



THE AUDIENCES' PERCEPTIONS OF NORTHERN
NIGERIAN MUSLIMS: A CULTIVATION EFFECTS
STUDY ON THE NIGERIAN NEWS MEDIA

BY

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A dissertation submitted in fulfilment of the requirement
for the degree of PhD in Human Sciences
(Communication)

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Human Sciences
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MARCH 2012

ABSTRACT

This study is necessitated by nonexistence of research works in media influence on audiences' social reality beliefs about Muslims from the Northern Nigeria on the basis of interreligious conflicts that have pervaded the Nigerian scene. Specifically, no research works on the conflicts have been conducted within the cultivation theoretical context of mass communication research. Neither has there been a research report confirming the moderator effects of third variables on such perceived reality beliefs. Earlier studies have however discussed the impacts of media coverage patterns of such conflicts on audiences, but without sophisticated quantitative findings. This study fills the gap. Structured within the purview of cultivation effect research, this study tries to resolve the controversy as whether global exposure is redundant in the presence of the content specific exposure. It has also examined the separate effects of television and newspapers. Survey is the method used to collect data from 450 respondents comprising of Muslims and Christians in Nigeria. Hierarchical multiple regression analyses indicate the vibrancy of the across-the-board exposure. That is, amount of time audience spent viewing TV and reading newspaper cannot be ruled out in constructing social reality beliefs about the world. The results also show the non-selective exposure as being moderated by real life experience of the nefarious events in cultivating the negative perception. This implies the validity of the *resonance* proposition. In line with the hypotheses, findings reveal that religious affiliation, income level, and nationalistic sentiment moderate the relationship between exposure to news stories on the religious conflicts and audience perceptions of the Northern Muslims. The findings imply that: the Christians are more affected by the religious conflict related news than the Muslims; effects of media exposure are more telling on the heavy viewers and readers within the low income earners; and sense of patriotism, to some extent, can override effects of media exposure on the people's perception as the Muslims from other parts of Nigeria might not see their Northern brethren from the prism of media reports.

خلاصة البحث

هذه الدراسة ضرورية و متميزة حيث إنها لم تسبق بدراسة مماثلة في تأثير وسائل الإعلام على تصورات مستخدميها عن مسلمي شمال نيجيريا. وخاصة أنه لم يوجد بحث سابق يعالج القضية على أساس نظرية غرس التصورات، جراء النزاعات الدينية المنتشرة في شمال نيجيريا. ولم يصدر تقرير يشير إلى وجود عوامل أخرى لها تأثير على تلك التصورات. فالدراسات السابقة قد عالجت أساليب التغطية الإعلامية لتلك النزاعات إلا أنها لم تهتم بنتائج إحصائية مقنعة. ف جاء هذا البحث لتلافي ذلك النقص. وبما أن البحث يستهدف التأثير الإعلامي بناء على نظرية غرس التصورات (cultivation theory) فإنه يحاول إنهاء التناقضات حول التعرض الشامل (global exposure) الذي هو عبارة عن المدة الزمنية التي يقضيها الناس في مشاهدة التلفاز أو قراءة الصحف من حيث التضاؤل في التأثير إذا قورن بتعرض المستخدمين إلى برامج معينة في التلفاز ومحتويات خاصة في الصحف (content-specific exposure). وعلاوة على ذلك فإن للبحث أهمية في اختبار التأثير الخاص لكل من التلفاز والصحف. لقد تبنت الدراسة المسح الاستطلاعي لجمع البيانات من 450 مستجوبا من المسلمين والمسيحيين في نيجيريا. وتشير النتائج الصادرة من تحليل الإنحدار المتعدد الهرمي (hierachical multiple regression) إلى أن المدة الزمنية التي يقضيها المستخدمون مع التلفاز والصحف قوية في التأثير وأن لها دورا فعلا في فهم التأثير الإعلامي. ويبدو في النتائج أن "المعايشة الذاتية للنزاعات الدينية" (personal experience of religious conflicts) قد تتفاعل مع تأثير المدة الزمنية التي يقضيها المستخدمون مع وسائل الإعلام في إحداث تأثير سلبي على تصوراتهم. وهذا يعني صلاحية فرضية المشابهة (resonance proposition) التي هي عبارة عن تشابه ما ينقله التلفاز أو الصحف بالواقع الحقيقي. وهناك تطابق بين الفرضيات ونتائج البحث؛ حيث أن كلا من "الانتماء الديني" (religious affiliation) و"مستوى الدخل" (income level) و"المشاعر الوطنية" (nationalistic sentiment) تتفاعل مع تلقي الأنباء الإعلامية عن النزاعات الدينية في التأثير على تصورات المستخدمين. والخلاصة أن أنباء النزاعات كانت أقوى تأثيرا على المسيحيين، وأن التعرض لوسائل الإعلام كان أشد تأثيرا على المكثرين من المشاهدة أو القراءة من ذوي الدخل المنخفض، وأنه يمكن أن تتغلب المشاعر الوطنية على تأثير وسائل الإعلام على تصورات المستخدمين عن المسلمين في شمال نيجيريا. وذلك لأن المسلمين في أقاليم أخرى داخل نيجيريا قد لا يرون إخوانهم من الشمال في الصورة التي تحاول وسائل الإعلام إعطاءها عنهم.

