



**REPRESENTATION OF ISLAM IN NIGERIA BY
WESTERN NEWS WEBSITES (CNN AND BBC):
AN ANALYSIS OF THE POST 9/11
DEVELOPMENTS (2001-2008)**

BY

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**A dissertation submitted in partial fulfilment of the
requirement for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy
(*Uşūl al-Dīn* and Comparative Religion)**

**Kulliyyah of Islamic Revealed Knowledge and
Human Sciences
International Islamic University
Malaysia**

MARCH 2011

ABSTRACT

This dissertation concerns Islam and Western media in Nigeria. Its aim is to analyze and evaluate the representation of Islam in Nigeria by the Western news websites with particular reference to Cable News Network (CNN) and British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) post September 11, 2001 developments. To achieve the objectives of this research, historical and analytical methodologies are applied. In this research, we are not concerned with the technical aspect of the news websites, rather, our intention is to evaluate the news websites of CNN and BBC and their contents on Islam that might not be in conformity with the true teachings of Islam. In fact, we are developing a framework and variable, which are explained in the light of the writings of contemporary Muslim scholars. This framework is used to measure the representation of Islam by Western news websites. The research also explores the historical development of Islam and Muslims in Nigeria. An analysis of the representation of Islam and Muslims in Nigeria (with particular reference to the issue of *Shari'ah*, polygamy and Islamic education) by the Western news websites is made. Commentaries on the contents of the websites from Islamic perspectives are given. The dissertation further investigates related factors behind the concern of the said websites of Islam in the country. The results indicate the causes for a negative portrayal of Islam by Western news websites, including the geographical location of Nigeria in West Africa as well as in the African continent, the political factor and the religious social reality in Nigeria with particular reference to Islam and Christianity. Then, the research suggests some solutions to these news websites that can be utilized to strengthen and enhance religious tolerance among various religious groups in Nigeria.

ملخص البحث

إن هذه الرسالة عبارة عن دراسة حول الإسلام ووسائل الإعلام الغربية في نيجيريا. فهي تهدف إلى تحليل صورة الإسلام في نيجيريا من قبل وسائل الإعلام الغربي ولا سيما الشبكات الإخبارية الأمريكية (سي أن أن) والبريطانية (بي بي سي) عقب ١١ سبتمبر ٢٠٠١ ميلادية. والجدير بالذكر أن هذا البحث لا يرغب في التركيز على الجانب التقني لهذه الشبكات الإخبارية الغربية، وإنما يهدف إلى تقييم وتقدير لمحتويات هذه الشبكات عن الإسلام في نيجيريا والتي قد تناقض مع التعاليم الإسلامية الحقيقية الصحيحة. ولهذا فإن البحث يستخدم المنهج التاريخي والتحليلي لإنجاز أهدافه، وذلك بدراسة التطور التاريخي للإسلام في نيجيريا وتحليل صورة الإسلام والمسلمين في الدولة، وخاصة ذلك الدور الذي لعبته وسائل الإعلام الغربية في تصوير قضية الشريعة الإسلامية، وتعدد الزوجات والمدارس الإسلامية في الجمهورية الفدرالية النيجيرية. كما سيقوم البحث بتقييم محتويات الشبكات الإخبارية الغربية من منظور إسلامي والبحث عن العوامل التي أدت إلى إهتمام تلك الشبكات الإخبارية بالإسلام في نيجيريا. وطبعاً، لقد أدرك البحث حقيقة إهتمام هذه الشبكات والعوامل التي أدت إلى عنايتها بالتصوير السلبي للإسلام في الدولة. وهذه العوامل تتمثل في العامل الجغرافي الممتاز الذي تحتله نيجيريا في غرب أفريقية، والعامل السياسي الذي تمثله نيجيريا في أفريقية الغربية بشكل خاص وفي القارة الأفريقية بشكل عام. ثم عامل البيئة الدينية الواقعة والموجودة في نيجيريا، والتي تتمثل بشكل خاص بالإسلام والنصرانية في الدولة. وأخيراً إن البحث يقدم بعض الإقتراحات لهذه الشبكات الإخبارية الغربية والتي لوفذت يمكن أن تؤدي إلى التسامح الديني بين الأديان المختلفة في الجمهورية الفدرالية النيجيرية.

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.

Tijani Ahmad Ashimi

Signature.....

