MEDIA DEPICTION OF SUFFERERS/VICTIMS OF BOKO HARAM ATTACKS IN NIGERIA AND AUDIENCE RESPONSE

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ABSTRACT: *This study employs focus group discussion to explore the Nigerian audiences' reactions and responsibilities to the suffering images of victims of the Boko Haram. The study further utilizes two audience practices, which are media witnessing and moral responsibility as its theoretical frameworks. It extends to the position of audiences as witnesses to the mediated images and their actions towards events witnessed. Extant literature suggests that in depicting the suffering victims, the media plays a number of roles in engaging and connecting audiences to the suffering of others. Scholars have also argued that factors such as distance, gender and culture contribute to or influence how audiences respond to the depicted images of suffering victims on the media. Compelled by these factors identified by Western scholars, this study weighed their authenticity within the Nigerian context. No known study has empirically measured this in Nigeria. This study is an attempt to bridge that gap. The finding of this study reinforces earlier findings that viewers of suffering victims tend to show compassion towards ameliorating the conditions of the sufferers. On the contrary, this study finds that Nigerian audiences feel pity and compassionate towards the suffering victims despite their gender and lack of proximity. While this finding may not have 'charted a new territory', it has demonstrated that reaction to media messages is culturally relative.*

KEYWORDS: Suffering, Audiences' response, Boko Haram, Responsibility, Media Depiction, Media Witnessing

INTRODUCTION

Lately there have been a lot of images of suffering victims of Boko haram terrorist floating on different media outlets in Nigeria and abroad. Boko Haram translates as 'Western education is sinful' (Peters, 2014). Also known as Jama'atu Ahlis Sunna Lidda'awati wal-Jihad, which in Arabic means "People Committed to the Propagation of the Prophet's Teachings and Jihad". Boko Haram is an Islamist group operating mainly in the Northern part of Nigeria. The aim is to Islamise and combat western education in Nigeria through violence (Ekwueme and Akpan, 2012; Okoro and Odoemelam 2013). How the sect emerged has been shrouded in controversy as different scholars offer conflicting accounts of its origin. For instance, Okoro and Okechukwu (2012) argue that the sect was formed in 2002 by their late leader, Ustaz Mohammed Yusuf in Maiduguri the capital city of Borno State in Nigeria and has seen different evolvement from its history. According to Onuoha (2012, p.2), ''Nigerian security forces date the origin of the sect back to 1995, when Abubakar Lawan established the *Ahlulsunnawal"jama"ahhijra* sect at the University of Maduigiri, Borno State''. In the similar perspective are Okoro and Odoemelam (2013) who posited that Boko Haram started operation in the 1995 with the name 'Sahaba' under the leadership of Lawan Abubukar who left the group

to study in Medina University in Saudi Arabia, entrusting the mantle of leading the group on Yusuf Mohammed.

Yusuf Mohammed who was in charge of the group when Lawan Abubukar left for his study was believed to have indoctrinated the sect with his own ideology and teaching which according to him is based on Sharia Law. He was arrested and detained for months by Nigerian police (Madike, 2011). When Yusuf was freed from Nigerian police detention, he began to recruit more people for the sect which one could address as intensive recruitment and mobilization. This persisted until he was gunned down in 2009 by Nigerian police. Before his death, Mohammed had already recruited 500,000 members made up of the *Almajiris* (beggars) in the Northern Nigerian where the sect is based (Madike, 2011; Okoro and Odoemelam2013). Having unleashed terror that left scores of people dead in 2009 by Yusuf (their then leader), the then president of Nigeria, late President Musa Yar'adua ordered for deployment of Military to contain the sect.

Today, Boko Haram attacks have left thousands of people death and millions homeless in the Northern Nigeria. Bombing remains the most frequently used strategy by Boko Haram, and this has led to wanton destruction of lives and property (Okoro and Okechukwu, 2012; Okoro and Odoemelam 2013). Expectedly, between 2011 and 2017 which represent the active years of the insurgency, many people have been either killed or displaced. In 2013, the group shook the nation with bomb blasts that left over 1,000 dead and did not stop there as they continued their killing spree with shooting and slaughtering (Baba, 2016). Their 'nefarious' act escalated the more in 2014 with over 10,849 deaths (Baba, 2016). Still counting, by the end of year 2014, more 13,000 people were reported to have been killed (*Africa Check,* 14/10/2014) all perpetrated by the group. Also, the sect on several occasions has threatened to disrupt Nigeria's national events and the threats always scared the country that the Federal Government often reacted by cancelling such national event (Rasheed, 2013).

