminal Justice System conducted in 2002 by the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (Obarisiagbon&Aderinto, 2018). However, the recent kidnapping wave in Nigeria started on February 25 2006, with the abduction of expatriate oil company employees in the Niger Delta region, which was displayed as an open message to the world for many years of marginalization, injustice, exploitation, and underdevelopment of the region (Akpan, 2010 cited in Yusuf & Abdullahi, 2020). As a consequence, the problem has taken a life of its own such that kidnapping for ransom is like any other trade because of its occurrence almost daily in Nigeria. Unfortunately, the rich and the poor have fallen prey to these dire devils, and travelers are not left out while school children and their counterparts in institutions of higher learning have been recorded as victims by the media in recent times. Apart from kidnapping, Nigeria is battling several other forms of security challenges which find expression in different dimensions such as terrorism, armed robbery, banditry, cyber crime, rape, bribery and corruption, murder, domestic violence, human trafficking, piracy, and child sexual abuse, among many others. These crimes exert so much pressure on Nigerian society, with her rising population, coupled with the absence of basic infrastructure, has exacerbated the insecurity levels in the country.

Walsh & Poole, (2019) have described the phenomenon as abducting or capturing away of a person intentionally to deprive them of personal freedom. Over the decades, kidnapping in Nigeria has evolved into a lingering pervasive security threat and a fast-paced and multi-faceted criminal enterprise. It is now perpetrated by diverse armed groups and criminal gangs operating across the country on land and at sea, pursuing different agendas and driven by different motivations: political, ideological, financial, social and cultural. (Assanvo and Okereke, 2019). A global study of the top 10 kidnap-for-ransom risk countries ranked Nigeria as the second riskiest country in the world (Constellis, 2017). Given the large number

of unidentified victims, kidnapping seems to be one of the most sophisticated and profitable types of criminal cases in Nigeria. Because they never know who may be stolen next, people are terrified by the forceful style of operation used by kidnappers (Peter and Osaat, 2021). This situation has become a constant news item in conventional media, including reporting it on social media outlets to such an extent that news of kidnapping is now commonplace. Be that as it may, the concern of this paper, therefore, is how we can appropriate the instrumentality of community radio to curtail the increasing menace of kidnapping in Nigeria. The central argument of this paper is that community radio has the potency to raise security consciousness, especially kidnapping in rural Nigeria. This is because community broadcasting is a system of broadcast media ownership and operation that is owned and operated by the members of a given community where such a station is situated. Production and dissemination here are done by the people and received by the same people on their terms. It is like Abraham Lincoln's definition of democracy- broadcasting of the people, by and for the people. Here, the people of such a community determine everything about the type of programmes, operation and funding. (Ekwe and Umeh, 2009:19).

The Place of Community Radio in Communication

A nation's communications depend heavily on community radio. Public-service broadcasting, or community radio, primarily caters to a specific community. It represents a specific community's culture, ideology, beliefs, customs, and values. Community radio, which serves as the voice of its local populace, has grown in popularity and presented new opportunities for grassroots activists and media professionals. In addition to providing utilities and amenities for various societal development aspects like health, education, water and sanitation, and disaster protection, community radio also addresses social and security issues locally and serves as a conduit between the government and rural populations (Khan et al., 2017:1). As a consequence, the sense of community evokes the spirit of togetherness, cohesion, unity, love and pursuit of common goals by all for community development. Thus, this mindset propels the kind of programming and content that emanate from these radio stations, which will naturally be designed so that the community is kept abreast of security threats and negative tendencies of criminal developments.

This is also so because even though using handsets, which provides people in rural areas access to social media, is almost basic, the question is, how can one authenticate information picked from these platforms? This is because social media operations are anchored on the libertarian theory of the press, which gives absolute freedom to publish anything at any time without any form of control. Thus, it is more or less an anonymous platform and the information it puts forward should be taken with a pinch of salt rather than a representation of unvarnished facts.Apart from social media, the country's lack of community radio stations has made people depend more on foreign media for their information needs, such as VOA, BBC Hausa Service, and Radio Deutsch Welle. The information coming from these outlets can be deceptive because they are far removed from these communities and operate from the metropolitan cities. As such, one cannot properly understand the extent and context of security challenges (kidnapping) and the patterns in which these problems occur better than a station domiciled in the community and operated by the people of that community. It is within this frame of understanding that this paper is conceived because every crime takes place in a community, and the surest way to tackle such menace is by using the resources within that community setting. As such, kidnapping in Nigeria does not happen in outer space, nor is it a virtual occurrence, but takes place within a geographical location. Thus, to arrest this negative trend, community radio, which is an effective and powerful medium for widespread education and awareness, could be deployed to check the incidences of kidnapping and other violent crimes in society.