Date

INTERNATIONAL ISLAMIC UNIVERSITY MALAYSIA

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**REPRESENTATION OF ISLAM IN NIGERIA BY WESTERN
NEWS WEBSITES: AN ANALYSIS OF POST 9/11/2001
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DEDICATED TO

This dissertation is dedicated to my late father, Alh. Sheikh Imam Khalifat Hāshim who has brought me up from the slums of illiteracy to the world of knowledge, and who has responded the call of His Almighty Allah. May Allah rest his soul in peace.

Likewise, the dissertation is dedicated to my mother, Alhaja Rafatu Ajike who constantly encouraged me throughout my study. Lastly, this humble dissertation is dedicated to my lovely wife Rahmat Olabisi Ashimi and my daughter Zaitun Olaide

Ashimi.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I wish to express my sincere gratitude and warm thank to my supervisor, Assoc. Prof. Dr. Mumtaz Muhammad Ali for giving me an opportunity to write this work under his supervision. I must admit that without his constant support and full guidance, it would have been very difficult for me to complete this humble dissertation. I shall always remember every moment he devoted to my dissertation, despite his unbearable workloads as a senior lecturer. His constant reminder for spiritual consciousness and moral uplift have strengthened my commitment and steadfast, for which I am ready to take up the challenge of tomorrow, and firmly set the intention of life to acquire the pleasure of Allah. May Allah bless him and his family.

Well, I am glad to seize this golden opportunity to thank Dr. Badri Najib Zubir (Dean, Kulliyah of Islamic Revealed Knowledge and Human Sciences) for his continuous efforts for the betterment of the Kulliyah, May His Almighty Allah reward him for his efforts.

Indeed, my warm thanks and deep appreciation go to Prof. Dr. Thameem Ushama head department of *Usūl al-dīn* and Comparative Religion for his fruitful instructions and his intellectual suggestions.

A special thanks and tremendous gratitude to Assoc. Prof. Che. Mahzan, who has devoted his precious time to examine this humble dissertation, and his fruitful instruction has undoubtedly contributed to the success of the dissertation.

Likewise, a unique thank and great gratitude go to my gigantic intellectual and energetic scholar professor Dr. Ishaq Olanrewaju Oleyede, Vice Chancellor of University of Illorin and whose intellectual instructions and academic suggestions have played a very important role to the quality of this dissertation. I shall always remember his uncountable time he spent to evaluate and examine the dissertation. May His Almighty Allah bless him and his family.

Similarly, it is very important to express my deepest thanks to distinguished scholars Prof. Dr. Abdul Rashid Moten, Prof. Dr. Ahmad Sheu Abdul Salam, Prof. Abu Shouk, Prof. Dr. Fadhl Rahim and Prof. Dr. Muhamad Yusuf Husain for their unique instructions and suggestions which has undoubtedly increased the quality of this dissertation, I do confess with their intellectual suggestions and their scholaristic guidance the dissertation has become successful.

I would also like to thank the members of the committee for Post Graduate Studies of Islamic Revealed Knowledge and Human Sciences; with particular reference to Prof. Dr. Nasr Eldin Ibrahim Ahmad, Deputy Dean, Centre for Postgraduate Studies, Prof. Dr. Hassan Ibrahim, Prof. Dr. Ibrahim Zain, for their fruitful instructions and suggestions.

Furthermore, my especial gratitude goes to Assoc. Dr. Kamar Oniah, Asst. Prof. Dr. Che Amnah Bahri, Assoc. Prof. Sa'd Din, Assoc. Prof. Dr. Abdul Kabir Husain,

Assoc. Prof. Dr. Jamal Badi, Asst. Prof. Dr. Bashir Soulihi, Asst. Prof. Dr. Uthman Kaboye, Asst. Prof. Dr. Fatmir, Asst. Prof. Dr. Munawwar Haque, Asst. Prof. Sardar Damerel and Asst. Prof. Dr. Sulaiman M. H. Boayo for their constant support and strong motivation for me during my study.

In fact, I would like to seize this opportunity to thank my lovely wife Rahmat Olabisi Ashimi who always encourages me and helps me for typing and editing throughout my writing, indeed, I fully appreciate her limitless support, her encouragement and her precious time she devoted for my dissertation, she is absolutely a sincere wife, may Allah bless you Rahmat Arike.

