Mass Media and People's Opinion: A Review of Endsars Protest in Nigeria

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Abstract

The study is based on the EndSARs protest as a case study to investigate the influence of mass media on shaping people's opinions. The survey research design was used in the study, and 120 participants were chosen at random from the Ojoo area of Akinyele Local Government. As indicated by the findings of this study, the majority of respondents are youth, and more than 40% of them took part in the EndSARs protest. Many of them believe that the media played a crucial role in disseminating information about the EndSARs protest and in shaping the opinion of the public. The hypothesis testing revealed that mass media has a positive and significant effect on people's opinions. Premised on the findings of this study, it is recommended that citizens use the mass media appropriately for essential information and that the government encourage freedom of speech among citizens.

1.   Introduction

The media is usually described as a medium of communication competent of concurrently reaching diverse people with consistent messages (Oyesomi, Oyero, and Okorie, 2014). Mass media has frequently made significant contributions globally because the general public highly depends on it to give information about political issues, social problems, entertainment, news etc. As indicated by Esteve (2018), mass media is now a powerful factor in people's socialization as it influences behaviour by expressing people with ideas that they can accept or decline. As a result, mental conceptions can be portrayed with greater force and persuasion. Critical thinking is curtailed when conveyed in this manner. This means that education and information dissemination are secondary priorities for today's media. Considering the organization and wide range of entertainment programs provided by media channels, there is very little doubt about it. The period that the media commits to news and informational programs has decreased significantly. Additionally, to the family, the church, and peers, the media plays an important role in shaping public opinion (Pusateri and Liccardi, 2015).

As a result, mass-influence media and the influencer channel act as primary agents of socialization and have a significant influence on people. This means that the media can either enhance, disprove, augment or invalidate a behaviour. Socializing via mass media is a necessary feature of mass media. People are first and foremost informed by the media. People use this information to make the image upon which their actuality is based. They assist people in modelling and demonstrating the behaviours they require, and thus form a piece of information that organizations create their reality image, on which they function.

The media also offers the public standards and values that they can use to achieve personal and interpersonal cohesiveness. Finally, personal identity is created and maintained via the media. People who interact with the media

may form their classifications of who they are as people and social beings. The term "mass media" is known as the technology that is intended to reach a large number of people. It is the primary means of communication to reach out to the general public. The most widely used forms of mass media are newspapers, articles, radio, television, and the nternet. The masses generally depend on on the mass media for relevant information and news.   (Awatade, 2014). The general public frequently depends on on the mass media to keep them informed about political and social issues, entertainment, and popular culture headlines (Awatade, 2014). In some cases, the media has changed the social structure in a negative direction. The greatest strength of mass media is its "social influence." Because people trust what the media informs them, this is the case. In today's world, where people are too preoccupied to verify the news report on top media outlets and print media, they rely on the mass media ignorantly.

Because viewers and readers can't tell the difference between what is right and wrong, the media has taken control of their moral judgements. For many people, the media is now the utmost source of information, which must be accepted at all costs. Therefore, it allows people to use the media to negatively influence public opinion (Murshed,2014). The media play an important role in informing, educating, and entertaining the public. In the present era, where numerous events occur daily that impact society overtly or covertly, it is essential that everyone be at least familiar with the general situation.

Then, there's the media's role, whether it's print, electronic, or any other type of media. To make sure that the public is aware of everything that is going on in the world, the media as a whole provides all of the necessary information. Public opinion may be influenced by media coverage of particular stories or aspects of them. A common theme in the media is that the most visible aspects of a story are regarded to be the most important. The mainstream media has a large influence on individuals' lives. It is difficult for people to visit all of the places to get a true sense of a situation. As a consequence, they keep a close eye on the media. Those that depend on them do so for a variety of reasons, including news feeds, general information, and recommendations. The media can ascertain a country's fate. This implies that media autonomy and balanced reporting are critical to the success of any country. Numerous media organizations are now trying to convince people all over the world.