The most worrisome aspect and new twist to the insurgency is the use of suicide bombing. The terrorist sect has lunched over 23 suicide attacks with huge destruction of property and increased death tolls (Onuoha, 2015). Through these brazen attacks, Nigerian has become ''a country of interest in the context of terrorism'' (Ette, 2012, p.45). Despite the government efforts to ensure total elimination of the terrorists in the country, it appears their efforts have not proved effective.

Research objectives

Having considered the above situation and the notion that audiences have become numb and lack feeling for the suffering images due to media continuous bombarding of the audiences with suffering victims (Moeller,1999), this study addresses the following objectives:

- To determine whether Nigerian audiences feel pity or numb towards media depictions of sufferers of Boko Haram insurgency in Nigeria.

- To evaluate whether the audience feel morally responsible to alleviate suffering of victims of Boko Haram attacks.

- To determine whether gender of audiences influence their reaction to suffering images of victims of Boko Haram attacks.

- To evaluate if proximity plays roles in determining how audience respond to images of suffering victims.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Suffering of displaced victims of Boko Haram attack

There is more to what displaced victims pass through than what is reported by media outlets or read in the academic literature. In the wall of IDP (Internally Displaced Persons) camp and around the suburb of Northern Nigeria lie hidden uncertainties of people's future (Jacob *et al*., 2016). Ever since Boko Haram began their attacks, property worth billions of naira have been destroyed, many people have been displaced with their lives shattered, traumatized and their future brought to stand still. The schoolgirls numbering about 270 kidnapped in their school hostel have been forced to marry members of the sect, some used for suicide bombing, some rumoured to have been sold by the sect to other Islamic extremist in other countries of the world. Some of those who returned were either carrying babies or pregnant (Human Right Watch, 2016). Today, Nigerians displaced by Boko Haram are scattered across the neighbouring Sub-Saharan African countries with little or no government assistance (Nwaoga, Okoli and Uroko, 2017).

Based on reports, internally displaced persons are prone to persistent violations of fundamental human rights, and their basic needs are trampled on. This is corroborated by Olajide (2016) who asserts that displaced persons, especially children and women are more vulnerable to rape and other violence that affect their fundamental human right. Similarly, "the lack of livelihood opportunities for women inside IDP camps, especially for those who have been rejected by their husbands and separated from families, has reportedly created destitution. Some women and girls have exchanged sexual activities for money" (Children Emergency Fund, 2016, p.13). Example of this can be seen from the interview conducted by Human Rights Watch with some of the freed girls kidnapped by the sect. One of the girls said:

> for refusing to convert to Islam, they and many others they saw in the camps were subjected to physical and psychological abuse; forced labour; forced participation in military operations, including carrying ammunition or luring men into ambush; forced marriage to their captors; and sexual abuse, including rape. In addition, they were made to cook, clean, and perform other household chores. Others served as porters, carrying the loot stolen by the insurgents from villages and towns they had attacked, (Human Right Watch, 2014, p.2).

Those who were lucky to escape from the insurgents have received minimal interventions but material and psychological (Ramiah, 2015). According to Human Right Watch (2014, p.3), "many of the victims and their family members expressed the ongoing anguish resulting from their ordeal, including deep fears of re-abduction, sleeplessness, and frustration for insufficient support from the government". In addition, this is worsening by the Government reluctant effort to see that these sufferers receive medical care or mental health support from Nigerian Government (Human Right Watch, 2014, p.3). To worsen the already bad situation, on January 17th 2017, the 'Operation Lafiya Dole' wing of the Nigerian Air Force 'mistakenly' bombed the IDP camp in Borno State. This led to the death of about 100 IDPs including staff of the International Committee on Red Cross and Doctors without Border (San Frontier), in an attack

allegedly targeted at Boko Haram terrorist gathering in Kala Balge Local Government Area of Borno state (*Vanguard*, 18/1/2017).