Furthermore, my warm regards go to Alhaja Sariyu Agbeke, Alhaji Fatai Ajao, Alh. Alh. Rahim Ayinde, Alhaja Madinah Aweni, Sis. Jemilat Ayinke and Sis. Fatimah Ajoke .

Indeed it is very difficult to exclude some important people from this acknowledgement such as, Alhaj Lukman Yusuf Olubodun, Br. Malik, Br. Mus'ab, Br. Hatim, Musa Owolabi, Dr. Jalil Abu Anis, Br. Jalil Yussuf, Br. Berte Hasan, Engineer Hakim Amuda Alh. Abdullah Otun and other friends who encouraged and motivated me during my enrolment.

Last, but not least, I owe a warm gratitude and gratefulness to my family members; such as Alhaja Rafatu Ajike, Alhaja Sariyu Amope, Alhaj Abdul Karim Animasahun Alhaj Muhyideen Hashim, Alhaja Sawudat Hashim Salamat Hashim , Muhammad Taib Hashim, Alhaja Sawudat Oloba, Alhaj Bashir Babatunde Hashim, Alhaj Ibrahim Hashim, Alhaj Yunus Baale Hashim, Aisha Hashim, Alh. Muftah Agbara, Br. Muftah Ajobi. Alhaj Abdur-Rahman Hashim, Sa'adat Hashim Alh. Rahman Atanda Hashim, Alhaja Rahmata Hashim, br. Salih Hashim, br. Adam Hashim and other family members who truly motivated me throughout my study.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 INTRODUCTION

Islam is the religion for over 55% of Nigeria's population. In terms of geography, Islam accounts for about 70% of the population of the old Northern Region and about 20 to 30% of the population of the Southern region. It is important to note that Nigeria contains one of the largest Muslim populations outside the Middle East, which explains the interest that Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Iran, Egypt, and some other countries of the Islamic World have shown toward Nigeria and Muslims there.

This rapid growth and strong presence of Islam is noticed by Western powerful media and their websites, especially with the emergence of reintroduction of the *Sharī'ah* in post September 11 2001 where the western media were so active in portrayal of the *Sharī'ah* in the country. It is argued that the Western media, print and electronic, contribute important factors that shape the views of non- Muslim Nigerians about Islam and Muslims. Hence, it is essential to evaluate the representation of Islam by Western news websites with particular reference to Cable News Network (CNN) and British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) respectively. The presence of Islam in modern Nigeria is an important phenomenon from both historical and futuristic perspectives. Historically speaking, in spite of colonial masters' policies against Islam it still exists with its considerable followers and demonstrates its vitality to become a dominant force in Nigeria. This shows the inner dynamism of Islam, which not only accommodates religious and cultural identities of all other religions, but it also manifests religious and cultural plurality. The pluralistic approach of Islam to life and

society is an important dimension, which attracts others. But it seems that the Western media especially, BBC and CNN news websites are not representing this image of Islam in the country. This fact will be demonstrated in details in chapter three.

Its picture of Islam seems to be quite contrary from the reality. The image of Islam in Western media seems to be irrational, dogmatic, intolerant and fanatic. The few studies available on Islam in Nigeria at the moment are based mostly on the analysis of the origin and development of Islam and have seldom considered the basic nature of and representation of Islam by Western media (BBC and CNN news websites) especially, in post-September 11 development. In spite of the negative image of Islam especially the issue of the *Sharī'ah* in Nigeria, Islam continues to flourish as a religious and cultural movement.

A cursory glance at Islam and the existing conditions of Muslims in Nigeria reveal the fact that in the absence of rulers' support and the bias attitude of Western media during and after the colonial period and vast influence and propaganda of modernity and Western culture is obvious in secularization and westernization of the society in the post independence Nigeria, yet, Islam still continues to demonstrate its revival and resurgence. This phenomenon of Islam's presence and its development deserves the attention of students and scholars. It demands that it should be studied from different perspectives. There is a need to examine and analyze the representation of Islam by the said media and see why Islam has continued to survive despite unjust role of secular media against Islam and the *Sharī'ah* in the post September 11, 2001 in the age of modernity and secularism in the most populous Muslim country in Africa which has a modernizing agenda and which does not proclaim Islam as the basis of its national constitution.