Theoretical Framework

The theory adopted in this work is the Democratic Participant Media Theory. This theory focuses on the right of the individual or a minority to have direct access to the media. In this respect, the media is for all people, both as individuals and groups, both locally and nationally. In this theory, the media ought not to be a private or commercial enterprise. The principle idea for this theory is that of interaction and directness. The media is supposed to serve as a tool for two-way communication, both in small and large-scale contexts. The main feature of Democratic Participant Media Theory, therefore, relates to the needs, interests, and

aspirations of the active receiver in society. It is concerned with the right to relevant information, the right to answer back, and the freedom to connect in small-scale communities, interest groups, and subculture situations via communication. Media institutions constructed according to this theory are involved closely with social life and are more in control of their audiences, offering them opportunities to access and participate. This theory applies to this paper succinctly in that it creates a diversity of voices and opinions on air through its openness to participation from community members.

No community is insulated from security threats, but acknowledging the challenge is a first step. Providing a democratic platform like community radio allows for a collective drive for solutions and engenders democratic communities. Community radio tries to air objectively all sides of a discussion without itself taking sides. It is a grassroots radio that provides for dialogue and democratic processes through its platform, which brings about the ventilation of community voices on tackling security challenges confronting it, especially kidnapping. As to the methodology adopted, the paper adopted a library-based research method by generating necessary information through a literature review using academic journal articles, newspaper reports, bulletins, and e-books, among others.

Literature Review

Various studies have been carried out on kidnapping and how the media can intervene to resolve it. For example, In his thesis, Ukandu (2011) explored the strategic role of religion in ameliorating the menace of kidnapping in Abia State and observed that the level of moral degeneration and erosion of communal values, mass unemployment and poverty, poor security, which encouraged the proliferation of small arms and light weapons, and the agitation for amnesty by some Abia youths were underlying factors which led to the crime of kidnapping in the state. The study, therefore, suggested that the positive roles of religion, especially the church as an organized social system with grass-root relevance, can serve as a restorative justice mechanism and structure that can help abate kidnapping through interventions aimed at prevention, detection, punishment of kidnappers, and care for kidnapped victims.

The question then arises, to what extent can the church as an ideological state apparatus curtail this threat? Do the youths who perpetrate these crimes even go to church? There are so many questions, but it is safe to say that they listen to the radio occasionally. This is because it is the cheapest form of communication. Nwabueze and Ebeze (2013) examinedthe vital role played by the media in containing the crime wave that has caused unrest throughout the nation, particularly in the North, South East and South-South regions. The discourse adopted the qualitative approach of appraising the correlation between mass media and insecurity in Nigeria, emphasising relevant practical measures. The paper recommended that in order to keep them up to date on the most recent methods available, journalists should undergo regular training on terrorism and conflict reporting. This would help to ensure that the mass media is effectively used to combat insecurity in Nigeria.

An analysis of the causes of insecurity in Nigeria by Comfort et al. (2013) revealed that the country's sultry security situation is a result of several factors, including weak and underfunded military establishments, ethno-religious conflicts, the widening gap between inequality and the absence of fairness and justice, and a disconnect between the people and the government. Thus, they argued that when leaders uphold moral principles, they will refrain from meddling in elections, official corruption, and other vices that exacerbate the severe wounds many facets of the political community have already been tending to. As a result, the Nigerian security issue poses a moral challenge to everyone, encouraging them to live by high moral standards that respect human life, look for peaceful ways to resolve disputes and advance justice, equity, fairness, and empathy in the nation. Akpan et al. (2013) interrogated the role of the Nigerian media in three major crises in the Niger Delta, Boko Haram and Jos crises. In its reportage of the conflict phenomenon in Nigeria, like most other conflict-prone societies, the media is culpable in stoking conflicts and making reconciliation difficult for conflict parties. The failure of the press and the practitioners alike to rise to practice their profession according to the ideal media ethics has generated the emergent quest for peace media in conflict reporting. The paper sought to ask How the media handled the reportage of these crises in a turbulent society like Nigeria? Does the environment and media

coverage have a major relationship? And in what ways has media reportage enhanced or reduced these conflicts?

