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# Table of Content

<b>Women, start your engines: US and UK media portrayal of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia women driving ban</b>	1
Saud A. Alsulaiman and Terry L. Rentner	
<b>News worthiness and Public trust in sub-Sahara African: Examining the impact of tabloid journalism in Zambia</b>	12
Gregory Gondwe	
<b>Cultivating Biafran agenda in Nigeria: Evaluation of the influence of radio Biafra's rhetoric of ethnic marginalization on rural dwellers in the South-east</b>	23
IKEGBUNAM Peter C. and AGUDOSY Fabian I.	

*Full Length Research Paper*

# Women, start your engines: US and UK media portrayal of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia women driving ban

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**The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA) was the only country to ban women from driving until a royal decree changed this in June 2018. The controversy before and after the ban gained media attention and is the foundation for this study, examining how US and UK media covered the women driving ban. Framing theory and thematic analysis were used to examine 80 articles randomly chosen from 10 prominent and most trusted US and UK news outlets before and after the ban. The study found that the majority of the coverage was supportive of women driving before and after the ban in the KSA, but coverage of KSA women vividly shifted after lifting the driving ban. Western ideologies and perspectives, present in most articles, did not consider the main differences between cultures. False information and exaggerations in some articles provided inaccurate information about women in the KSA.**

**Key words:** Saudi women, framing theory, thematic analysis, US and UK media coverage.

## INTRODUCTION

The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA) is home to more than 34 million people, of whom 20 million are Saudis, according to the General Authority for Statistics (2020). Empowering women is a priority for the Saudi government, with women playing significant roles in education, economy, health, and politics (AlMunajjed, 2009; Browne, 2018). In education, Saudi women are slightly better educated than Saudi men, according to the UNESCO Institute of Statistics (UIS) (2018). Around 50% of university students are women, as are half of the doctors and teachers in the KSA (Lapovsky, 2016; Nereim and Abu-Nasr, 2015; UIS, 2018). In politics, Saudi women gained equal rights to vote in the 2015

municipal elections, and 20 women were elected (BBC, 2018c; Chulov, 2011), and for the first time, 30 Saudi women joined the country's advisory body, the Shoura Council in 2013 (Nereim and Abu-Nasr, 2015; Radwan, 2018).

For a long period, however, the KSA was known as the only country to forbid women from driving cars. The breakthrough came on June 24, 2018, when Saudi women received the right to obtain driver licenses, putting an end to one of the major issues facing women in the KSA (Sirgany and Smith-Spark, 2018). It was a remarkable day for many women in KSA who took to the roads shortly after this historic decision. Saudi women

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applauded the decision by sharing videos and photos of themselves on social media driving cars in celebration (Sant, 2018).

The historic event prompted this investigation and analysis of prominent US and UK news media coverage in the KSA. Specifically, it compared how the media covered the issue before and after the driving ban was lifted. This study sought to identify main themes and tones of US and UK media coverage, adding to the body of knowledge of how Western media portray Saudi women.

Little or no research exists on how both the US and UK media covered the issue of women's right to drive in the KSA. These two countries have the most trusted media outlets in the world, according to a Reynolds Journalism Institute at the University of Missouri (Kearney, 2017), and both vital key players in the Middle East. The authors used framing theory and thematic analysis to examine how the media covered the events that led to the only country in the world that disallowed women drivers to finally lift its ban.

### **Image of Saudi Arabia in the media**

Throughout history, Arabs and Middle Easterners have been portrayed negatively in the US media due to the nature of the relationship between the West and the Arab countries (Hirchi, 2007). In his book "Orientalism", Edward Said (1978) believes that the West created the idea of the "East" (Orient) and "West" (the Orient). Said (1978) states that the relationship between the West and the East becomes "us" and "those" or "we" and "others" and because the Middle East embraces different identities and ideologies, it has been considered as "Others" (Said, 1978). A recent study published by the Center for Media Monitoring (CFMM), 2019 at the Muslim Council of Britain analyzed around 11,000 articles for all British media outlets found that 59% of articles associated Muslims with negative behaviors and that the word "Terrorism" is the most theme related to Islam and Muslim (CFMM, 2019).

The KSA is no exception to the negative media campaigns that severely impacted its image, especially after 9/11 (Zhang and Benoit, 2004). A recent study by The Economist and YouGov found that only 4% of Americans consider the KSA to be an ally to the United States (Frankovic, 2018). Such findings present a unique opportunity to explore how the US and UK media portray the advancement of women driving in the KSA.

### **Brief history of women driving in KSA**

In 1957, the KSA announced a decree prohibiting women from driving cars (Perper, 2018). Since then, many

women have made efforts to break the driving ban by driving their vehicles in KSA's streets, but many ended up in custody (Jamjoom, 2013a; Malik, 2011). For instance, in 1990, more than 47 women drove their luxury cars in the capital city of the KSA, Riyadh, but the police stopped them (Jamjoom, 2013b; The New York Times (NYT), 1990). The women then signed a pledge not to drive again (NYT, 1990). Saudis from around the country applauded the women for their bravery and described the incident with positive adjectives like amazing and astounding (NYT, 1990).

In 2011, another group of women launched a social media campaign called 'Women2Drive' asking all women to get behind the wheel, defy the ban, and drive throughout the KSA's streets (Chappell, 2013; Jamjoom, 2013b; Malik, 2011).

In 2013, Saudi women launched another campaign called 'Oct26driving' aimed at encouraging all women to protest the ban and drive their cars (Chappell, 2013; Hubbard, 2013; Jamjoom, 2013b; Jamjoom and Smith-Spark, 2013). A royal decree allowing women to drive on June of 2018 ended Saudi women's struggle and put an end to such an issue.

### **Framing theory**

Framing theory, developed by Goffman in 1974, suggests that the way mass media present and convey messages and information affect people's expectations of the social world around them (Baran and Davis, 2009). Framing theory focuses on how mass media frames its news and information and at the same time how people learn from the news and make sense of their social world (Baran and Davis, 2009). Framing is how journalists shape content "within a familiar frame of reference" (Gorp, 2007: 61) in a way that resonates with their audiences who also share the same frame of reference (Bowe, 2018). These frames include a shared culture and socially defined roles established within the society in which journalists and their publics live.

Mass media can alter perceptions and how people live or communicate with each other (Baran and Davis, 2009). Thus, depicting negative or positive images of Saudi women on the news media may affect perceptions and how people look at Saudi women. As stated by Arendt (2013), "Regular exposure to media stereotypes can contribute to the development of stereotypical memory traces. Once developed, such traces can be reactivated by subsequent (albeit brief) exposure" (p. 830). Framing theory provides a strong foundation for understanding US and UK news media framing of women driving in the KSA before and after lifting the ban and the efforts of Saudi women to gain local and international support (BBC, 2013; Chandler, 2014; Hubbard, 2013; Jamjoom, 2013a, 2013b; Malik, 2011; Jamjoom and

Smith-Spark, 2013).

The following research questions informed this study:

RQ1: What general themes and tones emerged when analyzing articles of women driving in KSA across prominent US and UK media outlets during the women driving ban and after lifting the driving ban?

RQ2: To what extent, if any, did prominent US and UK news media provide balanced coverage of women driving in KSA before and after lifting the ban?

## MATERIALS AND METHODS

A thematic analysis method utilized in this study. The researchers followed Braun and Clarke's (2006) rigorous thematic analysis process by systemically analyzing all data and giving attention to all details to capture patterns across the data. Thematic analysis is a "method for identifying, analyzing, and reporting patterns (themes) within data" (p. 6). Researchers in many fields, including health and well-being (Braun and Clarke, 2014), business (Jones et al., 2011), and media and communication (Lawless and Chen, 2019; Kim and Weaver, 2002) use a thematic analysis method.

### Sample

The sample included a set of 80 articles, eight articles from each of 10 prominent and most trusted US and UK news media (Kearney, 2017) that covered the issue of women driving in KSA, which are: The Guardian, The New York Times (NYT), Wall Street Journal (WSJ), CNN, The Independent, BBC, The Washington Post, USA Today, NPR, and Reuters. The researchers chose two periods, before lifting the driving ban and after. This resulted in sample of 48 articles from US media outlets and 32 from UK media outlets.

### Procedures

The researchers used the Google search engine to search for the topic under investigation by using two key phrases, *women driving in Saudi Arabia* and *women defy the driving ban in Saudi Arabia*. Each news network's name and year accompanied the keywords (e.g., women driving in Saudi Arabia BBC 2018).

The researchers then selected four articles for each period with a total of eight articles from each of the 10 media outlets. Four stories were the most any one selected medium printed or aired either before or after the ban. The researchers limited the study to 80 articles because the themes and tones were redundant and nothing new emerged in those articles studied during the time period.

The authors followed Braun and Clarke's (2006) rigorous thematic analysis process to analyze patterns, presence of different opinions (e.g. supporters, opponents, biased or unbiased coverage), and tone of articles (e.g. positive, neutral, negative). Scholars define media bias as the "different impressions created from an objective event by slanting information" (Xiang and Sarvary, 2007: 611). The authors operationalized biased coverage as a news article that selects certain actors, stories, and events to tell one side of the story and overlook other facts and sides. Unbiased coverage provides a neutral tone and includes different actors, stories, and events about the issue under study. We first familiarized ourselves with the data, took notes, generated initial codes, and searched for themes. We then made relationships between codes, themes, and sub-themes. We reviewed and

adjusted the themes to reflect on the data (Braun and Clarke, 2006). The researchers followed a detailed codebook during the analysis. After training, we applied human coding, by two experts in the field who followed percent agreement (Allen, 2017), and Pew Research's Center, 2018 strategies of intercoder tests by randomly choosing at least 6% of articles and rating them independently to obtain an 80% or higher agreement. The researchers randomly chose 10% of articles and conducted the intercoder tests reaching above 95% agreement. The researchers consolidated differences during coding process to ensure validity and reliability of data.

The researchers read each article thoroughly three times to determine certain themes, tones, and objectives. The three times analyses were conducted at a different period of times within six months to ensure accuracy and to reduce any bias or mood influence. The researcher's expertise of the culture and thorough research of the issue under study helped in understanding the overall aims and the tones of articles.

Subsequently, the researchers applied a computer software analysis, sentiment analysis, as a confirmatory tool for each article to confirm data accuracy, specifically articles' tones. After analyzing all articles, both researchers reviewed and reconciled the results of the coding process and sentiment analysis. Both researchers agreed upon the themes and tones that emerged after final examination. Researchers then utilized another computer software, *Write Words*, which generates word frequency for all articles.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

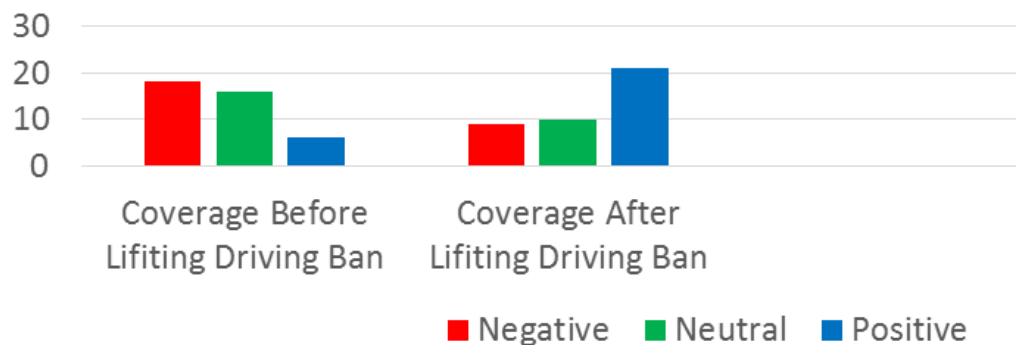
**RQ1: What general themes and tones emerged when analyzing articles of women driving in KSA across US and UK media outlets during the women driving ban and after lifting the driving ban?**

### *General tones and themes of media coverage*

Analysis of all selected articles in this study revealed how US and UK media covered the issue of women driving prior and after lifting the driving ban. Although common themes emerged across both periods, some themes found in articles written before the decision were slightly different from those after lifting the ban.

Only six articles written about Saudi women drivers before the ban were positive, however, 21 articles with positive tones emerged from The Wall Street Journal, The Washington Post, NPR, USA Today, and The Guardian after lifting the driving ban. These articles praised Saudi women, Saudi society, and the government for positive progress and development in the KSA regarding women's rights (Fahim, 2018). For example, one story described how a Saudi woman celebrated the historical moments by saying, "I feel free like a bird" (Chulov and Alfaour, 2018); another story showed how some Saudi women became interested in getting muscle and sporty cars with 400 horsepower (Stancati, 2018); and another described how police officers gave women drivers flowers and parents gave blessings to their daughters (Chulov and Alfaour, 2018). The overall positive coverage was 34%.

Almost 33% of articles written before and after lifting



**Figure 1.** Overall Sentiment of the number of articles before and after lifting driving ban.

the driving ban carried a neutral tone. Reuters, The Wall Street Journal, NPR, CNN, and The Independent were more likely to provide neutral coverage about the issue than other media networks. Nevertheless, 34% of overall articles were negative and severely criticized the KSA for a variety of human and women rights issues during coverage of women driving in the KSA (Figure 1).

Articles with negative tones declined by 20% after the KSA announced lifting the driving ban. Negative narratives that remained after lifting the driving ban included the guardianship system, activists' arrests, the war in Yemen, and other women's rights issues. The most negative media coverages were in The Independent, NYT, The Washington Post, The Guardian, and USA Today with at least three negative articles for each medium. Most negatives stories attacked Saudi culture, Saudi law system, and the KSA. These attacks included negative phrases, descriptions, and quotes, such as "repressive regime," and "allowing women to drive is a public relations move," in The Guardian (Mahdawi, 2018); "KSA is the worst country for women" (Mahdawi, 2018); "It is outrageous that women are still treated as second-class citizens in Saudi Arabia" in CNN (Smith- Spark, 2018); and "It consigns women as a second-class citizen" (Fisher, 2013). In some NYT and Reuters articles, journalists likened Saudi Arabia's policy ban on women driving to what is known as 'the Islamic State (ISIS) and Taliban' (Coker, 2018a; Hubbard, 2017; Kalin and Dadouch, 2018). In a Washington Post article, the KSA was described as "one of the worst countries for women" (Fisher, 2013). Other news networks used different labels such as a "repressive regime" (Mahdawi, 2018) and described the country as an "absolute monarchy ruled according to Sharia law" (Hubbard, 2017) or "Within Saudi Arabia, genders are segregated under the strict interpretation of Islamic Shariah law known as Wahhabism" (Mayhew, 2014), despite that nothing called 'Sharia law' in Islam exists (Landes, 2016). The news media also called the country different names instead of its official name such as "ultraconservative kingdom" in

the NYT (Hubbard, 2017), "the oil-rich kingdom" in The Independent (Mayhew, 2014), "the conservative Muslim Kingdom" in Reuters (Dadouch, 2018), and "the struggle is rooted in the kingdom's hard-line interpretation of Islam, known as Wahabbism" as in The Washington Post (Al-Shihri and Batrawy, 2013).