APPROVAL PAGE

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DECLARATION

I hereby declare that this dissertation is the result of my own investigations, except where otherwise stated. I also declare that it has not been previously or concurrently submitted as a whole for any other degree at IIUM or other institutions.

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**THE AUDIENCES' PERCEPTIONS OF NORTHERN NIGERIAN
MUSLIMS: A CULTIVATION EFFECTS STUDY ON THE NIGERIAN
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*I dedicate this thesis to the Glory of the Almighty Allah (SWT) and to the memory of
Mamawa El-Hadja Sammat Olaide Omilabu (May the Almighty Allah place her in
Jannat El-Fidaos)*

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Alhamdulillah! All thanks are due to my Creator, the Almighty Allah (S.W.T), for the strength, patience and endurance He bestowed upon me to complete this research. May He bestow His peace and blessings upon our beloved Prophet Muhammad (S.A.W.S), his family and companions.

I am grateful to my major supervisor, Professor (Dr.) Fazal Rahim Khan and my co-supervisor, Professor (Dr.) Syed Arabi Idid, for their diligent and meticulous supervision of this dissertation. I really benefited from their insightful comments, guidance, and advice throughout the period of my research. I also extend my profound gratitude to all my lecturers and colleagues in the PhD classes of Communication Department at the International Islamic University Malaysia. Particularly I thank Professor (Dr.) Mohd Yusof Hussain, Associate Professor (Dr.) Azmuddin Ibrahim (now Professor and Dean, Faculty of Communication and Media, Universiti Industri Selangor, Shah Alam), and Associate Professor (Dr.) Saodah Wok. I also thank Associate Professor (Dr.) Che Mahzan Ahmad, Assistant Professor (Dr.) Norbaiduri Ruslan and other members of the academic and non-academic staff at the Department.

My thanks also go to Mr. Abdul Hakeem Afolabi Omilabu for giving me financial and moral supports throughout my doctoral programme in Malaysia. I will ever be grateful to him for his charitable commitment to my educational progress and to the welfare of my family. Likewise, I express my appreciations to Mr. Mohammed Bankole for his generosity and kindness. May the Almighty Allah (S.W.T) reward both of them in abundance.

I am grateful to my parents, Shaykh Mohammad Busair Ahmad and Hadja Batool Busair Ahmad of blessed memory. They both laid the foundation for my intellectual, spiritual, and moral development. I deeply miss the pleasure of serving them in their life time. May the Almighty Allah (S.W.T) be pleased with both of them, grant them His eternal blessings and mercy, and place them in *Jannat El-Firdaos*.

I thank my brothers, sisters, cousins and friends for their encouragement and supports. I appreciate the perseverance exhibited by my wife, Sofiyya Busair Ahmad (*nee* Sauta) and my children throughout the period of my study and research abroad. Indeed, they have been understanding, kind and wonderful.