Worse still, there have been a high level of corruption, dishonesty and inhumanity in the IDP camp. According to Ajiyoye (2016), there have been misappropriations of funds donated to aid the victims and government unfulfilled promises. This was the case when Aliko Dangote (Nigerian billionaire) donated over eleven million USD ($11,000,000) to the victims and till date it has not been accounted for (Nwaoga, Okoli and Uroko, 2017). Similarly, many other donations from different agencies, government (e.g. Turkish government) were reportedly siphoned (Nwaoga, Okoli and Uroko, 2017). Just recently, on 4th of August 2016, the Governor of Central Bank of Nigeria (CBN), Godwin Emefiele, gave out six hundred (600) bags of rice to the displaced victims in Maiduguri, as usual, this was claimed to have been stolen by unknown persons. Having seen the suffering of the displaced victims of Boko Haram attacks due to misappropriation, Kayode (2016) laments that despite the large donation from individual, agencies and countries to the victims, their malnourished photographs have kept on flooding the media. Knowing what has become of the displaced victims, Hajia Hadiza Wakil who led Nigerian senators' wives to donate money, food and clothing to the suffering victims said that they were coming to the aid of victims because of the alarming rate of starvation, hunger and malnutrition of the IDPs (Nwaoga, Okoli and Uroko, 2017). This condition, it appears has arguably persisted as the gory images of the suffering victims of Boko Haram insurgency continue to surface online.

Media depiction of suffering

To say that there has been a growing focus on suffering in relations to victims of terrorism, crisis and other vices in today's contemporary media is to state the obvious. A glimpse at the conventional and social media brings a sour memory of what victims of terrorism and other related crises pass through. The depiction given to suffering victims of terrorism has left the audiences with overwhelming imagination to battle with (Beckett, 1994; Hoijer, 2004). The media has been the major means through which audiences become aware of others' predicaments (Tewksbury, Miller and DeMichele 2006). With media making all the issues in the society visible, audiences do not have to deny the awareness of the happenings around the world (Finkielkrant, 1998 cited in Tester, 2001).

Thus, by ''giving publicity to human suffering, exposing the picture of distant sufferers of war, genocide, massacre and other violence against civil population'', the media creates global awareness to them (Hoijer 2004, p. 513). Extending this point of view, Kyriakidou explains that publicity draws a ''sense of responsibility towards the distant others (sufferers)'' (Kyriakidou, 2014, p.1474). In other words, this invites the general public/audiences to be the moral judges themselves, act upon it, expand their imagination and take up responsibilities toward the victims (Cohen, 2001; Moeller, 1999; Tester, 2001). For instance television and photographs have been acknowledged for their visual impacts which foster response to victims as they are believed to give truthful depiction of the reality of occurrences. It has been argued that "through the media, and especially through the moving images of television, people have become aware of the sufferings of remote others and are challenged to include strangers in their moral conscience" (Hoijer, 2004, p.515). Although people respond in different ways to suffering of others, through extensive coverage from mass media, different images of suffering victims have surfaced to be part of what triggers audiences' perception of victims of crises, conflicts and crime (Tvedt, 1993). Consequently, with the media bringing to light the suffering of others who are rendered homeless, refugees and sometimes incapacitated in their country by

terrorist sect such as Boko Haram, it is expected that the media would arouse public sympathy and response to the situation.

The Boko Haram insurgency has attracted considerable international attention. For instance, humanitarian organisations such as Red Cross Society, European Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid Operations, World Food Programme, Central Emergency Response and other humanitarian agencies have come to the aid of the victim of Boko Haram attacks. Although the responses have been huge, it appears the they have not been commensurate enough. According to Ette (2012), media reports on issues of terrorism and how they report them help in triggering aids and compassion to the effected victims as their report "provided the scaffolding over the incident and enabled the readers to make sense of the story and to apply a particular understanding of it" (p.453).

Empirical evidence of Audience response to Media Depiction of suffering

How the media report on people's misery, suffering and how they trigger audience response has suffered from a draught of literature (Tester, 2001). The findings on how audiences react to mediated images of suffering have also remained inconsistent from different media scholars. In fact some scholars argue that the way mass media portrays the victims and suffering others has increased the audience's lack response to the images of suffering, and others arguing that images of suffering on the media still attract considerable reaction and response (see Höijer 2004; Kyriakidou 2008).