The word frequency count software indicated certain words or terminologies found across all articles. The study included only significant words and concepts that are important (Table 1).

### ***Themes before lift of driving ban***

Themes in articles written before KSA's decision to lift the driving ban mainly focused on guardianship, religion, women's rights, driving campaigns, and Shoura council and municipal elections (Table 2).

### ***Themes after lift of driving ban***

Five themes emerged after allowing women to drive:

- (1) Economic Benefits and Vision 2030: Economic benefits under vision 2030 was the main theme discussed in the articles written after lifting the ban as in The Independent and NPR (e.g., Al Otaibi, 2018; Hvidt, 2018; Sant, 2018).
- (2) Driving License: Related stories were about governmental offices readying themselves to issue thousands of women driving licenses and women celebrating their first Saudi driver licenses (Sirgany, 2018).
- (3) Driving Schools: Media outlets like BBC, CNN, WSJ, and Reuters (e.g., Al Otaibi, 2018; Jordan, 2018; Sirgany, 2018; Stancati and Abdulaziz, 2018) reported on the thousands of Saudi women signing up for driving lessons and enrolling in private and public schools.
- (4) Workforce: The Independent, WSJ, BBC, and USA

**Table 1.** Words counts across news articles.

<b>Words</b>	<b>Counts</b>
Activists	143
Authorities	45
Campaign, Campaigns, Campaigned, Campaigning, Campaigners	154
Celebration, Celebrating	16
Conservative	60
Council	34
Crown Prince Mohamed Bin Salman, MBS	75
Demonstration	20
Detained, Detain, Detention, Arrested, Arrest	142
Driving School	21
Driving, Drive	948
Economy, Economic	74
Excited, Excitement	14
Freedom, Rights	147
Government	118
Guardianship, Guardian, Male Guardians, Male Guardianship, Male Guardianship Law, Male Guardianship System, And A Male Guardian	78
Happy	18
Harassment	15
Hope	13
Jobs, Workforce, Work	122
King Salman	17
Kingdom	135
Laws, Legally	65
License, Licenses	114
Movement, Protest, Protested,	143
Police	112
Positive	12
Prison, Jail, Jailed	72
Reforms, Reform, Change	170
Repressive, Oppressed, Oppression	112
Riyadh	154
Saudi	917
Shoura	14
Strict, Restrict, Restriction, Restrictive	58
Wahhabi, Wahhabism, Sharia, Sharia Law, Islam, Islamic, Islamists, Sunni, Ultraconservative Muslim, Ultraconservative Kingdom, Islamic Kingdom, Religious, Muslims	148
Women	1,193
Women's Rights	56

Today (e.g. Abdulaziz, 2018; Hutcherson, 2018; Hvidt, 2018; Jordan, 2018; Wirtschafter and Rifai, 2018) all discussed how allowing women to drive would boost the number of women in the workforce.

(5) Auto Industry: Themes emerged in USA Today, CNN,

and BBC (e.g. Alkhalisi, 2017; Jordan, 2018; Sirgany, 2018; Stancati, 2018; Wirtschafter and Rifai, 2018) about the demand for new cars, increase in auto sales, competition among dealers, and car ads that empower women.

**Table 2.** General themes and tones of U.S. and U.K. media coverage of women driving in KSA before lifting the driving ban.

Tones	Themes	Notes
<p>1-At least 3 out of 4 articles of The Washington Post and The Independent were negative in its tones, severely criticizing the KSA when it comes to women issues.</p> <p>2-The Wall Street Journal, Reuters, BBC, NYT, CNN, and NPR were more neutral when covering the issue.</p> <p>3-Most articles were supportive of women driving and citing only women driving supporters. Reuters was the most balanced coverage.</p>	<p>1- Guardianship system: women need male permission in some cases. The concept was largely presented in the majority of news articles covering women driving issue in KSA.</p> <p>2-Women' rights: many articles discussed the status quo of Saudi women, like education, transportation, healthcare, and politics.</p> <p>3-Wahhabism: a negative term used by opponents to describe the type of Islamic schools followed in KSA.</p> <p>3-Driving campaigns: Saudi women and activists launched campaigns in 1990, 2011, 2013, and 2014, including on social media.</p> <p>5-Shoura council: Saudi women represent at least 20% of the Shoura Council, an advisory body, with 150 members.</p> <p>6-Municipal elections: Saudi women can run and vote in municipal elections.</p> <p>7-Women arrests: many articles included news and stories about women who defied the driving ban and got arrested.</p>	<p>There are some false information reported in some of the articles:</p> <p>1-In 2013, The Independent reported that women will be allowed to drive soon after launching a police "female department" under religious agencies. This did not happen and the ban on driving was from the Ministry of Interior not the religious police.</p> <p>2-A NYT article indicated that the ban on women driving was enforced by the religious police. This is not true. The ban on women driving was enforced by the Ministry of Interior. One month after writing the article, the NYT corrected and retracted the information.</p> <p>3-In many articles, like Reuters, The Guardian, CNN, the NYT, and The Washington Post, there was an objection for having a guardian in marriage. In Islam, generally women need a father's, or anyone legally represents a woman, to approve the marriage.</p> <p>4-Some articles, like The Independent and CNN, exaggerated the guardianship issue by saying women cannot even leave the home without a male guardian; women need male permission for almost everything; or women must accompany a male in public. This is not true.</p> <p>5-Few articles defended activists who publicly insulted the religion and the prophet of Islam under the "freedom of speech" umbrella and without mentioning that they insulted religions and prophets which is illegal under Saudi laws. The Saudi laws vividly address that insulting any religions or prophets in any means is illegal.</p>

(6) First Time Driving Experiences: News articles in the WSJ, The Washington Post and BBC covered the historic moments with positive narratives, photos, and interviews with first-time Saudi women drivers (e.g., BBC, 2018b; Murphy, 2018; Stancati, 2018; Stancati and Abdulaziz, 2018).

(7) Entertainment: News articles like The Washington Post, Reuters, and NPR also included KSA progress and expansion in the entertainment industry such as opening new cinemas, F-1 car racing, and other entertainment activities (e.g., Baldwin, 2018; Boren, 2018; Sant, 2018).

(8) Guardianship System: This theme emerged in most articles written after lifting the ban in the KSA as in The Washington Post, BBC, NYT (e.g., BBC, 2018a; Coker, 2018b; Murphy, 2018; Smith- Spark, 2018; Takenaga, 2018).

(9) Religious Themes: Religious themes, like Wahhabism, were included in stories by the New York Times and BBC (e.g., BBC, 2018a; Coker, 2018b; Hutcherson, 2018; Sant, 2018; Takenaga, 2018).

(10) Women's Rights: Status quo of women rights, challenges, and progress discussed in many news articles, like The Independent (e.g., Hvidt, 2018).

(11) Anti-Harassment Law: This new theme emerged in many media outlets, including The Independent and NPR which covered the new law passed by the Saudi government to prevent sexual harassment against women, especially after allowing them to drive (e.g., Al Otaibi, 2018; Sant, 2018).

**RQ2: To what extent, if any, did US and UK news media provide balanced coverage of women driving in the KSA before and after lifting the driving ban?**

To answer RQ2, the researchers analyzed each article to determine if it provided balanced coverage. Did each article include an overview of the issue by providing information and arguments of both supporters and opponents of women driving in the KSA in a balanced

**Table 3.** Tones before driving ban.

Coverage tone before lifting the driving ban	BBC	The Guardian	NPR	The Washington Post	USA Today	The Independent	CNN	The New York Times	The Wall Street Journal	Reuters
	%									
Negative	0	50	0	75	50	100	25	25	25	50
Neutral	50	25	75	25	25	0	75	75	50	50
Positive	50	25	25	0	25	0	0	0	25	0

**Table 4.** Tones after driving ban.

Coverage tone after lifting the driving ban	BBC	The Guardian	NPR	The Washington Post	USA Today	The Independent	CNN	The New York Times	The Wall Street Journal	Reuters
	%									
Negative	25	25	0	0	25	25	25	75	0	25
Neutral	25	0	25	25	0	50	50	0	25	50
Positive	50	75	75	75	75	25	25	25	75	25

and unbiased way? The study found that most articles written about women driving in the KSA (86%) were supportive and encouraged women to defy the driving ban. These articles included many quotes and citations from women activists, human rights activists and organizations, and in some cases journalists who supported women driving who also, in many cases, criticized the Saudi laws. The remaining articles were balanced (14%), mentioning both supporters' and opponents' perspectives and in some cases not citing either side or taking a side on the issue. That was obvious in Reuters, the Wall Street Journal, and BBC stories that provided balanced coverage for both sides before and after the lift of the driving ban. Although the BBC had one negative article written after lifting the driving ban, it generally provided balanced coverage. Like NPR and USA Today, many media were neutral in tones but were supporting women driving in KSA (Tables 3 and 4). Only one article out of the 80 articles in this study vividly opposed women driving, citing opponent voices (Abdel-Raheem, 2013). This article, which appeared in The Guardian in 2013, provided in-depth details about the role of women and how driving a car is something unnecessary for Saudi women at that time.

**DISCUSSION**

While most US and UK media outlets supported Saudi women to defy the KSA's driving ban, many articles did not consider the consequences of encouraging women to break the law in the KSA. This was obvious before the

announcement of the royal decree that lifted the driving ban, in which many articles encouraged women to put more pressure on the Saudi authorities by continuing their driving publicity campaigns, despite authority warnings. This story angle, however, could have created more risk for women.

Allowing women to drive, however, would increase women's mobility and role in Saudi society. Women would have access to work and save more money. A report estimated that families would save around \$1,000 each month if women drove instead of hiring drivers (Alkhalisi, 2017). Allowing women to drive would also help the Saudi economy to generate around 65% of GDP from the private sector (Alkhalisi, 2017). This decision would generate around \$90 billion by 2030 to the Saudi economy (Fattah, 2018). A report estimated that around 15 million women in the KSA could drive (Jordan, 2018). This would give Saudi women more opportunity to participate in joining private and public sectors and reduce the unemployment rate from 11.6 to 7% by 2030 (Jordan, 2018). It would also raise women's participation in the workforce from 22 to 30% (Jordan, 2018; Turak, 2018). For example, Careem Company, similar to Uber, which operates in more than 14 countries, plans to hire more than 20,000 women drivers by 2020 (Turak, 2018).

The Saudi National Committee for Driving made arrangements and preparations to teach women to drive. Universities are offering courses to on road safety, while private driving schools are training women to drive. Despite the fact that many women have complained of the high fees associated with taking driving lessons compared to men, experts believe that the use of extra



and advanced equipment to teach women how to drive was the reason for higher fees (Al Arabiya, 2018; ECA Group, 2018). The ECA Group (2018), for example, has introduced 6 EF-CAR driving simulators to teach women the basics of road safety as a part of a nationwide campaign to increase women drivers.

The study found that most articles (86%) supported women driving and called for women to defy the ban, but did not discuss other related issues such as the safety of driving or how to create a safe road environment for women, especially in articles written before lifting the ban. A few articles that emerged after lifting the ban, however, discussed the issue of driving safety in the KSA, as in *The Guardian* (Harrison, 2018). Interestingly, few articles discussed the significance of a safer driving environment after lifting the driving ban. The argument here is that coverage of women driving needed to address and focus on the driving environment, not just political or religious aspects. Unfortunately, most articles written about women driving in KSA encapsulated the issue on the guardianship system, arrests, and in some cases on Wahhabism.

Media outlets also overlooked other significant issues, such as infrastructure readiness for new drivers, or new technologies or policies that the country can use to help new drivers join the road safely. That is, most articles included a focus on cultural perceptions rather than operational issues such as road conditions and driving safety after the announcement to lift the ban. Analysis of articles that were written in US and UK media about women driving after lifting the ban found that 53% of those articles were positive in its tones compared to only 15% of positive coverage before lifting the ban. This makes sense as the KSA was the last country to lift this ban, feeding into the Western media narrative to preserve human dignity and freedoms. Nonetheless, analysis of some media networks unfolded some odd media coverage patterns. For example, the study found that the NYT coverage of women driving in the KSA became more critical and negative in tone after lifting the driving ban compared to articles written before. On the contrary, both US and UK media outlets, such as *The Washington Post*, *The Wall Street Journal*, *The Independent*, BBC, Reuters, USA Today became more neutral and positive in tone after allowing women to drive.

The study also found that most media coverages positioned banning women from driving as a violation of human rights. Media outlets, as well as the Human Rights Watch (HRW) (2013) organization, have criticized the KSA for not allowing women to drive and asked the authorities to revoke this law. Some articles, however, praised the KSA for making some progress regarding women's rights, including allowing Saudi women to vote and run in municipal elections and joining the Shoura Council, the country's advisory body.

The presence of false information, exaggerations, and

inaccurate descriptions of the country were also seen in some articles that provided negative portrayals of women's conditions or the system in the KSA. Some examples included limited access to education for women (McGveigh, 2013); the driving ban being enforced by the religious police, which the author then retracted after one month of the original article (Chan, 2016); the KSA as the worst country for women (Mahdawi, 2018); and women as second class citizens (Fisher, 2018). Another example of inaccurate information was that a female traffic department would be created under religious agencies (Mayhew, 2014), which never happened. A piece written by *The Washington Post* tried to legitimize what is considered a crime in the Saudi judicial system, such as defending a Saudi activist who publicly insults the religion of Islam and its prophet (*The Washington Post*, 2013). These demands are legally and socially not acceptable in the KSA as the law prohibits insulting religions or religious values, according to Communications and Information Technology Commission (CITC, 2020; *The Anti-Cyber Crime Law*). Thus, journalists would benefit from understanding the legalities in foreign countries as well as their values and principles.

Overall, half of the sample appeared to fully embrace Saudi women's achievement during this historic moment by sharing positive stories and images. On the other hand, many stories on women driving incorporated other political issues, such the war on Yemen, to undermine the government efforts of reforms and developments. This was most apparent in the NYT coverage in which the tones for articles written before lifting the driving ban were neutral and suddenly became severely critical after lifting the ban.

In many instances, journalists imposed Western values when framing their stories. The results of the thematic analysis revealed that most articles covering this issue tried to frame Saudi women's fates and futures as in the hands of men, while the reality is that the relationships between men and women in Saudi society builds on mutual relationships that comprise of rights and duties for both (Human Rights Commission, 2020) This does not mean that there were no shortcomings regarding women rights at the time of the study, but reforms and progress are gradually happening. For instance, women in the KSA receive paid maternity leave ranging from two months and up to three years without losing their jobs. Recently, women are able to have careers such as lawyers and defend cases in courts and hold leadership positions in different ministries in the KSA (Ministry of Justice, 2018). Considerable progress recently has given Saudi women their rights in many areas, including the revocation of what is known as "The Guardianship System" giving women more mobility and freedom. A recent report titled "Women, Business and the Law 2020" by the World Bank (2020), added a new victory for Saudi women ranking the KSA globally first with the largest

improvement regarding women's mobility, workplace, parenthood, economic activity, harassment, and retirement age. Therefore, framing repeated negative images with negative languages about the situation of Saudi women, even during a celebratory moment like lifting the driving ban, may only further enhance a WESTERN stereotype.