I devote my motivation, strength, and success to the infinite wisdom, will and mercy of the Almighty Allah (S.W.T). "How perfect You are, O Allah! I praise You. I bear witness that none has the right to be worshiped except You. I seek Your forgiveness and turn unto You in repentance."

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

TVGE	Television Global Exposure
NPGE	Newspaper Global Exposure
TVCSE	Television Content-specific Exposure
NPCE	Newspaper Content-specific Exposure
TVATTENTION	Attention Paid to TV News Stories on Religious Conflicts
NPATTENTION	Attention Paid to Newspaper News Stories on Religious Conflicts
PERC	Personal Experience of Religious Conflicts
NS	Nationalistic Sentiment
Religion	Religious Affiliation

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.1 BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

Mass media influence on people's perceptions of the world is entrenched in the cultivation theory of television effects propounded by Gerbner (1969) and propagated by Gerbner and his colleagues with a fundamental assumption that heavy television viewing cultivates a common outlook of the world. Starting with the cultivation hypothesis, Gerbner and Gross proposed that heavy television viewing instills fear because it makes the viewers perceive the real world as 'mean' and 'scary' as displayed in the television symbolic world (Gerbner & Gross, 1976a). Such fears inculcated in viewers are attributed to television long-term effects. Empirically described as minimal, steady, circuitous, television effects have been found to be cumulative and significant (Gerbner, Gross, Morgan, Nancy & Signorielli, 1986; Gerbner & Gross, 2002). Given the cultivation theory, television is assumed not only as a homogenizing agent in American culture, but also as a cultural arm of the American society (Gerbner & Gross, 2002: 229). Television long-term and cumulative impact on the viewers' social reality beliefs is based on television's assumed ability to create and maintain viewers' beliefs through its repetitive and stable system of messages (Morgan & Signorielli, 1990). According to the theory, mass media in general and television in particular, is a world in itself and not a window on the world or reflection of it (McQuail & Windahl, 1993: 100).

Theoretically, cultivation assumes that the indirect experience derived from television exposure will override the real life experience and that television is the

primary source of constructing and nurturing social beliefs (Gerbner, Gross, Morgan & Signorielli, 1994). Cultivation is evidenced through positive correlation between the amount of television viewed and the extent to which the viewer's real world perceptions resemble the world displayed on the television screen (Morgan & Shanahan, 1996). Premised on the notion of pervasive relation between television exposure and social reality, cultivation predicts a main effect for television viewing: the more the hours spent by individuals watching television, the closer the fit between the viewers and the perception of social reality portrayed on television (Shrum, 2001). Many research studies have supported this relationship (Gerbner, Gross, Morgan, Signorielli & Jackson-Beck., 1979; Gerbner et al., 1982; Hetstroni & Tukachisky, 2006; Morgan & Signorielli, 1990:13-19; Shrum, Wyer & O'Guinn, 1998).

Although cultivation effect is primarily concerned with television exposure, its extension to other genres of mass communication is inferred from the fact that the cultivation theory is interested in the general and pervasive outcome of cumulative exposure to cultural media and that theoretical framework of cultivation analysis is applicable to any dominant form of communication (Morgan et al., 1990). Newspapers' cultivation effect findings have been reported in a number of studies as well (Artwick & Gordon, 1998; Fallows, 1996; Khan, Abbasi, Mahsud, Zafar & Kattikel, 1999; O'Keefe & Reid-Nash, 1987; Rosenberry and Vicker, 2009: 165; Vergeer, Lubbers & Scheepers, 2000).