One of the arguments that have generated heated debate from different media researchers on audiences response to media depiction of suffering, and which is also leading for verification in this study is that of Moller (1999). Moeller had argued that audiences (western audiences) have started suffering from what she termed 'compassion fatigue'. According to Moeller, the increasing images of sufferers on the news has resulted in tiredness in response of audiences that they "don't care" anymore (p.9). This is owing to the regularity of such images on the media. Moeller argues that the way the media covers disaster "helps us to feel over-stimulated and bored all at once." (1999, p.9). This implies that the way mass media depicts people's suffering and sufferers have led to boredom on the side of the audiences that they are numb to some mediated images of suffering. Moeller's argument is further extended by Sue (2010) and Cohen (2001) who also contend that audiences deny the suffering of others as mediated by the media by completely undermining believability of such images.

From Cohen's (2001) perspective, the constant depiction and repetition of suffering images on the television have made audiences 'tired of the truth' (2001, p.187). In view of this, the suffering images of distance victims are selectively processed by the audience and not literally denied in such a way that the depiction does not lead to action from the audience any more. Rather, it leads audience to such thoughts like "get real, wise up and toughen up; the lesson is that nothing, nothing after all can be done about problems like these or people like these" (Cohen 2001, p. 195). Extending Cohen's view, Seu (2010) argues that such strategies "often consist of rational and deliberate reasons made by the audience that can either neutralize the severity of the suffering or dismiss any relation between spectator and the people in the image" (Seu 2010, p. 453).

In a conflicting perspective, Seu's (2003) focus group study delved more into the issue of avoidance. She argues that compassion fatigue as Moeller (1999) pointed out is not because of constant media bombardment (information overload) but an 'active "looking away"' (2003,

p.190). Essentially, she argues that desensitisation is the real reason but the moral justification of the audiences as "popular psychological discourse becomes a resource which people draw from to distance themselves from their responsibility to others' suffering" (2003, pp.190-192). Although Seu employed critical approaches in the ethical critique of the responses especially in the aspect of compassion fatigue being moral choice of individual audiences rather than social process, her study limitation was glaring because some individuals are 'turning away' from visual or prompt that is capable of manifesting such action.

Still on the contrast, Hoijer (2004) argues that depending on the type of images shown by the media, audiences can show compassion to the suffering others. Hoijer maintains that the type of narrative given/shown, the angle from which the image is shown, in no small way influences the compassion of the audiences towards the suffering others. She gave an example, that when the media shows the images of a suffering mother with a child, suffering orphans or suffering others that there is every tendency that it will attract more compassion from the audience than it would if an image of a helpless man is shown (Hoijer, 2004). Through focus group interview, Hoijer found that audience emotional response to images of suffering are selective, that the level of compassion they display is dependent on the types of images displayed by the media for the audiences. In addition, Hoijer also found that women respond emotionally more to the images of suffering compare with men (Höijer, 2004)

Consequently, Chouliaraki (2006) unveils how audiences respond to images of suffering others as shown by the media using discourse analysis. In *The Spectatorship of Suffering,* Chouliaraki created three types of news, arguing that audience response to the mediated images of suffering is dependent on the type of narrative given to it by the media and the type of news which includes adventure news, ecstatic news and emergency news. The adventure news depicts the victims or the sufferers as having no agency or little agency, and it uses "dots on the map". This lacks images or moral claims that would trigger audience responses. The emergency news she said, represents the type of news that triggers audiences, establishes connections between the sufferers and the victims and thereby triggers responses (p.137-46). Similarly, the media reports news of the suffering victims as ''random and isolated events and, for this reason, they fail to make an ethical demand on spectators to respond to the suffering they report'' (Chouliaraki, 2006, p.97). The second type of news which is ecstatic news is ''extraordinary class of reports on suffering that manages to bring the globe together in acts of simultaneous watching'' (2006, p. 94). This type of news 'brings the globe together' which portrays the occurrences in the western country with immediacy such as live coverage of the victims of 9/11 terrorist attack in the US by al-Qaida (2006, p. 157).