## LIMITATIONS

This study has identified three limitations. The first one is the use of thematic analysis. The analysis of articles was subjective to the researchers' understanding of the texts, tones, and themes. Although researchers established specific criteria and a codebook to ensure accurate analysis across all chosen articles, there were possibilities that the researchers' subjectivity had some influence on the results. Second, the complexity and overlapping of other issues with the women driving ban could affect the stories' tones. Finally, having 10 media networks and 80 articles could have resulted in a less in-depth analysis of how one particular media network, like The NYT, for instance, covered the issue of women driving in the KSA.

## Conclusion

The analysis of articles related to women driving revealed similarities and differences on how the US and UK mainstream media covered the issue in the KSA. Most media outlets provided neutral and positive media coverage after the government allowed women to drive, with a few exceptions. Prior to allowing Saudi women to drive, some US and UK media harshly criticized the KSA with unflattering phrases, descriptions, and misinformation. Being better informed about a nation's culture and religions may help journalists write articles with less bias or preconceived notions and greater objectivity. It is not being suggested here that journalists are purposely writing bias articles but simply suggesting that a better understanding of others' cultures can only better inform journalists in their reporting.

## CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

The authors have not declared any conflict of interests.

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*Full Length Research Paper*

# **News worthiness and Public trust in sub-Saharan African: Examining the impact of tabloid journalism in Zambia**

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**This study set out to understand the role of tabloid news content in establishing public news trust in Zambia. The study compared tabloid news stories (usually frowned upon as unprofessional by most African journalists and scholars) to professional news writing styles, which are rooted in Western journalism education. Drawing from studies that critique tabloid journalism as consumed by people lacking critical abilities to analyze professional news content, the study predicted that: (1) the consumption of tabloid news was not positively correlated to the lack of education/ability to critically analyze 'professional' news content; (2) individuals exposed to only professional news content in form of hard news will indicate lower levels of trust for the media if compared to those exposed to tabloid news content; (3) tabloid news will serve as a moderating factor between media trust and mistrust. This theoretical model was tested with quasi-experiments and surveys using data collected from over 319 participants from online media platforms belonging to selected media outlets in Zambia. The results supported the proposed model on the role of tabloid news content and public trust. Additional analyses suggested that there was no positive correlation between the consumption of tabloid news and education; therefore, debunking the idea that critical analysis of news content in Zambia resided among the educated individuals.**

**Key words:** Tabloid, sensational news, professional journalism, newsworthiness, media trust, zambia daily mail, Mwebantu Media, Zambia Watchdog, Zambia Media Landscape.

## **INTRODUCTION**

The quest for a normative definition for news and what should characterize news content, especially in tabloids has been a recurring theme in African scholastic discourse (Kerunga et al., 2020; Chama, 2017; Wasserman, 2010; Mfumbusa, 2010). Most of these debates are situated within the broad paradigm of

professionalism – a largely contested notion in journalism. A number of scholars still grapple with the idea of whether the field of journalism is a craft, profession, or trade (Kasoma, 2010). An elaborate discussion of this debate from a Western perspective, where this kind of scholarship mostly abounds, advocates

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for traditional approaches that have seemingly stood the test of time. As Pompper and Hoffman (2018) indicate in their invitation remarks to the special issue of the *Journalism and Mass Communication Quarterly* (JMCQ), "...we invite scholars to build upon traditional approaches for understanding mass media's role in defining and amplifying news" (p. 663). The traditional approaches referred to here are especially rooted in the western conceptualization of journalistic values.

This kind of emphasis on traditional approaches is iterated not only in western scholarship, but even among African scholars, who for the most part owe their journalism education system to the West. As Mfumbusa (2010) had observed, most African media scholars tend to privilege formal journalism training and traditional values (Mfumbusa, 2010) in opposition to journalistic practices that emanate from grassroots/community-oriented training. The inverted pyramid method emphasized in journalism education in Africa, continues to infiltrate and dictate the styles of news reporting and writing. In other words, most journalists are bound by the 'textbook' journalistic rules to an extent that their styles of writing and reporting only resonate with handful of the members of the audience. This has led journalism to be considered a field of haste (Nyamnjoh, 2005), privileging hard news stories and treating them as proxy for news reporting and writing. While hard news stories have become the major characterizing feature of professional journalism, soft news mostly residing in sensational/tabloid<sup>1</sup> journalism. As a result, values such as proximity, impact, oddity, and relevance, tend to be given less importance (Muchangwe and Gondwe, 2020; Bunce et al., 2016).

Despite the fact that tabloids have become the major custodians of soft news, and a platform where the majority find their voices, most media scholars in Africa take a moralistic approach to studying tabloid/sensational journalism and dismissing it as an inferior form of journalism. Others go beyond to suggest that the style of reporting is inappropriate for sub-Saharan democracy and its people. Against the backdrop of these strident debates is the question of what should constitute professional news reporting in African journalism and whether that resonates with what the audience believes as important. The idea not to assess the ethicality of tabloid journalism, but to understand what constitutes professional journalism in Zambia, and how the audience perceives tabloid versus professional journalism, which in this case is equated to mainstream media journalism driven by journalistic principles of ethics and styles of writing.

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<sup>1</sup> In this study, 'Tabloid' and 'sensational' journalism are interchangeably used to denote a "type of popular, largely sensational journalism that takes its name from the format of a small newspaper, roughly half the size of an ordinary broadsheet". In most sub-Saharan Africa, sensational media is mostly associated with tabloids

This study contributes to the growing area of value in the literature of professional journalism in Africa and what many journalists consider as tabloid journalism (which most scholars associate with sensationalism) produced by non-professional journalists and/or media outlets. It attempts to answer the questions of authenticity of tabloid news content by questions examining how people in Zambia respond to tabloid news as it relates to media trust and credibility. Furthermore, the study examines whether a certain type of people, particularly those with low academic qualifications, are more prone to consuming tabloid news content than those who are considered educated. The idea draws from most media studies that treat tabloid journalism as inferior to 'professional' journalism (Zelizer et al., 2000; Nerone, 2013; Örnebring and Jönsson, 2004; Campbell, 2001). The study sought to determine whether there is a relationship between the consumption of tabloid journalism in Zambia and the ability to critically analyze the news, and whether what is considered as tabloid and unprofessional news items are mostly consumed by a certain kind of audience – in this view, an audience that has little or no education, and, therefore, regarded as having less critical abilities to analyze what is deemed as "professional news writing" styles. Overall, the study was able to demonstrate that true professionalism now resides in "Tabloid/sensational journalism", not because they follow the structures from textbooks enforced by Journalism curricular in Africa that mostly "Western-oriented", but that they have understood the context of the people, and have devised a strategy that is key to the roles of journalism.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### The structure of 'News' in African Journalism

By and large, African communication scholarship imitates western directions and writing styles for research (Wasserman, 2019; Traber, 1989). Little effort is dedicated to identifying what affects the media in Africa. What constitutes a true African media is actually determined by the number of western traits it exhibits – the more western a media appears, the more professional its journalists are considered (Mutsvairo, 2018). As Nyarko and Teer-Tomaselli (2018) asserts in the chapter of Mutsvairo's edited book, "the idea of Africa is itself a Western construct", therefore, "Africanizing" the discourse is just another irony for Westernization (Gondwe, 2018). Such a tendency has led to a huge schism between the modernized elites and the vast majority that experience poverty (Gondwe, 2018; White, 2008). The media in this case is equally entangled in a web that constantly seeks to identify itself as elite (run by educated journalists); sustained by politicians that seek to advance an agenda; and supported by advertising companies that aim to maximize profits – pushing the



media to align more towards the market model.

When issues, such as *fake news*, #MeToo movement, and even issues with no proximal impact hit the headlines in western scholarship, African researchers equally embrace them as theirs; for they represent currency and importance. In the same way, when catastrophes occur in Africa, and western media defines them as newsworthy, the African media and scholarship equally takes the same strategy of making those events seem more important above anything else. If Western scholarship perceives an event in Africa as negative, the African scholars will embrace the same perspective. This relationship works in reverse too; if the western output is positive, the African perspective usually follows suit. For example, consider the number of studies and the approaches that came from events such as the Tahrir square protests or even the Zimbabwe and the President Robert Mugabe Saga. The truth is that there is a scarcity of research that reflects independent African scholarly thought. Such approaches among African scholars renders useless all the real issues that affect the local people and with potential to accurately define 'real' news. The result is "ferment in the field" of Journalism and Mass Communication (White, 1983).

Mfumbusa (2008) and Djokotoe (2004) do not only see this problem as rooted in market models, but in the education system that seeks to privilege 'haste' over other news values. In a study conducted among journalists in Zambia, Djokotoe observed that many journalists were driven by 'getting the scoop' of the story and learning to implement the idea of accuracy in this process. Unfortunately, this particular emphasis on 'getting the scoop' tends to ignore the promotion of skills and genres such as feature writing, editorials, and column writing in which most issue-based journalism and true news values that impart the greatest impact on society are found. In other words, while most journalists are skilled in 'professional' news reporting, the work produced is neither profound nor different from what most citizen journalists offer. This results in most news stories lacking incorporative creativity, engagement, and relevance (Kovach and Rosentiel, 2014) in the sense that their focus is only on issues that satisfy the elite minority, while ignoring the larger population.

Chama (2017) would assert that we can only revert to the understanding of 'real news' in Africa if we make in-depth reporting a priority. This statement is in opposition to the common 'professional' journalistic approaches that tend to privilege hard news stories that for the most part focus on reporting 'big names' and in haste, with less in-depth content. According to Chama (2017), a 'true journalistic story' begins after the events have been reported in form of hard news. This implies that when a story is "reported," the work is done in haste, therefore, leaving behind core issues that might require a deeper dive. For example, a story about water sanitation can be reported yet without a follow-up, the story cannot be

developed into a full-fledged account of impactful events and subsequent reparations. Djokotoe (2004) ideas that journalism should be rooted in genres that encourage editorials and feature reporting highlight the same ideas. For Djokotoe, news ideas go beyond fact-checking and 'witch-hunting' (as most mainstream media journalists in Zambia have resorted to) to emphasize the truthfulness of the context of the story and not the actual facts. In other words, facts become less important if they are not serving the contextual purpose of the general community.

Asimeng-Boahene, (2010) observes that such kind of reporting that privileges context is what most African journalists are comfortable with – by nature, Africans are storytellers and use different genres to drive a point. It is through these writings that Africans come to understand the values of news and subsequently define it to meet the "watchdog" standards elaborated by Sturmer and Rioba (2000). According to Sturmer and Rioba (2000), most journalists are now 'Watchdogs in Chains' in the sense that they can only 'bark' with no effect because they have ignored the values that inform news in African societies.

### **Tabloid Journalism verses 'professional journalism'**

In a perfect world, professional journalism places a lot of emphasis on contextual and in-depth reporting, while Tabloids are perceived as reporting in a scanty, sensational and exaggerated manner that has nothing to do with development issues. However, a critical analysis suggests that the opposite is true for both media types if ethics was considered a secondary variable. A number of studies have shown that African media systems that consider themselves professional tend to look down upon those that practice sensational journalism (Wasserman, 2010). As an offset, proponents of sensational/tabloid journalism consider 'professional' media systems as lacking the true basis for what constitutes 'real news' for the African people (Okumbe et al., 2017). Accordingly, they accuse their competitors of mimicking Western styles of reporting believed to be rooted in character assassination, 'vendetta journalism,' and the understanding that only political issues and 'big names' make 'news' (Gondwe, 2014; Mabweazara, 2018; Windrich, 2006). Kasoma (1995) castigates such kind of reporting as lacking the qualities of real African styles of news, and only playing to the galleries of Western dictations. For example, when the West declares an era of 'fake news' (as it was of the 2016 US elections) then the whole of scholarship in Africa turns to 'fake news'. The same was seen with the Arab uprising, the #Metoo movement, and many other events.

For Kasoma (1996), such reporting gravitates towards 'vendetta' reporting while ignoring what Djokotoe (2004) referred to as, 'issue-based journalism' – a form of grassroots reporting that seeks to highlight the main issues affecting society and not just chasing big names

for 'click-worthy' news. Issue-based journalism, according to Djokotoe (2004), sometimes defies the traditional 'professional' text-book journalism to accommodate styles that best deliver a message to its audience. As Traber (1989) had earlier observed, while 'text-book' journalism is ideal for instituting professional journalism in Western countries, African journalism should refrain from amalgamating western models in African fabrics. There is need for African journalists to find a model and style that speaks and serves their communities.

The above statement echoes the style and structure of news reporting that has been overlooked and accused as soft and unprofessional yet posing as a hallmark for what most people in Zambia would consider as newsworthy. This type of news reflects Gans (1979; cited in Usher, 2011) "*Multiperspectival News*", as a form of reporting that "seeks news about other subjects which are newsworthy for the variety of audiences in the total news audiences... It is a kind that also obtains news from many other sources, including ordinary citizens, and reports a variety of political, ideological, and social viewpoints/perspectives" (Usher, 2011). Chama (2017) and Wasserman (2010) would equate these ideas in Africa to the performance of sensational or yellow journalism, which for a long time has been exclusively defined in tandem with tabloids. For Wasserman (2010) tabloid journalism and its journalists "should be given credit for coding, reading between the lines, and appropriating media content in a way that is sometimes more of a ritual than a deliberation" (p. xi).

As Chama (2017) and Wasserman (2010) had earlier asserted, telling a 'true journalistic story' in Africa goes beyond fact-checking to include narratives of people's daily lives, which for many, are still precarious, dangerous, difficult, and uncertain. This argument also gives credence to Benson (2009) who saw '*multiperspectival news*' as existing in both 'professional' and 'tabloids. According to Wasserman (2010), critics of sensational or tabloid journalism "have not bothered to find out why such media outlets are popular, what they mean to their audiences, or how they articulate their daily lives...often the criticism directed at the tabloids centers around incredulity or ridicule at stories that defy belief" (p. xi), even when they are the ones that affect the majority of the people. For this reason, to tell an African story, as Zelizer (2004) had argued in her book, would also entail revisiting some of the dominant assumptions that pose as a whole hallmark for scholarly debates in the field of journalism.

### **Tabloid Journalism and public trust in sub-Saharan Africa**

When it comes to what people need versus what people want, journalistic practices in Africa are still at crossroads. How much engagement and creativity a journalist should

apply to a story is still a difficult question to answer. For many, the conventional way of presenting a story is the most ideal. However, Kovach and Rosenstiel (2014) assert that most people want both hard news and soft stories (p. 148) This suggests the idea of sensational journalism that many scholars refer to as 'unprofessional' and/or fake (Nerone, 2013; Örnebring and Jönsson, 2004; Campbell, 2001) is still relevant in the formation and understanding of newsworthiness. In its conventional sense 'sensational reporting' denotes unacceptable standards of reporting in the field of journalism. This kind of reporting is perceived as 'rumor mongering,' producing unfounded information that is not based on facts (Scott, 2017; Mfumbusa, 2010). Chama (2017) and Wasserman (2010) have called this 'tabloid' journalism to refer to a kind of reporting under scrutiny for its lack of respect to the defined standards of journalism. Most 'professional' journalists are hesitant to acknowledge it as a form of journalism. Instead, professional journalists perceive it as simply a form of "yellow journalism," which is agitational, adversarial, muckraking, and lacking the substance of real journalism (Mfumbusa, 2010; Musa and Domatob, 2007). Kasoma (1996) challenged the nature of its operation, arguing that tabloid journalism, which is usually sensational, is especially advanced by tendencies of naming and shaming through local jargons loaded with sexual innuendos and exaggerated headlines (Chama, 2017: 2). Politicians, such as the former Tanzanian President, Julius Nyerere, were explicit to assert that African countries were not ready to afford the luxury of an adversarial and muckraking media.