The EndSARS protest began as a public uproar on the abolishment of Nigeria's Special Anti-Robbery Squad (SARS), a branch of the Police Force notorious for its ruthlessness and human rights breach. During the year 2018, it was first put in place to raise consciousness about allegations of SARS officials engaging in violent and oppressive behaviour. The government altered the structure of SARS, but the alleged human rights abuses and injustice continued. Account of an unjustified shooting of a boy in the streets of Delta State by SARS officials emerged on social media in October 2020. More documentation of police shootings has been displayed on various social media channels. Notwithstanding the Nigerian Police's denials, the public's outrage remained unabated. Because of the social media campaign, large numbers of Nigerians marched through the streets of Lagos and Abuja, demanding an end to SARS. As a result of the negative publicity generated by the protests, the Nigerian government rapidly revealed the disintegration. This, however, was insufficient to appease the protesters, given that the government had previously made similar statements. After numerous allegations of harassment, the Inspector General of police (IGP) prohibited SARS from conducting stop-and-search operations in December 2017. As a result, the IGP re-announced it publicly in 2018 and 2020, asserting that previous bans were ineffective. In a related manner, Nigeria's acting president stated in 2018 that SARS would be reorganized and that the National Human Rights Commission would carry out investigations of unfair treatment. This was rapidly followed by the establishment of a centrally controlled FSARS (Federal Special Anti-Robbery Squad) that would answer directly to the IG of Police, as compared to the conventional system, which reported to state Commissioners of Police. Just a few weeks after, the IGP declared the end of FSARS, claiming that the unit would be disseminated and run by state

commissioners (Olatunji 2020). As a result of previous human rights violations and grievances, the protesters' list of complaints grew. They are now requesting recompense for victims of SARS violence, providing training for police officers, and the prosecution of SARS directors who have been allegedly involved. Because of the #EndSARS protests, global leaders like UN Secretary-General António Guterres and US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo tweeted their endorsement for an end to SARS.

The analysis is centred on the utilization and gratifications theory (Katz *et al*., 1974) that describes the connection between viewers and how they use media. It offers an innovative theoretical strategy in the initial phases within each new mass communication channel, such as newspaper articles, radio, and television, as well as the Internet. It asserts that the viewers are effective and that its media use is goal-centred; media users actively sought out media that satisfies their expectations rather than being passive (Diddi and LaRose, 2006). Individuals are rational and assertively self-aware beings who impact the influence of the media on them while also unknowingly making sense of media content from their perspective. The theory also proposes that viewers have possible alternatives for satisfying their needs and that their use or selection of a particular type of media (e.g., newspaper, radio, television, or internet or a particular program (e.g., newspaper column, radio program, tv station, or website) is to satisfy their requirements, wants, or intentions (Katz *et al*., 1974; Peirce, 2007).

2.   Materials and Methods

The survey research design was used in the study. The survey research design was chosen since data was collected using a structured questionnaire, which did not require any variable modification in the study. The research was carried out in the Ojoo area of Akinyele Local Government. The area was chosen because the protest had a significant impact, with several properties, including the Ojoo Police Station, being destroyed. The study's respondents were chosen using a random sampling technique. For this study, 120 people were chosen at random. For data gathering, a structured questionnaire was used. Section A of the questionnaire includes demographic information about respondents like age, gender, marital status, tribe, and religious affiliation. The second section of the questionnaire focused on the EndSARS mass demonstrations.