The paper recommends that there is a need for the convergence of media ethics and peace journalism in the reportage of conflict issues in Nigeria or elsewhere. This convergence, it is hoped, will help the media in turbulent systems avoid the pitfalls of propaganda, which will likely escalate conflict in society. This paper raised critical issues but was not specific as to which of the media can be appropriated for this purpose, considering that the study paid significant attention to environmental factors as crucial to resolving issues of violent conflicts. In yet another study, Abdulazeez (2017) looked at the case of Bring Back Our Girls using the role of print and social media in social movements. The study focused on how the Bring Back Our Girls campaigners utilize print and social networking sites to mobilize, organize and communicate with one another before and during the movement. In addition, it could be used to create awareness and entertain the inhabitants in remote villages about the activities of the BBOG. The study concluded that digital signage would affect the BBOG campaign. Not only with the BBOG campaign but good use can be made of digital signage in any type of social campaign, as it also affects print and social media. This study adds value to how the media can be used for social mobilization purposes, especially in addressing security challenges, just like in the abduction of the Chibok School Girls. While this work seeks to use print and social media as reactive measures after a crime has been committed, this paper dwells on how to apprehend community radio as a proactive tool for social and security consciousness in rural Nigeria.

Ate and Ogunlade (2019) studied social media usage to support abductees in Nigeria and inferred that Nigerians are interested in discussing the plight of abductees using social media platforms. According to the study, social media can quickly reach a larger number of Nigerians than traditional forms of communication. It therefore recommended among others that the Civil Society organizations in Nigeria and Human Right Groups should explore the advantages of social media to reach the people and the government alike. The departing line between this discourse and the work by Ate and Ogunlade is that while the later adopted the

use of the media as a tool for reactive purposes (to rescue the kidnapped Epe school boys) using the wide reach of the social media, the former is concerned with the use of community radio as a preventive tool against the threat of kidnapping in Nigeria. Beyond this, it is to arm rural dwellers with information on how to detect early warning signals of threats to community wellbeing. Ayuba (2020) whose study dwelt on the trajectories, typology and implications of kidnapping in Nigeria noted that even though the phenomenon of kidnapping is not new in Nigeria, the new dimensions it takes in recent times and its prevalence have become serious issues of national concern. The study established the existence of different types of kidnapping with kidnap for ransom being the most prevalent and most trending in Nigeria.

This is not unconnected to the pervasive poverty and unemployment, the quest for criminal accumulation of wealth, particularly among the teeming youths. Similarly, poor governance manifested in corrupt practices of public servants and political elites have been described as some of the motivating factors for kidnapping in Nigeria. Therefore, the study recommended that state governments design and scale up robust training for youths in ICT and other skills acquisition programmes. The youth's rate of redundancy and laziness will be significantly decreased in this method, as the proverb "an idle mind is the devil's workshop" states. This study is germane to resolving the kidnapping conundrum in Nigeria, however, the question is, how accessible are ICT facilities in Nigeria, especially in the rural areas? A careful perusal of literature around the subject matter points to the fact that the causal factors for kidnapping in southern Nigeria may be economically inclined. In south-south Nigeria, it reared its ugly head mainly as an environmental struggle, while in the Northwestern and Northeastern parts of the country, it could be deduced that endemic poverty and terrorism are fuelling the crime.Given the above, this paper examines the correlation between kidnapping in Nigeria and community radio for rural development.

Rural Broadcasting and Community Security for Development

Over seventy percent of the Nigerian population live in rural areas and are grossly denied access to modern communication channels and are thus shut away from credible information on issues that affect their lives and communities. Most of them live and die, never having an

appreciation of development and the possibility that they could participate in the meaningful building of their country (Thomas, 2010). This is exactly what rural broadcasting seeks to counter, such that it gives the people at the lower rung of the ladder a voice in interrogating their prevailing realities, speaking out on what is their most pressing needs and participating actively in discussions to shape their security needs. This is particularly important because, as observed by Frank and Smith (1999), community development is the process through which people in a community band together to solve challenges by working together. It is an expert procedure, and a component of its methodology is the conviction that communities cannot be assisted unless they consent to this procedure. It is,therefore important to point out that the security of lives and property is a requirement for any form of development in any community. This is because of the extent to which sustained security threats like kidnapping and other violent crimes can dislocate the social fabric of society and render development aspirations a mirage.