Scholars that argue in favor of sensational/tabloid reporting assert that, while it is characterized by 'rumors' that have less or no scientific basis, the proximity and impact they cover within their society is well-founded (Wasserman, 2010). The styles of reporting and the coverage of stories they have come to embrace, reflect the true impact of journalism in Africa. According to Wasserman, such stories take an in-depth approach to identify the real issues that affect society and present them in a more creative way (p. xii). This implies that media outlets that employ sensational reporting take an extra interest in their society to identify issues that are relevant, engaging, and interesting to their audience. "Despite the pejorative approaches through which the elite discuss sensational journalism, its value is beyond its perception" (Wasserman, 2010: xii). The implication is that tabloid journalism in Zambia, captures the real essence of 'true story-telling' in the sense that it articulates the narratives and lived experiences of the people's daily lives. For example, the author questions what a 'true story' of the millions of people undergoing hardships would look like - it is that which tells a story resonating with people's lifestyle, culture, and other everyday events, as expressed in sensational media and events. This is a skill that most journalists lack. It operates on the basis of what it assumes is interesting



and “newsworthy” to people on grassroots.

Recent studies from the West are also emerging to support “sensational reporting” after the backlash that occurred during the era of “Yellow Journalism” in the United States. A study conducted by Kalika and Ferrucci (2019) discusses how mainstream media reporters are implementing *TMZ* (an entertainment media outlet) strategies to draw the attention of the audience and remedy the “dying” journalism. In their content analysis findings, the authors indicate that *TMZ*’s success was based on four main strategies namely: paparazzi-based content, document-based reporting, sports-themed material, and reader polls. In short, Kalika and Ferrucci are suggesting the idea that “making readers part of the news was a new opportunity for many media outlets” (p.13) not only to increase consumption but also to be able to meddle ‘*what the audience think about*’. Grant (2019) also found that sensational news platforms online were recording successful results because of their ability to provide important spaces of aspiration, self-making, and debates among the people in Rwanda.

According to Grant (2019), these platforms had the capability to “document and give value to the everyday experiences of the local people and create an alternative perspective of Kigali different from that presented by the government-controlled press” (p.119). By such virtues, the people, at all levels consider themselves as participating in news formations with a higher probability of consuming and trusting what is more directly proximal and impactful to their lives. In sum, studies the consumption of tabloid/sensational has been burgeoning in huge numbers in most sub-Saharan countries (Chama, 2017; Wasserman, 2010; Mfumbusa, 2010). What is not substantiated is the type of people that consume such kind of media. Many assume that because of their stereotypes, tabloid/sensational media are especially consumed by the uneducated individuals with less critical abilities of critiquing ‘professional’ news content. This and many assumptions made us ask the following question:

**RQ1:** *Is there relationship between consuming Tabloid/sensational news and the lack of education/ lack of the capacity to critically analyze news content in the Zambian media.*

**Rationale:** A myriad of research have been done to suggest that education, measured through formal levels of education, predicts the degree to which one can critique and event or analyze an article. Most studies about sensational reporting in Africa suggest that the majority of people that consume sensational news are uneducated, and therefore, less critical (Asamoah-Gyadu, 2016; Hackett, 2016; Chibuwe and Ureke, 2016). The study argues under this hypothesis that the consumption of sensational news is not determined by the level of education, but by the trust and attachment one has to the story. This statement leads to the

assertions and research questions provided below in the following manner:

**RQ2a:** *Will individuals exposed to only professional journalism indicate lower levels of trust in the media than those exposed to both traditional and non-traditional news content?*

**RQ2b:** *Will individuals exposed to only Tabloid/sensational news media exhibit high levels of trust in the media than those exposed to both traditional and non-traditional news content?*

**RQ3:** *Will Tabloid/sensational news moderate the relationship between media trust and mistrust*

Research question three (**RQ3**) seeks to determine whether people that consume both hard news and sensational news exhibit higher levels of media trust than those that only consume hard news stories. In this way it can be measured whether sensational news acts as a moderating factor between media trust and mistrust in Zambian systems.

## METHODOLOGY

The study employed survey method and a quasi-experiment conducted between February 1st, 2019 and March 30th, 2019, after receiving the Institutional Review Board Approval on January 22, 2019. Government media and other highly ranked private media outlets, such as the *Zambian Daily Mail*, were considered for professional hard news stories because of their circulation and credibility. Other media such as *Mwebantu Media*, *The Zambian Watchdog*, and *Zambian Media landscape* represented what many consider “rumor mongering” news outlets and, therefore, sensational. Media type to represent Tabloid/sensational were categorized with the help of two trained coders yielding reliability results ranging between 0.88 and 0.94. The media outlets were selected based on their type of stories, and their disregard for normative journalism rules. The media in question were selected because of the readership, as well as the impact and credibility factors as indicated by Amazon’s “Alexa” – an online tool that categorizes a list of credible media sources in a country by measuring the percentage of daily time on site, the percentage of daily page views per visitor, the percentage of traffic from search, and the number of total sites linking to that source. Therefore, the criteria for selecting these media were based on Alexa, and a manual inspection of which medium had the most engaged followers.

### Survey sample selection

A total of 500 participants from a population of more than 10,000 were selected based on their active participation in the online platforms hosted by the aforementioned media outlets. The names were selected based on how often they posted or commented on the topic. Each selected member should have either posted or commented on at least three topics on social media platforms of the aforementioned media outlets. These media outlets, mostly nested on Facebook, host more than 3 million participants in total who were potential participants. The participants were limited to 500

individuals because of time constraints and for manageability purposes. The 500 participants were arrived at after calculating the confidence interval that provided us with CI 4.02 calculated at 70 percent. The whole process involved a manual and painstaking skimming of various posts to identify the main participants in the group that is, posting or commenting to the discussions online. The 500 were individually contacted by the researcher and the trained coders and invited to participate in the study. The invitation process simply involved sending an individual Facebook message. The selected sample size stood to represent the population of the Zambian media consumers because of its diversity. Generally, by leveraging online participation, the study was able to draw participants from across the country. Of the 500 respondents contacted, 319 participants responded to our requests. The 319 comprised of 267 participants recruited from various social media networks around the country and 52 other respondents who were physically recruited by the second researcher who administered the questionnaires. The same survey was physically administered to people with less access to the internet, thus less participation online from rural communities without access to the internet. The two samples included different age groups, ethnic tribes, political, and religious affiliations.

### Design and procedure

The designed and pretested questionnaire comprised of 43 items with six major sections that sought to examine: (1). Demographic characteristics, (2) level and kind of media genre consumed by respondents, (3) levels of media trust, (4) perception of news media as a whole, (5) attitude towards sensational news, and (6) attitude towards mainstream news. Besides demographic characteristics, all measures used established seven-point semantics on a Likert scale. Statements such as “I get my main news from (named sensational media outlets such as *Mwebantu* Media, Zambia watchdog, Zambia landscape, etc.)”; “I trust news from mainstream media”; “I identify myself more with issues from sensational media”; “I identify myself more with issues from mainstream media”, etc. characterized the survey questions. In order to get the respondent's views on the kind of media they consume as well as the levels of trust they have for their choices, Open-ended questions that asked them to list and rank the media they consume hierarchically based on the trust levels were also featured.

### Experimental design

Participants for the experiments were recruited from members of the surrounding communities whose media consumption was noticeable. Although they were not a representative of the entire country, their responses were considered necessary. As an addition to the survey. The experiment was designed for a 2 x 2 between-subject, which allowed us to manipulate our study group organized by Radio Kabangabanga, located in the rural township of Solwezi, Zambia. (There is nothing particularly special about using Radio Kabangabanga as the center point. The study leveraged its ability to bring together people of different beliefs and characteristics in their programming (Believing that it was the best possible place to recruit the participants given the cordial relationship shared with the radio director). Only members older than 18 were recruited, therefore, allowing us to host a total of 40 respondents. The 40 participants were randomly picked from the 52 participants that were physically contacted. Participants were required to provide informed consent and compensated with approximately \$3.00. The demographic characteristics included an equal split of both genders (20 males, 20 females) from different households with ages ranging from 23 to 81 years, with the average age being 33 ( $SD = 22.46$ ).

Furthermore, 57% of the respondents indicated that they were college graduates and middle class (considered elite in this case), while the remaining 43% comprised of high school graduates and dropouts (considered the uneducated and less critical).

### Study design

Four conditions were created to which all the participants were assigned. Ten participants were exposed to hard news political and professionally designed journalistic news stories generated by professional volunteering journalists; exposing the other 10 to sensational news stories that were also generated by the same volunteering professional journalists; third, the next 10 were exposed to both sensational and hard news stories, and the other 10 were treated as a control group and exposed to none. All articles were written in a way that they discussed issues pertaining to their communities: Issues of water sanitation, witchcraft, poverty, health, and country politics – for example, one story was about a “witch family” crash-landing in their community; an incidence involving an unknown family that was found naked in a particular neighborhood. The act automatically suggests the practice of witchcraft. Other stories involved the spilling of chemical wastes in a local river, an incidence that was only reported by ‘sensational media’.

Furthermore, stories on politics and economics such as highlighting the economic trajectory of the mines within the same area were included. Figure 1 has a story run by both the mainstream and sensational media outlet. Furthermore, participants were placed in either one of the two conditions through which they were asked to assess the kind of news stories they consume and trusted most, and also report on the strength of their responses same stories. Also, 93% of the respondents rated the chosen articles as real. The reality of these articles was based on the real issues happening in their society except that the reported statistics were not scientifically grounded.

### Measures

The procedure involved asking participants to go through the assigned articles and reporting their levels of believability and trust of the news story. Participants were also asked to determine which story/stories they felt spoke to their needs. The controlled group was given similar questions that sought to determine the kind of media and news stories they felt addressed their needs – particularly, those with proximal impact. The same aforementioned issues were addressed in the questions. RQ1 was measured through surveys by simply asking the respondents to indicate their levels of education and their understanding of the story in question. Education was measured by asking the respondents to indicate their levels of education (primary, high-school, and college/university level). On the other hand, the ability to critique the news content was measured based on the “known in the news” vs the “unknowns in the news. The three variables were measured on a self-devised 1 – 7 Likert scale through which the respondents were asked to indicate their level of knowledge of the topic in the news, whether they have the integrity to honestly spot the biases in the news, whether they spend time in taking an organized approach to seeking out the best possible truth to the story, their tolerance to listening to views that oppose their beliefs, and the openness to reconsider a new appraisal when the evidence points to the opposing view.

The second and third research questions (RQ2a, RQ2b, and RQ3) were measured using the global measure of trust drawn from the Van Duyn and Collier (2019) study, and as earlier proposed by Tsfti and Capella (2003). Therefore, a similar question was asked, “How much time do you think you can trust (a named media organization –mainstream and sensational) to report the news that



**Figure 1.** Variations in consumption between sensational and mainstream media in Zambia.  
 Note: images screen-captured from outlet homepages.

**Table 1.** Average scores, variance, and coefficient.

Scale	Mean	Variance	Alpha
Attitudes towards news reporting in Zambian media (8)	5.36	0.21	0.85
Level of trust for media as a whole in Zambia (5)	4.86	0.26	0.88
Perceptions of tabloid/sensational media in Zambia (7)	5.93	0.04	0.93
Perception of political news in Zambia (6)	6.20	0.68	0.78
Kind of genre frequently consumed (6)	4.02	0.73	0.84
Group influence of media consumption (8)	5.13	0.46	0.89

addresses your needs in a fair way?" A Likert scale addressing the responses from 1 – 7 (1 as in never and 7 as in all of the time) was equally employed. On average, participants trusted sensational media, *most of the time* (M= 27.22, SD= 2.40) and hard news stories, *some of the time* (M=19.37, SD = 4.20).

**RESULTS**

**Data analysis**

The overall sample consisted of 41.7% men and 58.3% women for both surveys and experiments. The total average age for the two methods yielded a mean of (M = 20.82) with the majority (77%) of the respondents classifying themselves as educated and in the working-class. The study further used Cronbach’s alpha to test the reliability of our scales that yielded the generally accepted guidelines of 0.70 (Hair, 1989). The findings are presented in Table 1.

**Survey**

A series of multiple regression analyses were performed

to respond to the hypothesis that sought to assess whether individual choices for a particular media source are determined by their levels of education. Attitude towards the two aforementioned news media served as dependent variables, while education levels and the ability to critique news content where the independent or predictor variables. Gans (1979) conceptualization of ‘actors and activities’ in the news were borrowed as our criteria for determining the predictor variables for the ability to critique the news (pp. 8-19). Therefore, the predictor variables included levels of education, which was dummy coded by indicating the “knowns in the news,” “unknowns in the news,” and “activities in the news.” The R-square, collinearity statistics, and coefficient estimates indicate that there is no positive correlation between the kind of media one consumes and their education level (-.078). Particularly, an average of 88.7% of the respondents indicated that they consumed a news story based on its political values, if the story addressed issues that were happening in their proximal communities, and/or if at least they knew someone in the community in which a story was happening. This average number included individuals that considered themselves as educated. However, the difference between the

**Table 2.** Individual attitude towards news media in Zambia.

	Unstandardized estimates	Standard error	Standardized estimates	t	p-level	Collinearity statistics
	B	SE	$\beta$			VIF
Intercept	3.946	0.845		4.174	0.05	
Edu-level	-0.078	0.056	-0.72	-.521	0.612	2.015
Unknowns	0.22*	0.077	0.284	4.434	0.013	2.113
Knowns	0.39*	0.061	0.173	3.341	0.011	2.411
Activities	0.44*	0.089	0.291	5.163	0.001	2.624
R <sup>2</sup>	0.16					
Adjusted R <sup>2</sup>	0.13					

Not: \* = p<0.05.

educated and the less educated was that one group mostly consumed sensational/tabloid news for entertainment while the later thought of it as addressing pertinent issues in their communities. This supports **RQ1** to indicate that education levels in Zambia had less influence on the selection of what kind of information/media genre one chooses to consume.

As Table 2 indicates, the criteria for deciding what kind of news media to consume<sup>2</sup> was determined by the ability to critique the content, which showed little or no correlation with the levels of education in our case. In both cases, the findings indicate that the elites and the non-elite suggest a strong ability of critiquing news content for trustworthiness. In other words, this implies that the ability to consume news media is contingent on the ability of being able to critique that media regardless of the level of education. Although education imparts someone with the skills to critique a news media, our findings suggest that even the “uneducated” did poses that ability except that it was limited by what they only knew. Generally, depending on the topic, the educated individuals exhibited similar limitations. In particular, it was observed that on a scale of 1-7, attitude towards news reporting increase by 0.22, 0.39, and 0.44 for a unit increase in the values of individuals’ perceptions of the “known in the news,” the “unknown in the news,” and the “activities characterizing the news,” respectively.