Emergency news on the other hand brings the audiences of different proximal differences together, connecting the sufferers and the spectators with the impression that something can be done to alleviate their sufferings. According to Chouliaraki, this approach employs the cosmopolitan way to show the suffering of other. The reason is that emergency news "by depicting those who suffer in such a personalized way so that spectators can relate and identify with that person (e.g. the portrayal of a women as a mother), and by facilitating a direct social cooperative relationship between sufferer and spectator (e.g. proposing to sign a petition in order to improve a situation or offering information on donating money to a humanitarian aid organisation" (2006, p. 130). Hoijer (2004) attests that emergency news proposes solution towards alleviating the suffering of those involved. This is the type of media depiction that greeted the abduction of over 200 schoolgirls by the Boko Haram insurgents during the 2014 attack in Chibok area of Borno State. This is also akin to the coverage given to the Asian

Tsunami, and victims of social violence and natural disaster in the developing countries which in no small way bring international response.

Providing a counterargument to Moeller (1999), Orgad (2008) argues that depicting much agency among the sufferers or victims of social vices will be detrimental to media course of depicting the images. If the sufferers/victims are depicted as healthy, independent and capable people, the audiences will view them as people who do not need help, and thus need no attention. However, if they are depicted as people who are incapable or who need helps, it will attract response of remedying their situation. From Orgad's study, the portrayal given to the London bombing 2005 and South Asia Earthquake in 2005, showed that those who suffered from the London bombing were described as 'victims' whereas the sufferers of Asia Earthquake were described as 'survivors'. As such, the earthquake was made 'more tolerable thereby 'having feasible solution' which undoubtedly has different meanings capable of triggering different reactions. In challenging Chouliaraki, Orgad argues that portraying the sufferers as victims is portraying the victims 'at its worst' which may convey "a message of agony that requires political action." (2008, p.21). Using this analogy, it can be argued that more people will respond to victims of London bombing than they would do to South Asia earthquake.

As can be gathered from the above review, most of the contributions are made by Western researchers, and no evidence so far has shown how Nigerian audiences respond to news that depict suffering. This leaves a gap which this current study tries to narrow. Although the existing studies served their purposes in contexts they were carried out they cannot be generalized on Nigerian audiences, who arguably have different political and cultural orientations, exposures and preferences.

THEORETICAL UNDERPINNING

Two concepts form the theoretical basis for this study, namely: media witnessing and moral responsibility.

Media witnessing

Media witnessing as a concept means ''being a spectator of calamities taking place in another country' through the 'cumulative offering by more than a century and half's worth of those specialised tourists known as journalists'' (Sontag, 2003, p.18). With regards to this study, the journalists who gather information and distribute to the audience are first witnesses, the audience are the second witnesses. Audiences become witnesses to social issues through media when they are confronted with excruciating lives people with 'an aching sense that something must be done' to help combat or alleviate the suffering of the people they witnessed through the media (Ellis 2000, p 11).

Witnessing as a concept is a very complex phenomenon and can be attributed to different situations. For instance, a person who bears witness to an event (actor or journalists), the process of bearing 'inward experience that authorises the statement (the witnessing of an event)'(Peters, 2001, p.709).Teasing this out, Peters argues that ''the witness (speech-act) of the witness (person) was witnessed (by an audience)' (Peters,2001, p.709). The audiences through the media become witnesses to events that took place elsewhere and to those who witness such events or those who give testimony to justify occurrences (journalists). They

become the witnesses to the news relayed to them, images, and text of the suffering of others in a distant land. The journalists give testimonies of people's predicaments on the screen of the audiences and audiences who view such images become the witnesses.

Arguably, Nigerian audiences will not deny witnessing the issue of displaced victims of the Boko Haram insurgency in the country either through the media or physically. This is because it is reported locally and internationally. Boko Haram is not a hidden issue to Nigerian and the global audience. As Finkielkrant, has rightly argued, our forefathers will have the temerity to deny the knowledge of some happenings around the globe and they will not be blamed because media reportage was limited then, but the present generation cannot deny their knowledge of the suffering of others or victims of Boko Haram insurgency in today's contemporary society (Finkielkrant, 1998) in (Tester, 2001).