One of the assumptions of the cultivation theory propounded by Gerbner and his colleagues is the assumption of global exposure to the mass message systems instead of the assumption of exposure to specific messages. Cultivation theorists assume that television audiences watch mostly non-selectively and 'by the clock' rather than by the programme (Gerbner et al., 1979; Gerbner et al, 1986). This

assumption is robustly contested by critics who argue that cultivation effect is rather content-specific and that time spent viewing television varies relative to programmes among viewers (Hughes, 1980; Hirsch, 1980). Specifically, it is disputed that dissimilarity in content types may induce discrepancy in patterns of action and characterization (Hawkins & Pingree, 1982). It is also argued that effect of television viewing on perceptions does not only relate to differences in nature of programmes, but also to time of viewing (Rubin, Perse & Taylor, 1988), and cultural heterogeneity of the viewing patterns (Tamborini & Choi, 1990), suggesting therefore that audiences actively and differentially evaluate television messages (Severin & Tankard, 2010: 270) and that their choice of programmes is habitually driven by their needs (Webster & Wakshlag, 2008). This has become even more likely with the advancements in media technology that encourage diversity in programming (Potter, 1993). This notion of selective exposure's cultivation is countered by Gerbner and his associates. They say that putting cultivation within the framework of programme preferences falls out of the fundamental assumptions of the theory (Gerbner et al., 1994).

Research findings and theoretical arguments in support of content-specific cultivation effects go hand-in-hand in the literature with those of global-effect advocacy (Allen and Hatchet, 1986; Carlson, 1983; Hover, 1990; McLeod, 1995; O'Keefe et al, 1987). In sum, the issue is far from settled and there continues to be a need to take another look at validity or redundancy of the global exposure assumption.

Besides the global exposure assumption, the cultivation assumption of heavy viewing consistency with the television world is also challenged by critics who argue that there may be some variables that cause heavy viewers' worldview to be more consistent with the world of television than those of the light viewers, and that

television's effect may disappear (Hughes, 1980; Hirsch, 1980). or at least become attenuated (Shrum, 2001) when those variables are controlled for. This has resulted in the induction of the constructs of *Mainstreaming* and *Resonance* in the cultivation literature (Gerbner, Gross, Morgan, & Signorielli, 1980). Generally; Mainstreaming and resonance hold that audience life experiences may moderate the cultivation effect (Shrum & Bischak, 2001). Specifically, mainstreaming would be evident through a commonality of outlook among the heavy viewers of different segments in society whose light viewers hold divergent views. Resonance, on the other hand, would take place each time there is an amplified effect among some heavy viewing sub-group in society. All in all, by proposing mainstreaming and resonance, Gerbner and his colleagues have highlighted the necessity of attention to moderators in the media cultivation effects.

Furthermore, cultivation effect studies have mostly focused on television exposure's effect on social reality beliefs, with some alluding reference to newspaper reading as one of the variation factors (Gerbner et al., 1979,) and as a control variable (Shrum, 2001). Some prominent studies have noted that attention to newspapers' cultivation on social reality perception is relatively scarce (O'Keefe et al, 1987).

Cultivation analysis is however not restricted to the American societies. It has been extended to other settings across the globe. Likewise, the focus of the analysis has been taken beyond the scary world scope to other sociological related phenomena in the world in as much as images in mass media, televising in particular, are assumed to cultivate the overriding predisposition of cultural beliefs, sentiments, and differing world views (Gerbner et al., 1980). Therefore, the cultivation discourse is extended in this study to the Nigerian religious sentiment phenomenon.

1.2 NIGERIAN SOCIETAL SETTING, MEDIA OWNERSHIP, AND MEDIA EXPOSURE

Integrating Nigerian news media into the realm of cultivation discourse necessitates brief explanations about the nature of the Nigerian societal setting, media ownership, ideology, control, viewership and readership or media exposure. Shoemaker & Reese (1996:151,192,224) affirms that societal setting, media ownership, ideology do interrelate partly to form a cultural background for the mass media message systems or the symbolic world that is assumed to cultivate social reality perceptions. Located in the West African sub-region of the Sahara, Nigeria is the most populous African country of about 150 million diversified set of people numbering well over 250 autonomous ethnic groups. Out of these, the *Hausa-Fulani*, *Yoruba*, and *Igbo* constitute the three largest dominant ethnics (Uche, 1989:7). With such a relatively large population size, Nigeria has a literacy level of about 80 percent (Olukotun, 2006). Nigeria is also a multi-religious setting (Noibi, 1990:30) with Islam and Christianity as the two major religions whose presence is felt virtually in all aspects of the national orientation (Bidmos, 2006:33, 62). The early Nigerian news medium was *Iwe Irohin* , an indigenous language-based newspaper established by a British missionary, Rev. Henry Townsend in 1859 (Akinfeleye, 2003:6) with the purpose of getting the people to seek information by reading (Uche, 1989:93). However, the *Iwe Irohin* was not only a medium of information, education, and entertainment as supposed; it was also a part of the British ideological, economic and religious superstructure employed to penetrate the minds and souls of the natives (Oso, 2006a). The indigenous *Yoruba* language later became a fraction of the newspaper and was eclipsed by the subsequent English appendage (Oso, 2006a). A flurry of dailies of nationalist ideas emerged and flourished thereafter to confront colonial repression as