## Experiment findings

The experiments examined **RQ2a** and **RQ2b** that sought to measure whether individuals exposed to either “Professional” or sensational/tabloid news will exhibit variations in the levels of trust for the Zambian news media. An OLS regression was performed across all conditions with the treatment variables and exposure

to different media genres as the independent variables and media trust as our outcome. As per rule, the variables were first dummy coded, assigning a 1 to those exposed to hard news stories and a 2 to those exposed to sensational media. An overall model indicate that the exposure had statistical significance ( $\beta = -0.54$ ),  $t(447) = 4.23$ ,  $p < 0.05$ . However, individuals exposed to hard news from mainstream media indicated lower trust for general news reported in the Zambian media ( $M = 2.78$ ,  $SD = 0.83$ ) in comparison to those that were exposed to sensational/tabloid news media ( $M = 4.17$ ,  $SD = 0.21$ ). The same applied to the kind of media the respondents believed addressed their need. To be specific, the overall results indicate that all respondents exposed to both media believe that sensational/tabloid media addresses issues that pertain to society ( $M = 4.33$ ,  $SD = 0.37$ ). The correlation coefficient of .086 suggest that the motivation for a news story consumption was strongly associated with the extent to which the respondents felt the story addressed issues that had proximal impact to them than mere political story with great impact yet only at an aggregate level.

Furthermore, the study examined research question three (**RQ3**), to determine whether the consumption of sensational news media could remedy the problem of news mistrust in the Zambian media. First, the levels of consumption were measured in the two types of media outlets. A seemingly sensational story published by the mainstream and professional media outlet was selected, The Zambian Daily Mail. This story was selected because a sensational media outlet reran it while accrediting the main source. The images below present the variations in consumption of story based on type.

The Zambia Daily Mail was the main host for the story, yet it only recorded 197 likes, 141 comments and 17 shares in a period of eight (8 h). *Mwebantu*, on the other hand, recorded more than 1.3K likes, 711 comments, and 43 shares within seven hours of re-running the story. These figures seem to suggest sensational media attracts more consumers than mainstream professional media in the sense that most people would prefer reading the same story from a sensational media platform.

<sup>2</sup> Note: the criteria for deciding what kind of news media one consumes was measured by running two separate regressions: one for the time spent with (or positive attitudes towards) mainstream media, and the other for the time spent with (or positive attitudes towards) tabloid media

However, this does not report whether the higher consumption of sensational news could remedy the problem of trust. As such, the controlled group (the group that indicated that they consumed both sensational and professional news) was used to measure the levels of trust. Findings suggest that individuals who recorded higher consumption of sensational news within the controlled group, reported higher levels of media trust ( $M = 4.73$ ,  $SD = 1.28$ ) than those that recorded lower consumption ( $M = 2.31$ ,  $SD = 0.85$ ). In addition, there was a marginally significant main effect ( $p < 0.072$ ) of consuming sensational news overall media trust ( $B = -0.07$ ),  $t(429) = -2.31$ ,  $p = 0.031$ ). These findings support in the rationale underlying RQ3 to assert that sensational media in Zambia has the capability of defining news if compared to hard news stories that mimic western approaches.

## DISCUSSION

This study set out to understand the relationship between the consumption of tabloid news content, media trust, and whether there was a connection between the type of news consumption and education. Particularly, the study asked whether individuals exposed to only professional journalism as defined by western scholarship indicated lower levels of trust as opposed to those exposed to 'tabloid' journalism; and whether tabloid news moderated the relationship between media trust and distrust. By controlling for the ethical implications, evidence shows that Tabloid/sensational media do connect with the people more than what most scholars refer to as "professional journalism". Because of the emphasized schism between Tabloid/sensational and professional mainstream media, most research have ended up linking African journalism and its journalists to lacking professionalism (Mfumbusa, 2010; Nyamnjoh, 2005). Albeit the empirical authenticity that these findings provide, their interpretations are problematic in the sense that they feed in the Western narratives of what and how journalism and professional journalists should look like.

However, journalistic professionalism, and especially in Africa is not an easy concept to understand (Mutsvairo and Bebawi, 2019; Kasoma, 2010; Mutsvairo and Columbus, 2012). Traditionally, it has been understood in textbook accounts, which for the most part fail to align with the status quo. Most media that employ such strategies work in the mainstream media that for the most part only serve a few elite and the government. According to Garman (2005), professionalism in Africa simply refers to the reliance on the "transfer of a certain parcel of knowledge plus a certain set of skills, together with a dose of ethics and accuracy mixed up in the ether of a critical humanities environment" (p. 201). This approach to professionalism ignores the context and needs of the people, therefore creating a gap between journalism and

its audience. For Gans (2011) "the notion of *multiperspectival* news is grounded on the concept of perspectives, which argues that people's positions and roles in society shape how society should be perceived by the media. Gans explained what news should look like saying:

*For example, poor audiences need business news like everyone else, but not about investing in the stock market or the latest newsworthy acts, legal or illegal, by corporate bigwigs. They need to know about the businesses in which they can afford to shop and the ones that will hire them, as well as the charitable and public agencies that can help them when they are jobless and in need (Usher, 2011).*

Gans refer to the notion of reporting issue-based stories that highlight the lifestyles of the local citizens, and not just stories of authoritative sources. The value for news should be defined by the attention it renders to the actions of local citizens, especially in political matters, and what their elected representatives are doing or not doing for them (Usher, 2011). The belief is that the grassroots approach would incorporate the local people more into the political process and would also offer citizens a platform to participate in the process of news making (Semujju, 2018). This is the kind of journalism seen in most sensational/tabloid stories with less regard to their ethical standards. As noted, most of these stories, though addressing what most media scholars would refer to as petty issues, they reflect the true meaning of Semujju (2018) community/alternative media and their possible impact to society.

This study affirms such conclusions by demonstrating that news genres that most professional journalists perceive as sensational/tabloid and unprofessional, have a strong bearing in the minds of most African audiences, and can be used as a criterion for arriving at a normative definition for what constitutes 'real news' in Zambia. The results provided evidence that individuals that consume more sensational news have a strong sense of trust in the media as their source of news. On the other hand, those that indicated higher consumption levels of 'hard news'/professional stories also exhibited high levels of mistrust for the news in Zambia. In general, these findings challenge the conventional understanding that only the 'uneducated' have a high tendency to consume sensational news. Choosing a media genre to consume was not associated with one's education levels or their ability to critique a story. Instead, people chose to consume a certain kind of media based on their affiliation, proximity, and impact. The more they felt the story addressed their issue, the more they were inclined to consume that kind of media. Tomaselli asks, "What exactly does it mean to tell a true story?" For him, telling a true story in Africa, and probably the rest of the world, goes beyond fact-checking, to include stories "that



resonate with the narratives of people's daily lives". Does this mean that we abandon stories about politics and other hard news items? According to Wasserman (2010), while statistics and verifiable sound bites are necessary for reporting 'hard news', a 'true news story' is characterized by the writing styles that accommodates the majority: being able to decode those statistics by reading between the lines and "appropriating media content in a way that is sometimes more of a ritual than a deliberation" (p.xi). Djokotoe (2004) referred to such form of journalism as "issue-based" journalism - a kind of journalism that is not driven just by events that replace each other in a haste way, but that responds to those particular events.

The Zambian situation, as reported in the findings attests to this problem. First, the study demonstrates that the level of education, as opposed to what many studies suggest, is not a criterion for the kind of news one chooses to consume. It is not because someone has less critical tools to assess a story that they choose to consume, but that the kind of stories presented in sensational media responds to the needs of the people. Although considered 'rumor mongering', such stories touch on the basis of the lifestyles of the people. They might not have an authoritative figure to confirm their authenticity, yet they mostly develop from within the communities, therefore, getting authentication from the same communities. They embarrass for the most part, but they also teach, entertain and even shape how society acts and consumes the media. Even among the elite/educated, as observed in our experiments, the levels of trust are not determined by 'elite news' (hard news), but by stories that speak to the hearts of the people. While facts may not be accurate in the news content, the contexts of the stories are perceived as accurate and trustworthy.

For many individuals in Zambia, hard news stories are viewed as simply upholding the status quo, and not designed to serve the people. Individuals buy a renowned newspaper or listen to some news media considered credible just for the sake of status. For example, many people in Zambia, and Africa at large would choose to subscribe to international media outlets such as CNN, BBC, Wallstreet Journal, New York times France 24, etc. not because they are interested in the news it offers, but because it elevates them to the status of an elite person. Many news stories in such media do not have a proximal impact on the consumers even when they choose to affiliate with them. At the end, they turn to the news that matters most to them – sensational. This kind of news is consumed with passion for it directly/indirectly impacts at a proximal level. If this is the case, therefore, what is presented as news in mainstream media lacks the essence and, therefore, does not qualify as news. At most, the definition for news in Zambia has a higher chance of being trusted if it is incorporated with sensational news reporting. This is strongly supported by

various studies that have shown that young people in the United States get their news from sensational/tabloid media outlets such as Late-Night TV shows and Show Biz (Kalika and Ferrucci, 2019).

Thus, the study does not advocate for unethical practices. Neither is the study recommending sensational/tabloid news as a way to address the lack of authenticity in Zambia. Instead, the problem is that most journalists in Zambia have failed to get in tune with their audience by repeatedly writing out of touch stories that are apathetic due to the inability to cause any meaningful change. Those that have attempted are unfortunately put under great oppression by the profession as well as various forms of censorship. Many scholars have called for community impact journalism training and community media training (Gondwe, 2014; Wasserman, 2010; White, 2008) among others as a way of redress, and the push by media pundits to professionalize the media as a whole poses a challenge for the thriving of sensational/tabloid media. The growing social media usage is slowly killing tabloids that were flourishing in the recent past years. However, a push for civility online accompanied with repressive laws and surveillance hinders the creative role of sensational news genres. Most countries in Africa, including Zambia, uphold draconian laws that push certain media into self-censorship and the lack of sensational reporting. On the other hand, the push for professional journalism among scholars is equally a hindrance to the survival of sensational reporting among some media outlets. Such tendencies push professional journalists into reporting strategies that focus on politics, creating a scenario where politics is wrongly portrayed as the only sphere that sells or attracts public interest. Future research should explore the various methods and strategies that journalists in Africa are now using to write a compelling message, especially amidst citizen journalism and bloggers who are becoming more popular than most traditional media. Research on trust should equally be pursued as a research avenue.

## CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

The author has not declared any conflict of interests.

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*Full Length Research Paper*

# **Cultivating Biafran agenda in Nigeria: Evaluation of the influence of radio Biafra's rhetoric of ethnic marginalization on rural dwellers in the South-east**

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The systematic exclusion of the Igbos from key national leadership positions in Nigeria made the rise of secession-seeking groups and demand for self-government inevitable in the region. IPOB is one of these secession seeking groups which uses its radio station to communicate its agenda. Following its stirring rhetoric and extremist views, much has been heard of the place of radio Biafra in the ongoing IPOB agitation in the south east. Owing to radio's ability to cultivate social and political realities in the minds of people, rhetoric of marginalization which forms the basis of radio Biafra's broadcast may not leave people free from thinking of what is being communicated and what could be done to actualize the desired self-freedom which the station cultivates. Against this background, this study examined respondents' level of exposure to radio Biafra's broadcast, their perception of the broadcast messages and whether the messages persuade them into believing the course being preached from the station. The study was anchored on cultivation and social exchange theories with survey and FGD as research methods in studying 400 respondents purposively selected from 1,306,739 which forms the population of the study. Findings revealed that respondents believed in the mission but lacks the will-power to realize the dream. The study, therefore, recommended that radio Biafra content presenters should reconsider the messages they dish out to the people to avoid a repeat of the Rwandan episode in Nigeria. It was also recommended that government should look into these marginalization complaints from South-Eastern states.

**Key words:** IPOB, rhetoric, marginalization, social exchange theory, cultivate.

## **INTRODUCTION**

The Igbo people and the continuous allegations of being marginalized have formed the basis of several crises and loss of lives in Nigeria. Their allegations of marginalization originated from perceived denial of their rights in the

manner at which national leadership positions were distributed in the country for sixty years and counting. Critically, when considered in line with other tribes, there seems to be a systematic denial of sense of belonging

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to the Igbo people especially in development and leadership positions. This can be found in what may be described as strategic exclusion of citizens from the five Igbo states from certain position of authority in Nigeria and location of major national industries and facilities in the area. This perceived denial of supposed national rights over the years has placed the Igbos on the verge of complain of being marginalized. In this regard, some Igbo activists capitalize on this perceived marginalization and subjugation of the Igbos to form different secession groups to press home the Biafran agenda. Their major target is to make the younger generations imagine the pains of the Biafran war that ended in 1970 and see the need to support segregation. In the views of these activists, the Igbos is subjected to different kinds of marginalization as a punishment for the Biafran war (Orji, 2001). Unfortunately, all the complaints from the region usually end in wishful thinking. This is because the government of Nigeria uses force to stop any form of orientation aimed at exposing the younger generations to the pains of the war.

With its commitment on the agitation and persistent demand for self-government, the IPOB resuscitated the radio Biafran station which was heard last during the war. IPOB strengthened the station and hoisted it on air through the internet such that the government of Nigeria cannot interrupt its activities and operations. This led to the current surge in the renewed agitation for Biafra with the radio station as the major source of communication to the people.

Radio is the widest and most popularly used mass medium in Nigeria. Considering the availability of radio sets in Nigeria, Asodike and Udoh (2014) argued that nearly every household in Nigeria has a radio set. This reason accounts for why researchers say that radio has the highest penetrability to the Nigerian audience, talking to them in the farm, in the house, on the road, while traveling or in the evening stroll using the "walkman" in the office while working and while reading. No wonder coup plotters easily battle to capture Federal Radio Corporation of Nigeria (FRCN) to announce their coup (Cappella and Jamieson, 1997) cited in Asodike and Udoh (2014).

From the aforementioned postulations and scholarly views, radio has been adjudged to be one of the best and most effective information dissemination means that reach out to different people using their local dialects. Radio can be used to mobilize the people at the grass root level for community development and national consciousness. This is why no serious mass-oriented development program, especially in rural communities in Africa ever succeeds without the active involvement of the people within the traditional system. Nigeria is among the countries with the best environment for media practices given their vibrant media landscape (Nwabueze, 2014). Since the end of the Nigerian Biafran civil war, the Nigerian media environment was characterized by

self-censored media practitioners who rather than expose the ills in the society choose to praise the machineries of the government (Ekeanyanwu and Ezeigwe, 2012).

