

THE IMPACT OF MASS MEDIA ON PUBLIC PERCEPTION REGARDING THE FOOD CRISIS AND FOOD INSECURITY IN NIGERIA

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Abstract

The food crisis is frequently defined by a significant rise in food insecurity, which is instigated by disruptions to food systems such as conflict, climate change, or economic instability. This situation results in a community or population facing a critical food shortage, leading to extensive hunger, malnutrition, and the risk of starvation. In light of this, the paper titled "The impact of mass media on public perception regarding the food crisis and food insecurity in Nigeria" aims to explore the essential role of mass media in shaping public perception and responses to food crises in Nigeria. The study adopts Agenda-Setting theory of the media proposed by McCombs and Shawto guide the work. The research utilized a survey research method along with purposive sampling techniques to derive its conclusions. The findings indicated that mass media in Nigeria has a significant effect on public perception by crafting narratives and influencing behaviors. The study concluded that mass media in Nigeria wields considerable influence over the public's comprehension and reaction to food crises and insecurity by enhancing awareness, fostering accountability, and encouraging dialogue; however, it must do so in a responsible and thorough manner. Consequently, the paper recommends that the mass media should develop more dedicated programs that focus on sustainable farming practices, innovative technologies, and success stories from local farmers to inspire and educate audiences both in Nigeria and globally.

KEYWORDS: Food crises, Famine, mass media, public perception, food security and Food insecurity:

1.1 INTRODUCTION

The absence of food security, often referred to as food insecurity, represents a significant challenge that is intricately linked to hunger and malnutrition. This issue has remained a central concern for numerous organizations and researchers (Adebayo, Adeola, & Bolaji, 2020). Similar to many nations globally, Nigeria faces the dual challenges of hunger and health issues that arise directly or indirectly from food waste and loss. Additionally, the Boko Haram insurgency, which commenced in 2009, has resulted in the displacement of millions. This ongoing conflict hampers agricultural activities, limits access to markets, and devastates infrastructure, leading to many displaced individuals residing in overcrowded camps with insufficient food resources (Ibrahim, Abdullahi, & Yusuf, 2021).

The recent flooding in the nation has exacerbated the situation to crisis levels (Ibrahim, Abdullahi, & Yusuf 2021). Food waste, spoilage, and loss represent approximately 40% of all food produced, resulting in a multitude of additional challenges such as poverty, environmental degradation, and life-threatening diseases that impose a significant economic burden on the nation (Environ & Pacetti 2012). These, among others, are some of the major challenges facing humanity today.

However, mass media have the potential to greatly influence public perception regarding food crises and insecurity in Nigeria by crafting narratives, swaying public opinion, and possibly impacting

policy responses. This includes the degree of attention allocated and the viewpoints expressed, as well as how the public comprehends the issue and its possible solutions (NiyiyonguNgusha, 2025). They can serve as an essential connection among the government, citizens, and humanitarian organizations through either sensationalism or effective communication. This encompasses the promotion of sustainable agricultural practices and nutritional awareness, which would have a beneficial effect on food security.

Media outlets, including newspapers, radio, and television, and online platforms, can play a significant role in emphasizing the seriousness of food insecurity, thus elevating it to a major public concern. They have the ability to facilitate discussions among the government, private sector, and civil society, while also promoting collaborative initiatives to tackle the crisis by delivering timely information regarding food prices, availability, and humanitarian assistance. This empowers individuals and communities to make well-informed choices (Soola, & Alowode, 2017).

It is anticipated that, in order to achieve this target goal, the media must guarantee that their reporting is both balanced and precise to avoid exacerbating the situation, thereby rendering their role in Nigeria's food crisis quite complex. Although media coverage may occasionally place undue emphasis on specific issues in various regions instead of focusing on the food insecurity challenges encountered in other areas of the country, such as Nigeria, this could have significantly shaped public opinion on issues like food crises and insecurity. Therefore, it is essential for the mass media to address the root causes of food insecurity in Nigeria to attain food security (Galie 2019, p.156).

1.2 Statement of problem

The media function as a significant instrument for spreading information, enhancing awareness as well as promoting policy reforms that can advance food security and aid in achieving the global objective of Zero Hunger in Nigeria (Bittner, 2019). This mass media includes a range of platforms, such as television, radio, print, and digital media, all of which can engage various audiences and encourage discussions regarding food crises in Nigeria. The media's role in tackling essential social challenges has grown increasingly important, particularly concerning food security and hunger.

Researchers such as Afzal, Ahmad, Imran, Khan, Zubair, Akram, and Khalid (2023), along with Beckmann (2021) and Aschemann-Witzel et al. (2022), generally concur that mass media plays a crucial role in shaping public perception regarding the food crisis and food insecurity in Nigeria, although the specifics of this influence are subject to discussion. The way media frames these topics can affect public opinion, influence policy decisions, and even alter individual behaviors concerning food. They acknowledge that media has the potential to either exacerbate or mitigate conflicts associated with food security, contingent upon the framing techniques employed. For instance, conflict-sensitive reporting, which focuses on dialogue and reconciliation, can foster a more constructive public discourse surrounding food-related matters.