well as to bear on local and national issues, offering ideological contrast to the colonial government-controlled radio broadcasting (Uche 1989:94-97). Such newspapers subsequently became political machineries and campaign megaphones in the hands of their owners who were politicians and who used the newspapers to promote their political hegemony before and after Nigerian political independence (Uche 1989:99-101).

Typified by newspapers, magazine, radio and television, Nigerian news media scene is made up of 116 newspapers most of which are tabloids (Olukotun, 2002), 244 TV and 95 radio stations (Akinfeleye, 2003:45). Specifically, 70 percent of the newspaper ownership belongs to the private sector substantially dominated by business magnates. Majority of this class of owners are non-Muslims and they believe that “a newspaper is first and foremost a business or commercial enterprise set up to make profit like all other businesses within their conglomerates” (Oso, 2006a). Most of the privately-owned dailies, the smallest of which has the average daily national circulation ranging between 70,000 and 80,000 copies, (Olukotun, 2006), have a nationwide coverage and command a large readership of around 75 million people, including buyers and users (Olukotun, 2002), majority of whom are the affluent, urban-based middle and upper classes (Oso, 2006b).

Unlike the print media, broadcast media remained government monopoly until 1992. That year, private ownership was allowed through a deregulation of the industry, subject to licensing and regulations of the Nigerian Broadcasting Commission (Olugbogi, 1997:50-52). Seventy percent of TV ownership in Nigeria is in the public sector comprising the federal government-owned and the state government-owned. The federal government-owned television channel is the Nigerian

Television Authority (NTA), arguably the largest of its types in Africa (The Guardian, Oct. 18th edition, 2009). The NTA channel, which is on satellite and Internet, has a chain of 148 network stations located in each of the 36 states of Nigeria attracting a wide viewership of approximately 80 million Nigerians at home and in the Diaspora. Additionally, 64 TV stations are owned by individual state governments across the country (Akinfeleye, 2003: 45). The highly-controlled programming mix of these two types of public broadcasting sector consists of documentaries, talk shows, sports, music, entertainment, and lifestyles (Olukotun, 2002). In the private television sector, on the other hand, there are 32 TV stations (Akinfeleye, 2003, 45) chiefly owned and controlled by business moguls most of whom are Christians and, like the newspapers, are largely concentrated in the South-Western region of Nigeria, spawning allegations of a media monopoly by a section of the country (Olukotun, 2000).

The Nigerian press, comprising print and broadcast news media, is overwhelmingly commercial and its orientation is invariably influenced by market forces. The audiences are thus treated as a commodity that a news medium must produce for its sponsors to generate revenue to keep the news outfits economically afloat (Oso, 2006a). Parts of the strategies the news media employ include sensational headlines, specialized reporting on issues and crises of national interests such as those with ethnic and religious overtones. Nigerian news media reporting of most religious crises in Nigeria is described as not in the best interest of peaceful co-existence between Muslims and Christians as the news reports, editorials, and features tilt negatively against the Muslims (Bidmos, 2006: 53). Such a bias in reporting conflict of religious and sectarian nature may be due to ignorance about the character of the faiths and also due to poor professionalism and inadequate journalistic investigation into the crises (Reporting Religion-Related Conflict, 2006:19). This may create

perceptions of Muslims being intolerant and a troublemaking segment of the Nigerian society.