Rural programs serve as source of cultural, political, health and other educational and enlightenment programmes for the masses, leading them towards self-actualization and national development. In this regard, Asemah et al. (2013) opined that much of the failure that attends government mass-oriented program are traceable to the fact that policy makers at the national level fail to utilize this powerful and credible medium. The aforementioned postulation demonstrated that radio has enormous power in shaping realities to its listeners through coverage of political and other national issues. Noticeably, the media environment in Nigeria changed in 2013 following the sudden emergence of Radio Biafra which enlightens its audience on the need for self-determination and governance for the South-Eastern population whose complaints of being marginalized in the scheme of things in the country have spread everywhere in the country.

Historically, Radio Biafra was last heard during the Nigeria-Biafra war of 1967-1970 when it was used as the Biafran war propaganda medium to champion the Biafran course. The new Radio Biafra, according to its director, Mazi Nnamdi Kanu, in an interview with the Sun, Newspaper (April 24, 2013) had been broadcasting from London on Short Wave frequency since 2009. The station was later extended to the shores of Africa with particular target audience in Nigeria. The aim of the station is to cultivate the Igbo agenda and inculcate the need and desire for self-government among the Igbos in the South-East.

Because of its inflammatory rhetoric and extremist views on the present government under Presidents Buhari, much has been heard of the role of radio Biafra in encouraging the IPOB agitation and activities in the South-Eastern Nigeria. The station had posed a serious threat to the national unity of the country following its determination to secure the long sought self-government through the airwaves. Its ability to by-pass other local stations and broadcast through their frequency makes it impossible for the National Broadcasting Corporation (NBC) to control. The content of the station's broadcast is carefully calculated and disseminated in such a way that it can appeal to both emotions and pity of the listeners. The messages are rhetorically designed to make the indigenes feel that they are unwanted, very highly marginalized and neglected in the developmental projects and distribution of key leadership position in Nigeria. Consequently, the attention of the government of the federation was attracted by the station for their messages which led to the arrest and detention of Namdi Kanu and three others in 2015.

At the event of this arrest, radio Biafra started seeing itself as the 'sole source of news to the Igbo population in Nigeria. The station further began to see itself as the sole

authority and voice for interpreting the reasons behind the arrest of its leader and the need' for the agitation to enable them win souls from among the population in a view to actualize their dream: self-government. However, the desire and serious determination of the station to inculcate in the minds of the people their views and the height of marginalization meted on the Igbos may not be too far from the position held in Mavric (2012) who affirmed that self-determination is something you take, not something a government gives to you. By applying all kinds of rhetoric in communicating the Biafran agenda, Radio Biafra is doing what they believe they can do to get what they seek. Self-determination encompasses both land rights and self-governance, as land is understood to be the economic (and in some cases spiritual) basis for indigenous communities to be self-governing (The Conversation, 2014).

Globally, marginalization of different kinds has caused a lot of issues leading to loss of lives, property and finally secession in different countries of the world. Today, some countries are product of secession- Eritrea seceded from Ethiopia, Bangladesh from Pakistan, East Timor from Indonesia, Algeria from France, The former Soviet republics left from the Russian Federation, Uruguay seceded from Brazil. Greece and Serbia left from the Ottoman Empire and South Sudan seceded from Sudan (Brandon, 2017).

Significantly, secession occurs among countries with multi-ethnic nations of different socio-cultural and ethno-religious diversities. Among the basic cause of secession among such nations is injustice and inequality resulting from power imbalance as can be found in Nigeria (Osaretin, 2019). These groups are united by their desire to uphold their sense of oneness and collective identity. Moreover, indigenous leaders around the world is united by the burning desire for their people to be respected, resourced properly and then left to make their own share of mistakes and their own progress (McMullen, 2010). Anything beyond this very desire brings about fear of domination and demand for self-determination which are best expressed through the media. In this regard, IPOB resuscitated radio Biafra to express their perceived marginalization of the Igbos in Nigeria. Radio in a country should influence social and, especially the political fabric. The social objective of using radio to mobilize people in Nigeria is highly noticeable in the area of education, information and entertainment.

Unfortunately, the current tempo at which Radio Biafra propagates their self-determination ideology is tilting towards violence in the country. It however suggests that the management of the station has lost believe in achieving the desired effect through peace and legal means and is, therefore, set to wage war with Nigeria if that will accomplish the mission (Ugorji, 2015a). To them, "it is impossible to achieve independence without war and violence" (Government of Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB), 2014: 15).

As a force for social transformation and mobilization for group action, the media handlers in radio Biafra station have intensified efforts towards persuading the Igbos and their supporters both from within and outside Nigeria. The possible outcome of these efforts may generate the strong and undiluted feelings of being marginalized among the populace because of the language of the messages dished out concerning the war, non-locations of life aiding infrastructures facilities in the east and power imbalance in the country. These revelations are tailored in a way that can make the Igbos feel more cheated, neglected and forcefully captured in the country. Such media contents when frequently dished out to a people may instigate reaction as a response or feedback to the message. The radio station kept on bombarding communities and individuals constantly with messages that encourage hatred of the leadership of the country and at same time promote the desire among the people to join the ongoing IPOB agitation. These messages promote moods, attitude, and a sense of what is and what is not important. It is worthy to note that the evolution of radio Biafra in Nigeria served as a great boost to the tempo of the Biafran agitation of this recent time, heightening the political, social and ethno-religious issues in Nigeria nation. This view is strongly supported by Onabajo (2000), where he opined that broadcasting has the power to work within a political system or against it, oil or ease the social, ethnic, religious and economic wheels of a country.

The views expressed earlier corroborated that of Berelson (1953) cited in Agbanu (2014: 107) who argues that some kinds of communication on some kinds of issues brought to the attention of some kinds of people under some kinds of condition, have some kinds of effect. This study, therefore, seek to examine the influence of the rhetoric applied by radio Biafra in communicating the Biafran agenda on old and young listeners in remote areas of South-Eastern Nigeria.

### **Statement of problem**

The development of every nation is the peaceful co-existence of its population therefore, peace and social harmony is the desire of any nation state (Owuamalam, 2016). Breeding disharmony among the citizens of a state is what caused Rwanda the landmark genocide record around the world in 1993-94 which was motivated by Radio Rwanda. Actually, Nigeria is going through the rigorous challenges of agitation, hate speech and counter operations in a bid to secure a united Nigeria. The agitators have their reasons for their actions and believe that it is right to share their views through the radio Biafra for others to hear and understand their take. No doubt, agitations of all kinds are likely to introduce conflicts which may disrupt national peace and security. Agitations, especially the IPOB agitation for self-government in

Nigeria had facilitated some bloody clashes most of which culminated in loss to lives and property. Yet, the radio Biafra had not ceased to propagate the ideas that encourage different kinds of agitations to different audience using heart-touching and marginalization inspiring rhetoric. This is a social problem that its influence on the recipients is worthy of investigation. Though studies on the Biafran agitation abound, little attention has been given to the influence of radio Biafra's rhetoric of ethnic marginalization on the Igbo people of Nigeria who forms the target of the message. Understanding the rhetoric of radio Biafra station and its influence on the citizens of the South-Eastern Nigeria is very important given the wave of events resulting from the actions of IPOB and their supporters within and outside Nigeria. Providing the views held among old and young respondents on the ongoing Biafran agitation is the gap that this study is set to fill.

### **Scope of study**

This study covered both youths and elderly persons in South-Eastern Nigeria but specifically only those who listen to radio Biafra. The study cut across remote areas of Imo, Anambra, and Abia states. Areas in the select states that are urban were not selected for this study. The implication of this scope is that the study recommendation should be based on the selected locations under investigation. The choice of the mentioned states was formed by the fact that the activities of IPOB agitation is more pronounced in the states.

### **Justification of the study**

This study aims at revealing the relationship between the rhetoric of radio Biafra and the people's mind in the south east. Given the impact of radio Rwanda in the 1993-1994 world genocide history, this study will draw public attention to the impending danger that radio Biafra use of rhetoric in communicating the Biafran agenda can pose to the unity of the country. While exposing the views of the youths vis-à-vis the elders in the south-eastern part of the state on Biafra, this study will serve as a means of explaining the influence and power of communication on the people. Again, this study will draw attention to the constitution of this country with a view to ascertain the rights of the people to self-determination under its jurisdiction. This will help Nigerians to understand what the law permits and what it do not permit.

Again, the study can serve as a way of exposing the dark history behind the resuscitated IPOB agitation of this recent time. While suing for careful choice of words by radio Biafra broadcasters, this study will open a call for an accountable leadership and provision of security for all Nigerian without discrimination of any kind. This study in

another development will provide a leadership template for the management of the political, religious, ethnic and scarce resources which forms the bases of the radio Biafra choice of words in championing the Biafran agenda. It is the position of this study that unaccountable and unjust management of collective resources is the brain behind different kinds of agitation in Nigeria, IPOB inclusive and therefore should be silenced only if the needed accountable and all inclusive leadership is instituted in the country by those at the control of the steering. Finally, this study will add to retinue of studies on Nigeria and the Biafran agitation by different pro-Biafran groups in the country. Subsequently, the study looked at relevant theories that can provide a bearing for proper understanding of its findings.

### **Theoretical framework**

In keeping with the scholarly importance of theories to social science research, this study was anchored on the cultivation theory of mass communication which explains "how media cultivate attitudes to the people through repeated publication of a given content through rhetoric. The study was also anchored on the social exchange theory which looked at the people's desire to take an action over a communicated message from the perspective of cost/benefit analysis.

#### ***The cultivation theory***

This theory was developed by Gerbner and Gross (1976) in their study on the effects for extensive use of TV programs. The position of this theory according McQuail (2010: 553) is that the more people are exposed to media contents, the more their ideas correspond to the communicated content. This theory becomes apt for this study as it explains how radio Biafra audience's exposure to the rhetoric of the station cultivates the realities of Biafra in their minds. It will be on the regular and seldom exposure to the rhetoric by the consumers and their reaction to the contents they have been exposed to overtime.

The basic assumption underlying the cultivation or enculturation approach is that repeated exposures to consistent radio Biafra portrayals and themes on ethnic marginalization of the Igbos is likely to influence their listeners' perception of Nigeria and encourage their quest for the actualization of the Biafran state in the direction of the radio portrayals. Some research studies indicated that media portrayals of certain topics could have an impact on audience perceptions, particularly if the media were the main information sources to the people on that particular issue (Ezeh, 2009). The monotony of radio Biafra's communication of the Biafran agenda makes it the only source of information on the Biafran state

actualization among the South Easterners. This theory says that media cultivate or constructs a reality of the world that, although possibly inaccurate becomes accepted simply because we as a culture believe it to be true. The researchers base the judgments about the listeners' perception of Biafra on this cultivated reality provided by radio Biafra through its constant dissemination of issue relating to gross marginalization and ethnic hatred of the Igbos in Nigeria. Cultivation theory was adopted in this study as a result of the concern over the effects of radio Biafra contents on the need for the actualization of Biafran state. This theory has been applied to countless other media-cultivated realities such as beauty, sex roles, religion, the judicial process and marriage in television studies. In all cases the assumptions are the same, the radio, like the television cultivates realities among audience.

In line with this, radio Biafra's use of rhetoric in communicating the Biafran agenda may not leave the listeners without any impulse that can trigger reactions either for or against the mission. It may not be out of place that the station is making its audience had a rather distorted view of their social system and the true position of things in the leadership of the country which they maintain is chiefly against the Igbos.

Therefore, cultivation theory is concerned with the total, not individual impacts of communication through the radio where people (including youths) attempt to learn and cultivate their predisposition from experience which they have obtained through radio messages especially on issue of national concern which affect their fortune in the Nigerian state. One negative effect of this is that, radio Biafra's messages may not generally present the realistic view of the Biafran agitation to the people. Cultivation theorists argue that broadcast media have long term influences which are small, gradual, indirect but cumulative and significant (Baran, 2009). This same thing applies to radio, which sometimes uses the people's dialect to present an issue to them in a manner they will always remember it. This theory argues that the mass media cultivate attitudes and values which are already present in a culture: the media maintain and propagate these values amongst members of a culture, thus, binding it together (Baran, 2009).

Cultivation research looks at the mass media as a socializing agent and investigates whether radio listeners come to believe the message version of reality the more they listen to it from the radio (Okeoma, 2012). The research contends that radio messages targeted at some kinds of people under some kinds of condition, have some kinds of effect. In this study, the South Easterner are in some kind of condition which is to support Biafra and face the war imminent or remain marginalized in Nigeria since signs of restructuring the system for the better is never at sight. People who listen frequently to radio Biafra are likely to be more influenced by what they hear from the station which may move them from their love for Nigeria and its leadership to desire to secede.

Based on the nature of this study, the researchers consider this theory relevance following its ability to explain the influence of radio Biafra's rhetoric on the listeners concerning the communicated Biafran state agenda in respect to the alleged gross marginalization of the people in the area under study.

### ***The social exchange theory***

The social exchange theory propounded by Homans (1958) posits that every human being considers the cost and the benefit of any offer by a marketer before deciding to buy and use the product or service offered by the marketer (Njoki, 2013). Further the theory also indicates that to arrive at a decision, a customer weighs the value provided by the product or service and compares this to what other competing firms in the society offer before choosing to buy or not to buy.

Social exchange theory is a social psychological and sociological perspective theory that explains social change and stability as a process of *negotiated* exchanges between parties. Social exchange theory posits that human relationships are formed by the use of a subjective cost benefit analysis and the comparison of alternatives. The theory has roots in economics, psychology and sociology. Social exchange theory features many of the main assumptions found in rational choice theory and structuralism. It is also used quite frequently in the business world to imply a two-sided, mutually contingent and rewarding process involving transactions or simply exchange.

The individuals therefore, are expected to consider the costs of their behaviour-monetary gains and future impacts that can follow up an action taken as a result of media message adoption and acceptance. If actually, they buy this idea to engage in an action to get Biafra, what is the benefits such behavior will provide in both short and long term bases?

Actually, while dishing out the rhetoric of marginalization and hatred by radio Biafra, they have their target audience at heart. The people who they want to sell their ideas to and the people who will serve the secondary audience to influence others into accepting what is communicated. The position of this theory is that people accept to act in a particular manner if they consider the benefits of engaging in the action or the new cultivated behaviour to outweigh the costs of embarking on such behavior.

Moreover, this theory shares the same aspiration with the uses and gratifications theory which presupposes that the world have transcended from what the media contents do to the audience to what the people do with the media contents (Agbanu, 2013: 176; Nwabueze, 2014: 47; Nwodu, 2007: 141). It is pertinent to also state that the theory shares the same view with the theory of reasoned action which according to Glynn cited in Agbanu (2014), opines that the that humans are rational

beings and as a result, calculate the cost and benefits of their actions and inactions before taken decision on media messages.

Relating this theory to this current study, the message of marginalization and hatred meted against the Igbos as portrayed in the rhetoric of radio Biafra have been received by the respondents but whether they buy the idea and as well act in the direction of the message is by this theory seen as a matter of exchange controlled by observed cost/benefit analysis. Given that the study has to do with what language use got to do with the audience of the media, the researchers also looked at the concept of rhetoric.