Most recently, the World Bank's 2011 World Development Report on conflict, security and development underscores the strong linkage between security and development mirrored in its central thesis, which states that "breaking cycles of violence requires strengthening legitimate institutions and governance to provide citizen security, justice, and jobs.". The report further supported this with two main arguments: (1)'Twenty-first-century conflict and violence are a development problem that does not fit the 20th-century mould'; and (2)'Vicious cycles of conflict are created when security, justice, and employment stresses meet weak institutions (World Bank, 2011 cited in Caballero, 2015:10). This suggests, therefore, that security threats like kidnapping and other violent crimes as experienced in Nigeria today have direct consequences on the country's development. It arrests societal growth and hampers the ability of individuals and communities to harness and direct their energy towards social change. This is because for any society to chart a course of development there must be a tolerable level of security that guarantees the safety of lives and property. Kidnapping has caused so many families psychological and emotional trauma and when the smallest unit of the society is disorganized in this manner, the last thing to think of is development.Kidnapping has also thrown many victims' families into indebtedness through

the payment of ransom. The financial strain placed on communities to ensure the safe return of those forcefully taken away takes a while to recover. This is because of the incalculable damage the experiences have caused families and communities. It is,therefore difficult for development to thrive in such an atmosphere.

Conclusion

The previous sections expounded on the efficacious utilization of community radio to curb the kidnapping problem in Nigeria and enhance security consciousness among the country's rural populace. No society can dispute the importance of security to its growth and development. Governments find it challenging to impose any form of restriction on the current level of insecurity in Nigeria since it has gotten out of control (Nwosu, 2003; Soola, 2007; Iziguzo, 2007; Iteogu&Jibowo, 2019). Therefore, it is not an overstatement to say that Nigeria faces numerous security concerns, given the numerous problems that have recently hampered the nation's development efforts, including threats to lives and property caused by crime and violence. However, the mass media—especially community radio—is a valuable tool for raising public awareness on several crucial national concerns, security being one of the most critical. By giving the public the knowledge they need to be vigilant about security, the community may help prevent the spread of fears and provide a stable, peaceful environment with robust institutions to protect their constituents. In order to fulfil its social responsibility, the media, particularly, community radio, must make sure that it exposes certain societal causes of insecurity, seeks to generate public support to prevent or lessen the recurrence of crimes, insecurity, and other social ills, and uses resources and a broad range of coverage to do so.

Recommendations

A top-down, centralized communication approach characterizes the majority of government actions to reduce the threat of kidnappings in particular and insecurity in rural regions generally. These interventions also frequently rely on externally induced communication tactics and channels to transmit information. Nonetheless, rural communities have well-established communication networks that they have historically used to create and store

knowledge, which may then be efficiently shared or conveyed through community radio for the best possible use of the resource. For this reason, community radio can offer rural communities an efficient way to get access to a variety of security-related information. (Day, Romney, Kimani, Maulana, Mallya, Negussie, and Musebe, 2010).The following recommendations are made in light of the critical analysis and evaluation of the theories and literature on radio and insecurity:

To strengthen the community's resilience against kidnappings, more participatory community engagement programmes should be developed and deployed on community radio stations. These programmes should inform and empower local inhabitants on safety precautions, reporting suspicious activity, and preventing kidnappings.This recommendation corroborates Silas, Mahfouz, Muhammad &Rachmah (2024).Similarly, in order to effectively disseminate accurate information, mobilize resources, and coordinate responses to combat kidnapping incidents, community radio stations, law enforcement agencies, local authorities, and civil society organizations should establish viable collaborations and partnerships. Establishing community media in our rural communities is a requirement that governments at all levels should set forth to guarantee that this synergy becomes feasible.Governments have long ignored this crucial component of broadcasting that meets rural residents' information needs. Given the extreme insecurity in our rural communities today, governments ought to take the necessary action to enable these areas to establish thriving community radio stations that would aid in the rural populace's education on security-related matters.

The public must be actively involved in maintaining the safety of people and property in their community by reporting any breaches to the appropriate authorities. Governments at all levels should use radio programmes to reach out to citizens on security-related issues, regardless of where they live. Relevant media industry stakeholders should also ensure that security is a strong part of their daily programming. Again, the study recommends that future researchers use this study's methodological gap to expand the boundaries of knowledge.By implementing these recommendations, community radio would no doubt be used significantly to address the problem of kidnapping in Nigeria and strengthen community safety, awareness, and resistance to such illegal activity.

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