Such a portrayal of Muslims in the Nigerian news media might be not be unconnected with what Shoemaker & Reese (1991) call broader social and institutional forces in whose context the overall significance of the effects of media content could be understood. Behind such forces lies a relatively small group of media conglomerates who have something to sell (Gerbner, 1997). Closely relevant to the idea of social and institutional forces as an explanation of subtle and recurring negative media portrayal is the cultural model of cultivation theory. The cultural model of cultivation model theory posits that heavy exposure to such a recurring media portrayal overtime influences audiences' perception in the direction of the portrayal in the media message system (Gerbner et al., 1980). This portends symbolic configuration of the media world as an expression of the consistency of the profitable and "sociological constraints on the industry", which has surrendered 'the press to the plutocracy of market concentrations' (Gerbner, 1990).

The assumed influence of news media exposure on Nigerian viewers and readers' worldview about Muslims may have occurred cumulatively over the past decade. Ever since the return of democracy to Nigerians in 1999, numerous religious crises between Christians and Muslims have occurred and extensively reported in the media.

Nigerian news media's reporting patterns of the crises have been surmised to have not only cultivated a commonality of outlook in many viewers and readers about Muslims (Bidmos, 2006:53), but is also thought to have undermined the political and economic development of the country, threatening its national security (Akinfeleye, 2003:45). When reporting national crises, particularly those of communal nature,

Nigerian newspapers constantly emphasize the sensitive and perilous angles, in consonance with the news values of conflict, prominence, and consequence (Ado-Kurawa, 2003:11).

1.3 STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

The cultivation hypotheses have been mostly tested in the Western settings to investigate impact of television on issues beyond violence and crime (Baran & Davis, 2009:329). Particularly, cultivation analysis has been employed to investigate the impact of television and newspapers on people's perception of affluence, fear of victimization, social stereotypes and marital expectations (Potter, 1991; Sparks & Orgles, 1990; Segrin & Nabi, 2002; Tan, 1982). Cultivation hypotheses have also been tested in some regions in Asia and Africa regarding newspapers' impact on ethnic conflicts and effect of video exposure on children (Khan et al., 1999; Okoye, 1993). Nevertheless none of the existing studies have examined the relationship between exposure to news media' reporting of religious crises and audiences' perceptions of social reality beliefs about Northern Nigerian Muslims. The present study fills that gap in the literature by investigating news media exposure and audiences' social reality perception in the context of audience' exposure to the Nigerian news media in general. Additionally, the present study shall try to shed some light on the on-going controversy over the heuristic potential of the global exposure construct, a centrepiece in the Gerbner's cultivation theory, vis-à-vis the conventional notion of content- specific exposure.

Moreover, Nigerian newspapers' reproduction of conflicts between various groups, sectarian and religious alike, have been attributed to three factors: structure of media ownership and the resultant message system; political power struggle; and news

values within which the Nigerian journalistic notion of ‘conflict makes news’ falls (Oso, 2006b). This underscores the argument and the counter argument that Christians’ predominance of media ownership has contributed to the pattern of media coverage of religious crises (Ado-Kurawa, 2006: 9-13; Salawu, 2009:7-11) and its subsequent cultivation of social reality beliefs about Northern Nigerian Muslims.

Therefore, the present study attempts to examine whether media types and similar factors do really moderate exposure to Nigerian news media and cultivation effects. In other words, the study tries to find out whether the main effects or the contingent effects are more apt descriptions of mass media role in the context of Nigerian religious crises. Clearly there is a need to determine whether mass media stories on the religious conflicts in the Nigerian society has anything to do with the current structure of relationship between Christians and Muslims in Nigeria.

1.4 RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

The rationale for the present study does not only exist in investigating exposure to Nigerian news media coverage of religious conflicts and audiences’ perceptions of social reality beliefs about Muslims, but also in testing the fundamental assumptions of Gerbner’s cultivation theory in the Nigerian society and within the context of inter-religious sentiments of Christians and Muslims. Specifically, the objectives of this study are to determine:

1. Whether main effects aptly describe the role of media in creating pejorative perception of Northern Nigerian Muslims within the context of the religious conflicts.