### **RHETORIC: A BRIEF REVIEW**

Rhetoric is built on persuasion and meanings of the words that are used by a medium in communicating a desired action. The rhetoric used among radio Biafran presenters in seeking their Biafran agenda can change the views of the people about Nigeria if persuasive enough for the idea of marginalization of the Igbos in Nigeria. This is because of their exposing the Igbo population to various activities and actions of the government of the federation suggestive of the fact that the Igbos is second class citizens in the country.

As a powerful means of persuading an audience into acting in an expected communicated manner, Li (2016) argue that rhetoric is a persuasive artistic means of communication capable of shaping society. According to Beqiri (2018) rhetoric motivates specific audiences in specific situations. The Biafran agitation sets the center stage for examination and re-examination of the Nigerian leadership for sixty years and counting. The rate of negligence and lack of federal presence in the South East Nigeria crowned by the appointment of the ongoing administration paved the way for the Biafran radio presenters' rhetoric to penetrate the people. Significantly, radio Biafran presenters adopt deliberative rhetoric in dishing out their messages to their audiences. Deliberative rhetoric is that kind that examines previous happenings and events, presenting them in perspective to the current situation with the aim of getting the listeners to act in a predetermined manner (Beqiri, 2018). Through this kind of rhetoric, radio Biafran presenters or rhetors expose the people to the weakness and the injustice against the Igbos by the Nigeria and its government since 1970.

Drawing from this scholarly position in Li (2016) and Beqiri (2018), the rhetoric of ethnic marginalization as being communicated to the population of Igbos in Nigeria can shape their views and support for the continued agitation for Biafra. The strength of rhetoric in shaping human behaviour was captured in Eyman (2015: 24) where the author supports the views among contemporary rhetoricians that rhetoric can affect people's behaviour. This implies that if the presenters become successful in

convincing the Igbos into buying the Biafran agenda, their behaviour will likely shift from the idea of one Nigeria to the desire for Biafra. Through their use of rhetorical modes, the presenters have had a place in the minds of their listeners, the question that this study is set to answer is whether these audiences of the radio Biafra are ready to act in the direction that they are being informed. At this point, this study looked at the relations between setting and acting the cultivated Biafran agenda by the Igbos in Nigeria.

### **Setting vs. acting the Biafran agenda**

Drawing from the postulations of the two theoretical frameworks reviewed earlier, it is clear that one thing is to cultivate a particular behavior among the people and another thing is for the people to adopt and accept to participate in the change behavior communicated. The position of things as it concerns the Biafran agenda remains that the Igbos are feeling marginalized in the Nigerian state. Given the condition of the people, the only thing that can appeal to them is to seek for self-government from the Nigerian system which they have seen and concluded to be totally against their well being. Having dashed off all sense of futurity in the country, the Igbos were left with no option than to secede from Nigeria.

The rhetoric of marginalization and ethnic sentiments that characterize the radio Biafran station may not be enough to motivate the people into taking the desired decision of turning violence in their resolve to achieve Biafra. It is the views of radio Biafra that the Igbos are deprived of things of high importance or necessity in their society such as status, money, rights and justice among others. The station therefore tends to instigate social movements in order to register their grievances or dissatisfaction for attention to be given to them. It is the belief of Ezemenaka and Prouza (2016) that people who are deprived of things of importance in their society collaborate to join social movements with a view to agitate for a better tomorrow. While citing Singer (1992), Flynn (2009) noted that fraternal deprivation may strengthen a group's collective identity and draw their attention into taking group action. Unfortunately, this becomes possible only if the people have the will power to do so. Drawing from this, it could be possible that the respondents in this study through the rhetoric of radio Biafra have adopted the required change of attitude of supporting Biafra even if its actualization can lead to violence, but after considering what they are likely to put in as a sacrifice, they choose to remain marginalized in the country. The aforementioned view was captured succinctly in Thompson et al. (2016) who stated that by May 1967, it was obvious that most easterners preferred secession to any other form of association with the rest of the Nigerian

Kendall (2005) argues that the 'will' suggests that

individuals are propelled into, or determine to join, a social movement whose activity they believe can address their discontent or marginality within society and work to resolve the prejudices they face. In other words, individuals who engaged in social movement activities believe in the strength of their 'willpower' to help them achieve meaningful results. Unfortunately, any sort of denial or removal of this willpower prevents some individuals from joining the group action for the actualization of the desired group objective, despite facing the same problems, deprivation, marginalization injustice or issues as those who join social movement activities. This is exactly the case with IPOB and the federal government. The IPOB wanted to secede, but the Nigerian government is denying them the right to secede and by so doing make use of their security agents to destabilize their efforts towards achieving the Biafran dream.

The main hindering factor against the people's desire to move for the Biafran dream is the fact that they take decision of their own as a planned action considering the pros and cons of the action they are about to take. This reason accounts for inward support and prayers for the actualization which lacks physical backing and general participation among the people. Invariably, the majority of people of South Eastern Nigeria may want Biafra inwardly but the solemn sacrifice of war for the actualization of the dream is what is lacking in them and this may account for why federal government is never ready to allow for referendum. The end point of all these is that the media can succeed in telling the people what to do but may not be too strong to force the people to do it. To add to knowledge, this study looked at the evolution of the current radio Biafra with special attention to its modus operandi.

### **Radio Biafra: A brief historical evolution**

Radio Biafra is a radio station established by the defunct government of the republic of Biafra during the Nigeria-Biafra war from 1967 to 1970 to champion the Biafran war propaganda (Omaka, 2017). The radio station was the official radio of republic of Biafra that existed from 30th May 1967 to 15th January 1970. Biafra took its name from the Bight of Biafra (the Atlantic bay of its south) (Ugorji, 2015b). The inhabitants were mostly the Igbo people who led the secession due to economic, ethnic, cultural and religious tensions among the various peoples of Nigeria.

On the 30th of May, 1967, Lt. Col. Chukwuemeka Odumegwu Ojukwu, the Eastern Regions military governor, pronounced the republic of Biafra, citing the killing of easterners in the post-coup violence as a major reason for the break-up. The large amount of oil in the region also created conflict, as oil was a major component of the Nigerian economy (Minahan, 2002: 762). The need for radio broadcast became imperative for Biafra because during the war, newsprint was very

scarce and the government owned newspaper, the Biafra Sun, could print very few copies. Addressing this challenge, Nkpa (1977: 334) notes that:

*The major difficulty in the dissemination of information was the fact that only about 15 percent of the population of Biafrans is literate. The commonest source of information for the average citizen was by word of mouth, a situation that is known to be very conducive to the formation of rumors. Radio remained the only channel through which the Biafra government could communicate to the populace both in English and in local dialects.*

Nkpa (1977: 4) further states that, "the radio, the newspapers and official pronouncements were not very much trusted, and the average Biafran made no distinction between radio broadcasts and official pronouncements". He explained that "the two came from the same source the radio and were regarded as one and the same thing", hence "transistor radio which were owned by many young men were very useful both to the literates and the illiterates as those who cannot understand the broadcasts in English can understand the ones in vernacular" (Nkpa, 1977: 4). Being a study set on the ethnic marginalization, the researchers further looked at the Igbos in Nigeria and their alleged marginalization.

### **The Igbos and the concept of marginalization in Nigeria**

After the civil war in 1970, to create enabling conditions for the unity of all Nigerians and facilitate the reintegration of Biafrans, the then military head of state of Nigeria, General Yakubu Gowon, declared "no victor, no vanquished but victory for common sense and the unity of Nigeria." Included in this declaration was a transitional justice program popularly known as the "3Rs" - Reconciliation (Reintegration), Rehabilitation and Reconstruction. Unfortunately, the genocide committed against the Igbos during the war was not addressed by any court neither did any government did anything to perpetrators of the genocide (Odoemene, 2012; Ugorji, 2015b, 2017). As noted by Morgen (2016), in reality, the recurring secession attempt is the result of a buildup of the various illogicalities within the Nigerian state. Various constitutions had been negotiated and adopted prior to 1966, but none addressed the fundamental social differences, ethnic imbalances, economic competition and political tensions that the Nigerian state struggled with.

Because the postwar transitional justice program was inefficient, and failed to address the human rights abuses and genocidal crimes committed against the Igbos during the war, the painful memories of the war remains green in the minds of many Biafrans even sixty years after. According to Ugorji (2017), war survivors and their

families are still suffering from intergenerational trauma of the war till date. In addition to trauma and yearning for justice, the Igbos in the southeast of Nigeria feel completely marginalized by the federal government of Nigeria. Since the end of the war, there has not been an Igbo president in Nigeria neither had an Igbo man held a sensitive position in the political equation of the country where they were said to have been reintegrated after the war. Integration in Nigeria is very hard as each ethnic group struggle to maintain dominate the others, no trust and no sense of unity among them (Ekanola, 2006; Heywood, 2007; Udebunu, 2011). Nigeria has been ruled for over forty years by the Hausa-Fulani from the north and the Yoruba from the southwest. And this fact makes the Igbos feel they are still being punished because of the aborted session of Biafra (Folarin et al., 2014).

In the light of the discrimination that characterizes the inhabitants of the country, people vote along ethnic lines making it highly unlikely that the Hausa-Fulani that constitute the majority in Nigeria and the Yoruba (the second majority) will vote for an Igbo presidential candidate. The implication of this is that an Igbo man had no hope of becoming the president because, even he contests, the voting strength is against him and he will lose. This makes the Igbos feel frustrated and completely deprived of what they consider very important to ensure their wellbeing in the country. Because of these issues, and given that the federal government has failed to address the issues of development in the southeast, new waves of agitation and a renewed call for another Biafran independence have emerged both from the region and within the Diaspora communities abroad (Ugorji, 2017).

In terms of development, there was no seaport in the South East and the one in Portharcourt that may be closer by is not working. There is only one international airport and no railway line in the entire region. These and many other kinds of infrastructural decay in the area point to the suspicion among many proponents of the Biafran agenda that the country did not want the progress of the Igbo man. Dredging the river-Niger to serve as a link to encourage sea transportation will help the Igbos who are mostly merchants to deliver their merchandize from abroad, but that has formed a political bait to lure the people in the area into voting for a presidential candidate year in year out.

### **Empirical literature**

Since the resurgence of the Biafran agitation in Nigeria from the Uwazurike days to this current Kanu era, researchers have been examining the possible causes and developments on the agitations and the possible threats that it pose to the unity of the Nigerian state. Akinyetun (2018) examined the Biafran agitation from the points of views of the causes of the renewed agitation in this recent time. The study was carried out using a library

method which gave the researchers the opportunity to examine literatures on the issues concerning the Biafran agenda since 1966. The study found that the resurgence of the Biafran agitation of these current days is based on issues relating to marginalization, economic imbalance, social alienation, ethnic suspicion and superior-subordination contestation which are rampant in the system. The researcher recommended deployment of peacekeepers and builders while efforts should be made to utilize the different forms of peacemaking initiatives such as negotiation, mediation, settlement, and tracks of diplomacy (Diamond and McDonald, 2013; Ramsbotham et al., 2011) to resolve the Biafra conflict. The researcher also proposes three levels of peacemaking processes of Intra-group Dialogue within the Biafra separatist movement; conflict settlement between the Nigerian government and the pro-Biafran movement and multi-Track diplomacy to reach out to all ethnic groups especially the Hausa Fulani Moslems and the Igbo Christians.

Unfortunately, this study did not address the need of the Biafran agitators which hinges on good governance or true brotherhood devoid of marginalization of any kind. The study is therefore different from the current one in the sense that as the previous one is a library study, the current one is empirical which is looking at the recipients of the radio Biafra messages in the south eastern state bearing in mind the impact of the message of marginalization brought to them under the condition of being short-changed in what was supposed to be collective property. This study is much more concerned with the relationship between the messages received and the will power to engage in an action as a result of the communicated contents.

In another study, Chilwa (2012b) set out to find the reason for the persistence agitation of the Biafran agenda in Nigeria despite all efforts by the government of the country to bring to a halt the agitations at different times. The study was based on the use of social media networks by the agitators to send across their messages to the wider world. The study applied a sociolinguistic-based Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) to investigate how sociolinguistic issues such as virtual community, identity, language variations and social interaction are used to project self-determination and the struggle for political independence. The study found that the Igbos are gradually getting themselves mobilized for the Biafran agenda through the social media encouraged by increased internet enabled devices that are rampant in the society today. This study agrees that there is danger for the unity of the country in the face of determination for self-government among the Igbos. As this current study is concerned with the rhetoric used in communicating the marginalization of the Igbos, the previous one is concerned with the use of social media as a mobilization instrument for championing the Biafran agenda among the Igbos.

Similarly, Egwu (2016) used the deprivation, rising expectation and frustration aggression theory to examine the causes of popular movements particularly MASSOB and IPOB self-determination quest as against the Nigerian state position on the issue. This study also used library research method to examine literature on the renewed agitation of the groups for the Biafran cause in Nigeria. The study found that the causes for this renewed agitations for self-determination is as a result of the inability of the Nigerian state to give the people sense of belonging at the centre. The researcher condemned in entirety the act of using military might and the judicial system alone in seeking to resolve conflicts with ethnic and religious components in Nigeria which he said, will rather lead to further escalation of the conflict as military intervention and the retributive justice that follows did neither have within themselves the tools to uncover the hidden animosities that fuel the conflict nor the skills to get the required data to transform the “deep rooted conflict by eliminating structural violence and other underlying causes and conditions of deep conflict” (Cheldelin et al., 2008: 53). On this ground, the researcher while citing Ugorji (2012) recommended, a paradigm shift from retributive policy to restorative justice from coercive policy to mediation and dialogue.

Again, this study looks at the causes and not the influence of the use of mass media in communicating the Biafran agenda and the possible implication among the people to whom the rhetoric were dished out.

Other studies include Ezemenaka and Prouza (2016) where it was concluded that Nigeria is seen as a fragile state. This fragility according to Fund for Peace (2016) reveals the weakness or ineffectiveness of the central government to exert practical control over much of its territory; low-provision of public services; widespread corruption; criminality; refugees; involuntary population displacement; and sharp economic decline. The method of this study is different from the current one which is particularly looking at the influence of the radio use in the propagation of the Biafran agenda in the minds of the Igbos populace in the south eastern Nigeria.

In another study, Onuoha (2014) sees the Biafran crisis as more of generational action that questions the old power to stand for the Igbo of today in the height of this political marginalization suffered by the people of the region since the return to democracy in 1999. In his view, the crisis is more of the voice that will be speaking for the Igbos in the national level for the recognition and inclusion in the political equation of the country which they have seen to have completely eluded them for long now. This is what caused the aggression that sustained the continued agitation for self-government from Nigeria by IPOB.

Similarly, in his dissertation, titled “Forging a Nation while losing a Country: Igbo Nationalism, Ethnicity and Propaganda in the Nigerian Civil War 1968-1970” Doron (2011) concluded that the Biafrans lost what they sought

to gain carelessly following Ojukwu’s trust in western aids which they enjoyed from both French and European machineries which could have helped him secure the future of the Igbos from the war by suing for peace. The study was also conducted using the library method in exploring literature concerning the Biafran case in the country. The author finally explained that the Igbos are still leaking the wound of the war and can never be contented in the country unless they are seen as part of the country which he confirmed is not forthcoming in the Nigeria of this generation.