Indeed, it is not the technical aspect of these news websites, CNN and BBC, which is important for this research. Rather, it is their contents which require an evaluation as they might have some positive or negative impact toward the resurgence of Islam and Muslims in Nigeria. It is obvious that Islam has undergone various developments in Nigeria. The efforts of the colonial masters during the colonization of Nigeria to regulate and control the spread of Islam had failed. Efforts at reducing the influence of Islam by different forces including the internal and external secular media also seem to be a failure. The images of Islam on Western news websites (BBC and CNN) instead of damaging Islam have rather result in the further strengthening of Islam. Although it is true that the anti-Islam and anti-Muslim policies and agendas of certain quarters, particularly by both internal secular media, and external Western media in the country further stimulate the negative image of Islam – as in the case of the recent anti-*Shari'ah* propaganda in Nigeria, the Nigerian Membership in OIC and the beauty contest controversy which aggravated the negative image of Islam. Nonetheless, the representation of Islam in negative way does not and cannot, in any way, help to arrest the growth and development of Islam, nor strengthening the Muslim- Christian relations in the country. The greater role of Islam and the application of its spiritual and ethical principles would guarantee the peaceful and harmonious development of Nigeria. The need to understand this and create healthy attitude towards Islam and Muslims seems to be more urgent. The revival of Islam and its culture provide a place where Muslims and other communities can interact on a healthy basis that will help to develop the larger community. The revival and resurgence of Islam guarantees the greater peaceful co-existence and development of Nigerian population as a people. Against this background, however, the role of

Western news websites seems to create obstacles towards the maintenance of the culture of plurality in the Nigerian nation.

1.2 STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

It is obvious that Islam has existed before any other religions in Nigeria especially Christianity. But, in contemporary Nigeria, the Western news websites (BBC and CNN) are very active. It is generally understood that they seem to play a negative role. This attitude is creating tension among Muslims and Christians. Conflicts are taking place between these two communities. This situation has taken a new turn and became worst particularly after 11 September 2001 event. These websites, it is assumed, are playing negative role. Hence, there is an urgent need to examine and understand the role of news websites after post 11 September 2001 developments, with special reference to Western news websites namely BBC and CNN respectively. Indeed, we are not concerned here with the technical aspect of news websites. Rather, our concern lies in the content of the news websites that might not be in conformity with the true teachings of Islam.

However, Islam as religion insists and perpetuates to demonstrate its revival and development against the dominance of modernity and secularism in the country. The problem that the study seeks to explore and solve is to determine the degree of distortion in representing Islam in these news websites.

1.3 OBJECTIVES OF THE RESEARCH

The main objectives of this research are as follow:

1. To explore and evaluate representation of Islam by Western News Websites with particular reference to (CNN and BBC) in the post 11 September 2001 Developments.

2. To investigate the authenticity of the contents of these Western powerful websites on Islam.
3. To identify the shortcomings of the contents of these websites on Islam and Muslims.
4. To suggest solutions to remedy the negative influence.

1.4 RESEARCH QUESTIONS

1. What is religious social reality in Nigeria with reference to Christianity and Islam?
2. How did websites portray Islam and with respect to the *Sharī'ah*, education and traditional culture (polygamy and circumcision)?
3. How does the contents of these websites relate to the teachings of Islam?
4. Whose interests do these websites serve?

1.5 SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

The study of representation of Islam in Nigeria by Western News Websites is one of the most important issues. It needs the attention of both scholars and intellectuals. Therefore, this research is expected to evaluate and explore the representation of Islam in Nigeria in the news websites of CNN and BBC in the post 11 September 2001 developments from 2001 till 2008. This period is so important for our research because it coincides with the issue of *Sharī'ah* reintroduction in Nigeria, moreover, it is the era of Islamophobia and terrorism. Furthermore, nowadays, these websites are considered to be the main source of information whereby majority of western people acquire their knowledge about Islam, as such, this current research intends to critically analyze the contents of Western News Websites with particular reference to BBC and CNN respectively, that might have positive or negative impacts or effects on

the development of Islam and Muslims in the post 11 September 2001 in the most populous country of Africa (Nigeria).

1.6 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The topic of research is related to news websites but it is not approached from communication theory point of view rather the issue will be dealt in the content of development of Islamic thought, hence, we will adopt descriptive and analytical methodologies, to achieve the objectives of this research, historical approach will also be applied. It will be basically descriptive in nature, yet analytical method will be the main tool of study, it will analyze the content of Western news websites on Islam in Nigeria. It will make an in-depth exploration and analysis of the websites of CNN and BBC related to post 11 September 2001 (2001-2008) content on Islam in the country. The study is also descriptive in the sense that it tries as far as possible to assess the content of websites on Islam rather than offering any judgment on it. Nevertheless, in certain aspects the study will also be interpretive. Furthermore, this study will be confined to library research. Lastly, the researcher will use very simple language compatible with his ability rather than being exclusively. By applying the above methodologies the study will analyze and elaborate the merit and demerit of the news contents on Islam.