Moral responsibility theory

This concept is concerned with how people react to media messages, whether they have feelings to the images depicted by the media and who should take responsibility for such images. In explaining what responsibility entails, Fisscher et al (2003, p.210) note that responsibility usually collide with the questions such as "who has caused this?", and ''who ought to take care of this?''. In trying to answer the questions as outlined by Fischer, one could understand that moral responsibility is the commitment demanded from audiences affected by occurrences either when the occurrence is about to take place or has taken place. This could come in the form of helping people to avoid such occurrences or combating the occurrences from existence (Fisscher et al 2003; Shepherd 2003).

Consequently, moral responsibility can be attributed to the relationships that exist between an event, occurrences, happening and the audiences; being aware of the consequences of their decisions, the audiences take moral responsibility of occurrences by choice (Hoijer, 2007). People act differently in different situation and how they act in such situation is the moral responsibility they have taken. Research on people's behaviour and moral responsibility by social psychologists has shown that a lot of factors such as age, income, demographic and physical features determine people's attitudes towards taking responsibility (Hoijer, 2009; Bandura 1999; Paharia et al. 2009). Sometimes, this can be determined by the proximity of such issues (Hoijer, 2004).

METHODOLOGY

All data for this study was gathered through focus groups sessions. According to Kitzinger (1994, p. 299) focus groups is "a form of group interview that capitalizes on communication between research participants in order to generate data". Being a qualitative method of data gathering, the design has been increasingly applied in different studies, especially in the social science field (McLafferty, 2004; Morgan, 1996). However, despite the huge advantage of using focus group in the research, it has some disadvantages. For instance, dominant participants in the group may try to extinguish the ideas of the less dominants ones thereby leading to the neglect of a valuable information from the less dominants ones (Smithson, 2000). Although this is the case, the present study controlled the situation in order to allow even opinion from different participants.

This method was chosen because other media researchers who have studied audiences' responses to suffering employed the method and it seemed to be very effective (see Sue, 2010; Hoijer, 2004; and Kyriakidou, 2009). Besides, the method has proved to be the most effective and stress free way of finding in-depth information in topics relating to audience research (Höijer 2004; Morgan 1996; Seu 2010; Szerszynski and Urry 2002).

Research sample

The study employed non-probability sample by using convenience sample as a sampling technique in carrying out this study. Convenience sampling is the type of non-probability sampling in which population target is selected for a particular study if such members meet "certain practical criteria, such as geographical proximity, availability at a certain time, easy accessibility, or the willingness to volunteer" (Farrokhi, 2012, p.785). The reason for choosing this method is because of geographical proximity and willingness of the participants to volunteer. In all, eight people participated in the focus group. The process involved playing some graphic video clips of the suffering victims of the Boko Haram insurgency in Nigeria. The discussions then organically emanated from the themes therein.

Ethical Consideration

The participants were communicated via the letter of consent and request for participation sent to them. As a precautionary measure, before the Focus Group Discussion commenced, each of the participants was reminded again of the confidentiality of their participation and the need to withdraw if they no longer want to go ahead. Before commencing the exercise, information sheet detailing what the research is all about was also sent to the participants. In order to obtain their consent with the research procedure, the participants filled participant consent form. Consequently, during the transcription of their response, anonymity was maintained by assigning pseudonyms to the participants. Their real names and information gotten and anything that would directly or indirectly reveal the identities of the participants were not shared with a third party. The reason for doing this is because according to Morrison (1998, p.226) ethical problem arises in focus group "particularly in media research, when material shown is very upsetting or disturbing".

Data analysis

In analysing the data, thematic analysis was employed. This is because it is widely used in qualitative research. The choice of this approach becomes necessary in view of its flexibility and the fact that it involves phases which include familiarizing with the generated data, generating codes, looking for themes, reviewing the defined theme, defining and naming the themes and producing the final findings/reports(Braun and Clarke, 2006).

DISCUSSION OF RESULTS/FINDINGS

Audiences' reaction to the images of suffering

This study offered a contrasting view to the ones by Moeller (1999). Participants' reactions and responses after seeing the video clips of the suffering victims were in contrast with earlier arguments of a media anthropologist like Moeller (1999). The participants were not only touched by the suffering images they saw but felt pity towards the displaced suffering victims,

which was entirely different from Moeller's (1999) argument that media's constant bombardment of their audiences with images of suffering has led to 'compassion fatigue', especially for depicting the victims as helpless people who could not do anything to help themselves.