Finally, Thompson et al. (2016) examined the history of the Igbos in Nigeria, their status and agitation for self-determination as well as the response of the Federal government over time concerning their agitation. These scholars concluded that the Igbo question is one of the most unity-threatening issues in the country which the state had failed to address. They acknowledged that the choice of self-determination is inalienable but maintained that any group that wants self-government must follow due process rather than a means for seeking attention, personal aggrandizement or political subversion while advising the federal government, to approach issues of this nature through dialogue and an all-inclusive policies rather than the use of military force. It was observed from the study that self-determination is not new in world political landscape but the Nigerian constitution contravenes the international law in this regard. This study was also conducted from available literature of the state of Biafra and Nigerian leadership. Very much unlike this current one which set to examine the relationship between what the recipients of radio Biafra messages and their actions after being exposed to those contents which are very much like the contents of the radio Rwanda of the 1993-94 which gave birth to the Rwandan genocide.

## Research objectives

This study aims at the following objectives:

- (1) To ascertain the respondents’ frequency of exposure to radio Biafra rhetoric of ethnic marginalization.
- (2) To ascertain if their exposure to the radio Biafra increase their knowledge of the need for continued agitation for the actualization of the state.
- (3) To ascertain if their exposure to the station increase their believe in the generality of alleged marginalization of the Igbos in the Nigerian political equation
- (4) To find out if there is a significance difference in views expressed by the young and elderly respondents after being exposed to radio Biafra
- (5) To find out if they can support violence means of achieving the Biafran dream since radio Biafra had seen legal means as unattainable.



## Research questions

This study was guided by the following research questions posed from the research objectives set earlier:

- (1) What is the respondents' frequency of exposure to radio Biafra rhetoric of ethnic marginalization?
- (2) Does exposure to the radio Biafra increase respondents' knowledge of the need for continued agitation for the actualization of the state?
- (3) Does respondents' exposure to the station increase their belief in the generality of alleged marginalization of the Igbos in the Nigerian political equation?
- (4) Is there any significance difference in views expressed by the young and elderly respondents after being exposed to radio Biafra?
- (5) Are the respondents ready to support violence means of achieving the Biafran dream since radio Biafra had seen legal means as unattainable?

## METHODOLOGY

This study was based on mixed method. The survey research method and focus group discussion (FGD) were used to enable the researcher obtain both qualitative and quantitative data for the study.

### Area of study

This study is premised in South-Eastern Nigeria which comprises Anambra, Abia, Ebonyi, Enugu and Imo states. The reason for premising this study in this part of the country is because they are the region that complains of being marginalized in the Nigerian political equation which leads to the renewed agitation for the Biafran state by IPOB. The study will cover only listeners from Anambra, Abia and Imo states given that these are the states where the agitation is more pronounced with the attending harms done to the people and their properties.

### Population of the study

In Anambra State, the researchers selected Dunukofia with a total of 124,000, Ayamelum with a total of 203,200 and Ekwusigo with a total of 203,500. In Abia State, the researcher selected Arochukwu with 221800, Umunneochi with 213700 and Ohafia with 322,200 local government areas while the Mbaitolo with 32700, Okigwe with 182700 and Orlu with 196600, making a total of 1,973,093 projected to 2018 to be 2,061,014 from where the researchers selected 400 respondents using Taro Yameni sample size determination formular.

### Sampling technique

This study used the purposive sampling technique which allows the researcher to examine participants based on their knowledge and exposure to radio Biafra and its rhetoric of ethnic marginalization. The reason for the use of purposive sampling technique was to enable the researchers to select only those who are exposed to the station's contents. The reliability of these instruments was tested using the test-retest reliability testing method.

## Data collection methods

This study applied the survey and focus group discussion as the research method. The application of these two research methods helped the researchers to provide qualitative and quantitative views from the audience under study and as well ensure that any empirical lapse observed in one method is taking care of by the other. The researchers used the questionnaire and the interview guide as instrument for data collection.

## Data presentation and analysis

All qualitative and quantitative data generated from the field were presented descriptively using frequency tables and percentages. The results and findings were discussed in relation to previous studies and theoretical frameworks adopted in the study.

Table 1 reveals that the respondents are well exposed to radio Biafra and its rhetoric of marginalization used in cultivating the Biafran agenda. It conveys the accessibility of the station among residents of South Eastern Nigeria.

Information from Table 2 demonstrated that the peoples' exposure to the radio station and their rhetoric serves as a source of information on the marginalization and suffering of the people of the Igbos before, during and after the war with Nigeria. Their response revealed that the radio has succeeded in cultivating the need for agitation at least if not to achieve a separate state, to secure a better situation unlike what obtained now in the country.

From the data in Table 3, it can be observed that the majority of the people under study nurse the belief that the Igbos in Nigeria are being marginalized as a result of their exposure to the radio Biafra station and personal experience from living in Nigeria.

Table 4 demonstrates that though the people have been exposed to the radio Biafran rhetoric of ethnic marginalization against the Igbo people of the South-East, they have not been motivated to accept violence as a means of achieving the Biafran dream.

## Analysis of the focus group discussion

The focus group discussion was conducted in 9 different locations to cover the select local government areas under study. Each group has a total of 10 participants making a total of 90 participants. The time for the discussion was approximately 50 minutes each. For the sake of convenience, the discussion was conducted at the various local governments secretariats of the local governments under study. The first group was the Ayamelum discussion group which held at the local government secretariat on the 3rd of January, 2020. The discussion which started at exactly 12 noon saw 10 participants in attendance. The next group was the Dunukofia group held at the secretariat on the 10th January and Ekwusigo was conducted on 17th January.

**Table 1.** What is the respondents' frequency of exposure to radio Biafra station?

<b>Respondents' frequency of exposure to radio Biafra</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Highly exposed	204	52.4
Moderately exposed	140	35.9
Poorly exposed	45	11.5
Total	389	100

Source: Researchers' field survey, 2020.

**Table 2.** Exposure to the radio Biafra broadcasts increases respondents' knowledge of the need for continued agitation for the actualization of the state.

<b>Whether exposure increase knowledge of the need for agitation</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Yes	201	51.6
No	102	26.2
Can't say	86	22.1
Total	389	100

Source: Researchers' field survey, 2020.

**Table 3.** Exposure to radio Biafran station increase respondents' believe in the generality of alleged marginalization of the Igbos in the Nigerian political equation.

<b>Whether exposure to messages command believability in marginalization</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Yes	246	63.2
No	64	16.4
Can't say	79	20.3
Total	389	100

Source: Researchers' field survey, 2020.

**Table 4.** From your exposure to radio Biafra, can you support violence means of achieving the Biafran dream since radio Biafra had seen legal means as unattainable?

<b>Whether respondents subscribe to violence</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Yes	63	46
No	270	63.2
Can't say	56	18
Total	389	100

Source: Researchers' field survey, 2020.

The groups held in Abia State are Arochukwu local government on 24th January, in Arochukwu, there are only 6 participants in attendance. The Umunneochi group was conducted on the 17th day of February and Ohafia local government held on 31st January with 10 participants. Every other group was complete during the discussion. The reasons for holding the discussions on

Fridays were to ensure the participants are free with the time schedules. The discussions conducted in Imo State include Mbaitolo local government area held on 7th February, Okigwe local government held on the 14th February and Orlu local government held on the 21st February all in 2020.

The focus group discussion on this question shows that

the radio station is a source of knowledge to the people in the area. In the words of a young female discussant in Ekwusigo, radio Biafra is very revealing in terms of information on the state of the Igbo man in this country, she said. Another participant from Ekuwsiogo local government stated that every hidden piece of information that took place during the war is being exposed to the people. One of the discussants in Okigwe made it clear that the station is very important as it makes the Igbo man to know his level and position in this country. This view does not augur well with a discussant in Ayamelum local government who said that radio Biafra is set to initiate another civil war in the country. In his words, "the ways the radio station is packaging and sending their messages is very provoking and peace threatening. I will only advice the youths to ask the elderly ones questions about the previous war before they will accept to go and die in another one" contrary to another view expressed by another discussant in Orlu who said that the government of Nigeria should just let the Igbos leave. His reason was basically the level of denial of the Igbos some rightful positions of authorities in the country. To him, good governance devoid of marginalization will assuage his desire for self-government. Generally, the people wished that Biafra can be achieved but not through this way that radio Biafra is pushing for it.

The information from the FGD also supports the earlier finding as majority of the respondents acknowledged being exposed to some information that they have not been acquainted to in their previous lives. According to one of the discussants from Ummneochi, "I cannot deny getting any new information that is revealing and worth being regarded as knowledge from the station. The discussant further stated that one aspect of the station is the use of foul languages in addressing government officials and people of other tribes, a situation she maintained should form one of the recommendations of this study. Meanwhile, in trying to avoid future outbreak of war, the use of foul language in radio Biafra has to be curtailed, she warned.

Reacting to the information on whether the respondents now agree to the fact that there was marginalization of the Igbos in Nigeria, the respondents generally admit being marginalized but a good number of the people adjudged the marginalization as self-inflicted by the Igbos themselves. According to one elderly discussant from Dunukofia, our problem is self-inflicted, we love money more than every other tribe in Nigeria and we are even ready to sell our blood brother to make the needed millions of money irrespective of the implication tomorrow. Supporting his view another discussant from the same group added that other tribes pursue group interest more than the Igbos and that is what caused the height of the marginalization. On whether they will be part of what could be done to get a better position for the Igbos in the country, all the participants are of the opinion that they need a better position for development of their

region. Some of them complained bitterly on the inability of the government of the federation to create an additional state for the Igbos in the south east to measure up with other regions.

## DISCUSSION

Research question one which sought to ascertain the respondents frequency of exposure to radio Biafra revealed that the respondents are well exposed to the station and that they hear the words the station used in communicating the people about Biafra. This information confirms the finding obtained from the quantitative study where the researchers found that the majority of the respondent frequently visit and listen to the station. While reacting to the question in Okaigwe, a middle aged discussant said that *"he tune-in to the station to listen to the Biafran episode when there is any activity concerning IPOB"*. In another discussant's word, *"radio Biafra is a station for the Igbos set for the liberation of the people of this region, we listen to them and what they are saying is the truth and Nigerians hate the truth"* This finding corroborates the views of the proponents of cultivation theory which according to McQuail (2010: 553) who states that as the people get exposed to a particular media channel, with time they are likely to begin to believe and accept the messages communicated through the channel as the truth. Moreover, the level of wide exposure to radio Biafra is a sign of the universality of radio as a medium of information dissemination (Asodike and Udoh, 2014). The significance level of communication observed among the people revealed a high commitment of the station to take what they wanted. This finding is in tandem with the views expressed in Mavric (2012) who affirmed that Self-determination is something you take, not something a government gives to you. Unfortunately, the message exposes the people to different things while their minds and thought are becoming more considerate on what they intend to do over the message that they have received from the station.

On the second research question, it was found that the respondents have general believe that the Igbos is being marginalized. One thing that is revealing from the FGD is the fact that as the younger ones blame the elderly generations for the marginalization, the elderly people blame the younger ones for their love for money which they said made them wish to pursue personal rather than group interest in politics. According a discussant in Arochukwu, *the problem of marginalization of the Igbos in the country is a self-inflicted one. We marginalize ourselves and some of us will go to radio Biafra to seek for whom to deceive*. The fact remains that the people believe in the language of marginalization but have different views on the persistence of their said marginalization. The aforementioned findings corroborated the postulation of the social exchange theory which sees

human actions on issues communicated in the media as a result of calculated behavioral change which is placed against the comparative advantage of the action to be taken as directed by the media message Njoki (2013) and Glyn (2004) cited in Agbanu (2014). Already, the station and its presenter have offered the people the message on the need for secession from Nigeria but the people are more concerned with what they stand to gain or loss in the course of acting the radio Biafra's script.

On the research question five which sets to examine if there is a difference between the view of the elderly ones and the new generation of Igbos, the focus group discussion revealed that there is a transfer of moral burden (Duru, 2015) from the two groups of people in the region. The younger ones see their present day situation in the country as being the fault of the elderly ones while the elders see the persistent marginalization of the Igbos as a result of the younger generation's love for money which they (the elders) alleged was responsible for lack of trust on the Igbos by any other tribe in the country.

When asked whether they will support violence means of achieving the Biafran state, there were general mixed feelings among the people. This draws attention to the relationship between cultivated behaviour and the accepted behaviour (Njoki, 2013). When there is conflict between what is communicated and the well thought action of the respondents, social exchange will ensue and a planned action subject to negotiated exchange takes precedence. This finding recalls the views expressed in Nwodu, (2007) when he questions the media power of setting agenda. From practical experience in this study, radio Biafra has initiated the secession messages using all kinds of abusive rhetoric but the people seem to think otherwise with much emphasis placed on the cost-benefit analysis of acting the communicated messages. With the uncertainty of likely outcome of engaging in violence as alternative, the Igbo people are not much that out to support Biafra especially among the elderly ones who witnessed the previous war. The fact is that majority of the people accepted that they like Biafra as a state but were afraid that pressing for its existence may lead to war which they never wanted.

According to an elderly discussant from Orlu, *"the need for Biafra is at the heart of many Igbo men but never through war or any form of violence. There is the hope that one day; God will liberate the Igbos from this marginalization"*. To this discussant, there is no need for the use of violence in pursuing their Biafran dream. This fear was as a result of the people's lack of the will power and the drive to take what they may have wanted (Ezemenaka and Prouza, 2016) even when it is glaring to all of them that they are not well situated in the country. This is in line with earlier position held in Thompson et al. (2016) who stated that by May 1967, it was obvious that most easterners preferred secession to any other form of association with the rest of the Nigerians but cannot just

achieve that easily.

## Conclusion

This study is very a revealing one on the use of foul languages by radio Biafra presenters as means of pressing the government to grant IPOB's need. From both the qualitative and quantitative data collated and analyzed, the study has proved that there is difference in reasoning of Biafran agitation between the young and elderly Igbo men. Most fortunately and most striking revelation here is that the study have shown that the Igbos need Biafra but were still silence because of lack of the will power to achieve their desired goal of getting self-government which literature have proven is not given but taken. It also found that there exist differences between what is communicated and what is acted by the people. Based on these findings, the researchers concluded that given any slightest opportunity, majority of the Igbos will join the move for a self-government from Nigeria.

## Recommendations

From the empirical data obtained from the field and analyzed, the researchers recommended as follows:

- (1) That more inclusive government should be used to assuage the Igbos' desire and quest for this Biafra if the country still appreciates the unity of its existence.
- (2) That the people in radio Biafra should be very careful on their use of language in order not to instigate another war in Nigeria. What happened in Rwanda between 2003 and 2004 should serve as a serious warning and life experience of what radio languages can do to any nation.
- (3) That the government may consider any means of educating the citizens on historical issues that had happened to reduce the influence of the rhetoric of radio Biafra on the citizens.
- (4) The youths should make use of their senses in assimilating media contents so that they will not end up in acting what they did not know its origin.

## CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

The authors have not declared any conflict of interests.

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