1.7 LITERATURE REVIEW

It is an undeniable fact that most of the studies on Islam in Nigeria contributed meaningful research, especially, those researches, which are related to the field of religion such as; “Islam and Christianity”, “A revolution in History” and “Islam in Nigeria between today and Yesterday”, along with several books on Islam in Nigeria written by various authors. For instance; John Hunwick discussed about Islam in

Nigeria in pre-colonial period and postcolonial period respectively. According to him “Islam made the earliest external contact, perhaps as early as ninth century, through North Africa, Kanem-Borno, and later the Hausa states. The religion brought a new system of ideas, a new way of life, and literacy by means of the Arabic and ajami scripts. Initially confined to a very small segment of the aristocracy and courtiers of some Hausa rulers, the religion expanded rapidly after the early nineteenth century *Jihād* led by Sheu Uthman Dan Fodio. The Islamic faith later spread to the south of Nigeria, particularly parts of Yorubaland or the old Western Region of Nigeria”.¹

This means that Islam preceded Christianity or any other imported religions to Nigeria, it has even existed before the advent of colonial Masters (British) who brought Christianity to the country with the ambition of colonization and exploitation of human beings and resources. But, *Jihād* of Usman Dan Fodio in the early nineteenth century further contributed to the development and expansion of Islam from the North to the south.

In fact, the author did elaborate on the advent of Islam and its development in the country as well as its impact in social and political dimensions, which is quite relevant to our subject here. However, he did not specifically touch on the representation of Islam by western media, and which will be our field of study in this research.

Similarly, works of Matthew Hassan Kukah and Toyin Falola have demonstrated the religious development in contemporary Nigeria. They jointly wrote a comprehensive book known as “*Religious Militancy and Self-Assertion*”. This book is mainly about Islam and politics in Nigeria. The book is critical with an in-depth assessment of the impact of Islam on colonial and post-colonial Nigerian politics.

¹ John O. Hunwick. *Religion and national intergregation in Africa: Islam, Christianity and politics in the Sudan and Nigeria*, (Illinois: Northwestern University Press, 1992), 86.

From both analytical and theoretical perspectives, moreover, the book skilfully combines archival materials with important conceptual questions. Religious problems in the postcolonial era are firmly rooted in the nature of British colonial rule and the complex history of Christianity and Islam in Nigeria since the 19th century.

Falola and Kukah's major contribution lies in the effective application of social history to the crisis of governance in contemporary Nigeria. While drawing from other parts of the country, the book is primarily concerned with the emergence of the Fulani aristocracy in Northern Nigeria. The authors persuasively argue that Islam provides the Hausa Fulani traditional and bureaucratic elites with an important instrument of political and economic advancement in post-colonial Nigeria. These modern expressions of religion and politics are traced to the Fulani *Jihād* of the early nineteenth century. A major contribution of the authors to this historical event is an interpretive historical expressive account of the origins of the *Jihād*. Political and ideological expressions throughout the 19th century would thus sustain the power base of a regional elite in modern Northern Nigeria. This development has had serious implications for the post-colonial Nigerian state and society. Its most decisive expression lies in the role of regionalism in Nigerian politics since the period of decolonization.

Indeed, the authors have only demonstrated the importance of religion in Nigerian politics, they however, did not touch on the representation of Islam by external media such as BBC and CNN websites respectively.

Edward Said also provides some information related to the nature of covering Islam in the West. According to him "for the general public in America and Europe today Islam is News of particularly unpleasant sort". The media, the government, the

political strategists, and although their marginal to the culture at large, the academic experts on Islam are all in concert. Islam is a threat to western civilization”.²

Obviously, media has strength to influence and shape people’s views, perception and attitude to any religion and belief. The portrayal of Islam by the western media as a threat to Western Civilization, has played a very significant impact in Nigeria context, as such Islam is portrayed as abuse of human right. The recent *Shari’ah* debate in 1999 in Nigeria and the case of Aminah Lawal who was sentenced to death for committing adultery out of wedlock are such example and evidence that prove the attention of the western news website especially BBC and CNN respectively.