Addressing the first objective of the study on how audiences feel after seeing the suffering victims, six of the participants representing the majority were touched by the suffering images they saw. They said that they were 'touched and shocked'. For instances, one of the participants, Michael (28) said "I am deeply touched by the suffering of these people knowing that they are humans like me". Similarly, Kanyin (24) expressed her shock after watching the video clips "I must confess, I never knew that these are what the displaced victims are passing through. It is shocking seeing them starving. It is even more shocking watching as they jostle for few relief materials some of who do not get anything in the end". Similarly, the participants communicated their shock over the suffering victims through expressions such as (OMG! Goshh! Hmmm! God have mercy!), and their body language such as (sighing and shrugging). These expressions are strong indications that participants feel bad about the excruciating conditions of the displaced/suffering victims. On the contrary, only two participants seemed not have been moved emotionally by the images of the suffering victims.

Consequently, the above findings from align with Kyriakidou's (2014a, 2014b) argument that moral value and culture, to a great extent determine how audiences perceive and understand mediated images of suffering on the media. This finding is also consistent with Hoijer's (2004) findings that audiences' response to the suffering images on the media outlets is selective and varies from one audience to another. Again, this is dependent on the type of audience and images shown as response of pity or compassion is more likely to be invoked by the ordeals of victims. The video clips of the displaced victims watched by the participants depicted the 'ideal victims' comprising more of women and children. The ordeals of the suffering victims as depicted in the clips triggered immediate response and sense of pity from the participants.

Thus, contrary to the view fostered by Moeller (1999) about the Western audiences suffering from 'compassion fatigue', the audiences sampled for this study did not show any sign of numb or compassion fatigue. This variation in finding can be attributed to the race and the nationality of the participants. This is because people who come from the same race and cultural background as the sufferers tend to respond more pitifully to their excruciating images on television screen even though they might have been separated by distance and time (eg. Like Nigerians in UK responding to the sufferers of Boko Haram insurgency in Nigeria) and this is where the concept of 'media witnessing' manifested its power and has played a significant role among Nigeria audiences. This study has therefore demonstrated that proximity is not necessarily the case when dealing with the images of the suffering others, but it can vary from individual to individual.

Significantly as we argued above, this is where the concept of media witnessing is embedded. Apart from the suffering of the displaced victims as depicted in the watched video clips by *BBC* and *Sahara TVs,* their journalists represent the first witnesses to the suffering victims while the audiences are the second witnesses. By watching the videos used for the focus group session, participants bore witness to the suffering of the victims of Boko Haram attacks. This can be likened to "an aching sense that something must be done" (Ellis, 2000, p. 11). Similarly, just as Finkielkrant (1998) in Tester (2001) would say, they (participants) will not deny they do not know about the suffering of those suffering victims as denying would be lying to themselves. This is because the media makes us witnesses to the things happening around the

world and the need to act upon it. This is tied to Hoijer's argument that "the experience is that we are seeing the innocent victims of the violence with our own eyes, and the pictures become evidence of their suffering" (Hoijer, 2004, p.515).

Individual and collective moral responsibility

In determining whether the participants had moral responsibility for the suffering victims, the responses of the participants proved positive to a certain extent. This outcome connects the objective of this study to moral responsibility as one of the theoretical underpinnings for this study. This outcome goes a long way in explaining how moral responsibility influences people's behaviour and responses to the suffering victims of the Boko Haram insurgency as depicted in the media. As a theoretical framework, moral responsibility asks "who ought to take care of this?" (Fisscher *et al.* 2003, p.210). Similarly, moral responsibility asks ''who ought to do something about this?''(Huibert, 2013). Consequently, the responses from the participants showed that it was crucial for them do something that would mitigate the plights of the victims.