3.   Results

Table 1: Demographic Characteristics

Gender	Frequency	Percent
Male	76	63.3
Female	44	36.7
Age (Years)		
18-25 years	39	32.5
26-35 years	37	30.8
36-45 years	34	28.3
46-55 years	10	8.4
Educational Qualification		
Primary School Cert	5	4.1
O'Level/SSCE	18	15.0
OND/NCE	71	59.2
BSC/HND	26	21.7
Religion		
Christianity	59	49.2

Islam	52	43.3
Traditional	9	7.5
Tribe		
Yoruba	70	58.4
Igbo	13	10.8
Hausa	37	30.8
Total	**120**	**100.0**

Based on the demographic attributes of the respondents, 76 (63.3%) are male, while 44 (36.7%) are female. Additionally, 39 (32.5%) are between the ages of 18-25, 37 (30.8%) are between the ages of 26-35, 34 (28.3) are between the ages of 36-45 years, and 10 (8.4%) are between the ages of 46-55 years. This suggests that there are a lot of young people among the respondents. According to the respondents' academic qualifications, 71 (59.2%) have OND/NCE, 26 (21.7%) have BSC/HND, and 18 (15.0%) have O'Level/SSCE certificates.

Table 2: Opinion on EndSARs Protest

S/N	Statement	Yes	No
7	Did you take part in the EndSARs protest?	53 (44.2%)	67 (55.8%)
8	Do you think the media created awareness for it?	117 (97.5%)	3 (2.5%)
9	Did the media make the world know the severity of brutality faced by Nigerian citizens?	86 71.6%)	34 (28.3%)
10	Did the campaign against police brutality spread fast due to the media's involvement?	110 (91.6%)	10 (8.4%)
11	Do you think the media enable citizens to freely express their opinion on EndSARs?	103 (85.8%)	17 (14.1%)
12	Do you think that the media help people in shaping their opinions?	100 (83.3%)	20 (16.7%)
13	Media is an integral part that makes the world heard of the police brutality and EndSARs	94 (78.4%)	26 (21.7%)
14	Do you think without the media's involvement, the awareness/campaigns would have had a fast response from the government?	91 (75.9%)	29 (24.2%)

Based on the respondents' opinions on the EndSARs protest, 53 (44.2%) asserted that they took part in the protest, whereas 67 (55.8%) asserted that they did not take part, 117 (97.5%) asserted that they believe the media created awareness for it, while 3 (2.5%) asserted otherwise, and 86 (71.6%) claimed that the media made the world conscious of the severity of police abuse encountered by citizens of Nigeria; 103 (85.8%) of the respondents believe the media empowered citizens to readily express their opinions on EndSARs, while 17 (14.1%) believe the media enable citizens to spontaneously express their opinions on EndSARs, 94 (78.4%) of respondents said the media plays a critical role in raising awareness about police abuse and EndSARs, and 91 (75.9%) said the government would have responded immediately to the protests even if the media had not been involved.

Impact of Mass media in shaping peoples' opinion

Table 3: Pearson Correlations

		Mass Media	Peoples' Opinion
Mass Media	Pearson Correlation	1	.181[*]
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.048
	N	120	120
Peoples' Opinion	Pearson Correlation	.181[*]	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.048	
	N	120	120

 *. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

The impact of mass media in shaping people's opinions was tested using Pearson correlation. The result indicates a positive significant correlation between mass media and public opinion (r =.181,p<.05), implying that mass media positively significantly influence the opinion of people.

4.   Discussion

The study investigated the EndSARs protest as a case study to analyze the influence of mass media on shaping people's opinions. A total number of 120 people were selected at random from the Ojoo area of Akinyele Local Government. According to the study results, many of the respondents are young people and more than 40% of them participated in the EndSARs protest. The majority of them think that the media played an important role in disseminating information about the EndSARs protest and in influencing their views. The result of the hypothesis revealed that mass media has a positive and significant impact on people's opinions. This finding is consistent with the findings of Bode (2016) and Molaei (2017) both asserted that social media is rapidly evolving as an important source of news, contributing to a well-informed populace. Premised on the findings of this study, it is suggested that citizens use the mass media appropriately for important information and that the government encourage freedom of expression among the citizens.

5.   Conclusion

This study concludes that mass media influences and shapes people views and opinions. The mass media is very powerful, and the majority of the masses rely on it for information. As a result, most people take whatever they see or hear from the mass media as valid information even without further investigation. The media serves as a channel of information distribution and dissemination to the public and as a result, goes a long way to influence and shape people's opinions about events.

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