Eribo Festus wrote a book called “Press Freedom and Communication in Africa” It is a good work. According to him “Press freedom is the availability of a free marketplace of ideas and information for all citizenry without fear, favour, intimidation or obstacle.”³

If so, the western attitude of negative portrayal of certain religion and which is not suitable for their value, belief, norms and their worldviews are inevitable.

Initially, most of the news in third world countries is imported from the western media, naturally, such negative report of news about Islam in Nigeria by western media must have played a vital negative impact on Nigerian local media.

Mytton’s work about Mass Communication in Africa is approximately related to our field of work. According to him “The constitution of Nigeria guarantees freedom of expression including the freedom to hold opinions and to receive and impart ideas and information without interference or censorship of the government. It also defends the right for anyone to own, establish and operate any medium for the

² Edward Said. *Covering Islam* (London: T. J. Press, Padstow Ltd, 1981), 136.

³ Eribo Festus. *Press freedom and communication in Africa*, (Africa World press, Asmara, 1997), 52.

dissemination of information, ideas and opinions”⁴ this simply means to some extent there’s a freedom of speech and expression.

This also implies that any news about Islam in Nigeria by the western press or news agency can simply be received and published by local media without any interference or censorship of Nigerian government. Vice versa, any local News either about Islam or any religion can still be export to the western media to gain global coverage. Again, the news of the *Shari‘ah* outbreak in Nigeria in 2001 and the case of stoninnig of Aminah Lawal, which gain western coverage, are example of such called press freedom in the country.

Salahudeen wrote about the significant feature of early Nigeria Newspapers, his article was related to evaluation of Islam in Nigeria in western media, in the sense that the nature of reporting of religion especially Christianity in early Nigeria newspaper was inherited from the West. According to him “One significant feature of early Nigerian Newspapers was that they devoted much time and energy to reporting information about Christian affairs. The attention was superfluous and so frequent that one wonders whether the papers were essentially established to promote Christianity. The papers gave extensive coverage to affairs affecting Christians, such as building of churches, celebration of Christian festivals arrival of missionaries, meeting of churches, services and ordination... Missionary activities also received much publicity and attracted editorial comment. The newspapers also propagated the presumption that Christianity was the best, highest and noble civilization and that only Christianity could elevate mankind”⁵ in short, the early newspaper was serving the interest of Christianity.

⁴ Mytton G. *Mass communication in A frica*, (London: 1983), 119.

⁵ Salahudeen Y. *The portrayal of Islam in some early Nigerian newspapers*, The American Journal of Islamic Social Science. Vol: 6 No 2 (American Technology Library Association, Chicago, 1989), 322.

It is an undeniable fact, that Since the Independent of the Federal Republic of Nigeria till today, the media industry is controlled by Non- Muslims with particular reference to many Christians, therefore, rationally, it is not surprising if the propagation of Christianity is gaining more coverage than other religions (According to Nigerian proverb: no one would like his clothe to get wet during the heavy rain, rather everyone would like to protect his clothe not to be wet). So, as far as media in Nigeria is concerned Christians undoubtedly would like to disseminate the Information of their faith to vast audience of Nigeria in order to compete with existing dominant religion of Islam in the country.

Indeed, they may inherit this attitude from The American or Europeans Christians, which hold that Christianity is the only religion that can cope with civilization, Progress and salvation.

Frederick M. Denny provides some insight about Islam and Muslim Community. According to Him “Islamic community is known as the *Ummah*, an ancient Arabic religion communal term that spans the range of religion, share values, and common concerns. *Ummah* sometimes has a cultural meaning, but it does not denote nationality, kinship, or ethnicity, at least in its fully developed meaning as Muslim Community”⁶. According to the Holy Qur’an, every religious community is an *Ummah*, the Muslim *Ummah* is the totality of Muslims in the world at a given time, be in Nigeria, Malaysia, Indonesia or any part of the world or continent, they are all sharing one common goal, objective Islamic creed and the sense of shared history of the Islamic venture inherited from the past.

In fact, Denny’s discussion and evaluation about Islam and Muslim is general which also includes Nigeria, however, he did not specifically talk about the

⁶ Frederick M. Denny. *Islam and Muslim community* (San Francisco: Harper& Row Publishers, 1987), 62.