Majority of the participants (five out of eight) said they would take action if they had the means to remedy the suffering of the victims. Also, even though that most of the participants felt pity and were moved to take action to alleviate the suffering of the victims, women (female participants) were moved more towards taking action that will remedy the immediate needs of the victims unlike their male counterparts who shifted the responsibility to government. According to one of the male participants Micheal (28), "it is the duty of the government to cater for its people; it is government's responsibility and they should face it and do their job". On the same note, Tom (26) said "for me, as an individual I cannot do anything, it is the responsibility of the government". Out of the four male participants three believed it is government's responsibility the remaining one said "for me in my individual responsibility the only thing I can do is to build an NGO, perhaps employ people who will be teaching the affected children in the refugee camp on new skills acquisition as they are a lot of things they can do to sustain themselves instead of waiting for government to supply every of their needs"

On the other hand, women who participated in the group showed sense of more sense of moral responsibility by taking action towards alleviating the suffering of the victims while two participants out of the four women gave themselves tasks of creating awareness, the remaining two said they are willing to make donations to see that they impact on any of the victim no matter how small. For Kanyin (24) "I don't really have the finance to help them but the only thing I can do is to create awareness through social media because we have some people that give out to people like this. And the thing is that people need to be aware of what is going on and not just what we hear. I can create awareness and tell people about it and that is what I can do". This implies that gender affects people's sense of pity and responsibility towards helping the suffering victims.

On the other hand, participants sue for help from selves, government and concerned agencies. This invoked the moral responsibility principles. It has been argued that morally responsible audiences tend to proffer solution to a problem individually or collectively (Paharia et al. 2009; Alicke, 2000).This explains why participants were willing to contribute to the affected victims, including drawing government's attention to the plights of the affected victims. Consequently, on the question of 'who ought to help", participants suggested that in addition to individual donations, government and the United Nations should mitigate the victims sufferings.

Gender and proximity roles in audiences responses to suffering

Responses from the participants show that gender and proximity did not play any significant role because both genders showed similar compassion and pity for the suffering victims. However, in terms of individual responsibilities, women showed more willingness to help the suffering victims unlike the men who urged government and United Nation to rise up to their responsibility. This is akin to Hoijer's (2004) findings in terms of feeling pity from both genders. Hoijer (2004) shows that women feel more pity seeing images of suffering victims than men. Although male participants in this study showed pity, more female respondents showed more sense of pity and willingness to help.

On the participants' proximity to the victims, Tom (26) who lives far from the affected areas/victims and has not visited Nigeria for six years asserts that "when you see a sight like that of course it has to evoke feeling of sympathy and feeling of pity when you see people suffering, it is only natural and in human nature to feel that way. My feeling of pity for the victims stems from human nature and the sight of the video clips we have just seen as well. It is really sympathetic to see how people live in such deplorable condition". Also, Imam (26) who is from one of the communities displaced by the terrorists said "I feel pity because it is sad for someone that has everything, family, job to be taken away not because I am one of the victims but as a human. It is a sad situation, no access to medical care, no school for the children, their means of livelihood destroyed, it is like moving from a good job to become a beggar. It is a sad situation, and anyone anywhere can feel pity about it and not because I am directly from that part of the world".

CONCLUSION

This study has explored the audiences' positions as witnesses to the mediated images of the suffering victims of Boko Haram insurgency in Nigeria. Moeller (1999) had argued that because of too many images of suffering, Western audiences have become compassion fatigued, and that they do not care anymore for the suffering victims. In exploring this on Nigerian audiences' reactions to images of suffering, mediation, moral responsibility and audience witnessing concept guided the discussion of suffering by the audiences.

This study acknowledges that the media is quite influential in inviting the audiences to relate and care for suffering others as they bring the sufferers closer in establishing experiential (witnessing) among the audience to relate emotionally to the excruciating lives of portrayed images. Having watched the video clips of the displaced victims of Boko Haram in Nigeria, it becomes clear that Nigerian audiences react differently to the images of the suffering victims unlike their Western counterparts. Participants showed sense of pity to alleviate the victim's suffering. Some of the participants also mapped out roles for themselves, while also calling on the government and humanitarian agencies to rise up to the challenges posed by the Boko Haram insurgency on the victims. The result of the finding contradicts that of Moeller (1999). The study through data generated has shown that Nigerian Audiences are neither suffering from compassion fatigue nor becoming numb. This has proven that audiences' responses to media images of sufferings are triggered by different factors such as cultural backgrounds.

Limitation and future research

This study relied on the views of eight participants in a focus group discussion preceded by watching video clips of the affected victims of the Boko Haram insurgency. While not undermining the outcome of the study, future research should extend to using mixed methods to critically engage this issue. Through such means, there would be basis for generalisation.

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