Nonetheless, while the media exerts a considerable influence on the public's perception of the food crisis in Nigeria, it is essential to acknowledge the intricacies of this relationship. Media framing, agenda-setting, and various other factors contribute to the formation of public understanding and reactions to food insecurity. The challenge lies in the fact that, despite the profound effects of food insecurity in Nigeria, there exist a lack of comprehension regarding how mass media shapes public perception of this crisis, and how such perceptions affect both individual and collective responses. Consequently, this research will primarily concentrate on the vital role of media framing and its impact on public awareness and policy responses related to the food crisis and food insecurity in Nigeria.

1.3 Objectives of the Study

From the statement of problem, the following objectives are generated:

1. To explore the basic role of mass media in promoting food crises and security in Nigeria
2. To investigate the extent to which media messages has gone in shaping public opinion.
3. To identify the major factors responsible for food crises and insecurity in Nigeria.

1.4 Research question

This research work seeks to provide answers to the following questions:

1. To are the basic roles of mass media in promoting food crises and security in Nigeria?
2. To what extent has the media messages gone in shaping public opinion?
3. What are major factors responsible for food crises and insecurity in Nigeria?

1.5 Conceptual Clarification

Mass media: Mass media refers to technology designed to engage a large audience. In this research, it pertains to the main channels of communication utilized to connect with the overwhelming majority of the general populace.

Public perception: Public perception denotes the overall manner in which the public perceives and comprehends a subject, which may include an individual, organization, product, or issue. It includes the shared opinions, beliefs, and attitudes of a significant number of individuals. Public perception is influenced by multiple factors, such as media reporting, personal experiences, and information obtained from reliable sources.

Food security: Food security refers to the condition in which every individual, at all times, possesses both physical and economic access to an adequate supply of safe and nutritious food that satisfies their dietary requirements and preferences for a healthy and active lifestyle. It encompasses not only the availability of sufficient food but also the assurance that it is accessible, affordable, and of high quality.

Food crises: Food crises represent significant disturbances to food systems, resulting in extensive hunger and malnutrition, particularly affecting the most at-risk populations. These crises arise from a complicated interaction of various factors, such as conflict, climate change, economic shocks, and pandemics. Currently, millions of individuals around the globe are experiencing severe food insecurity, with some nearing starvation.

Famine: Famine denotes a critical and extensive lack of food resources, resulting in malnutrition, starvation, and mortality. It represents the most severe category of hunger crisis, as outlined by the IPC food insecurity scale.

Food insecurity: Food insecurity, commonly referred to as "hunger," occurs when an individual does not have consistent access to sufficient nutritious food necessary for healthy growth and development.

2.0 LITERATURE REVIEW

Previous research, such as that conducted by Bahn (2020) and Hwalla&Labban (2021), has categorized the issue of food security into four key components: accessibility, availability, utilization, and stability. Their analysis examines food security from a temporal, global, and international standpoint, emphasizing the importance of understanding the historical context of the region and its connection to food security. Furthermore, we adopt an international perspective, focusing on the roles of governmental organizations, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), and various other entities. This study also

addresses the impact of international organizations on local food security, considering factors such as local conflicts, economic shocks, and other human-induced effects.

As stated in the Global Report on Food Crises for 2022 (World Food Programme, Citation, 2022), the primary factors contributing to the increase in acute food insecurity in 2021 were conflict, extreme weather conditions, and economic shocks. These factors are often interrelated and mutually reinforcing, complicating the identification of the exact cause for each food crisis.

According to the Global Food Security Index (Global Food Security Index, Citation2021), Africa's central area suffers from a food crisis. Like other African countries, the Sahel region faces a volatile climate. The unstable climate situation exacerbates the problem of food insecurity in the Sahel. The population in the Sahel is primarily rural, and agriculture is heavily reliant on weather conditions (Thyberg 2017). Therefore, any change in the climate will impact agriculture and the economic performance of these areas. A critical issue common to all Sahel countries is a lack of water.

Yobom (2020) discovered that the trend of annual minimum temperatures rose significantly during the rainy season across all nations. In the dry season, every country observed a notable increase in maximum temperatures. This phenomenon has a direct effect on the population and agricultural development in these nations. The second indicator of climate change in the Sahelian region is precipitation. There exists a strong correlation between precipitation and temperature in this area, as rainfall can be influenced by temperature during the rainy season. The Sahel experiences a diverse range of precipitation levels. The distribution of precipitation poses challenges not only among countries but also within individual nations.

2.1 Concept of Food

In general, humans require food for survival, which leads to the exploration of various delicacies that either please the palate or provide temporary gratification (Aschemann-Witzel 2022). Food can be defined as any substance that is ingested to offer nutritional support to the body. Typically, it originates from plants or animals and contains vital nutrients, including carbohydrates, fats, proteins, vitamins, and minerals. This substance is consumed by an organism and absorbed by its cells to generate energy, sustain life, or promote growth. Plants, algae, and certain microorganisms (such as bacteria) produce their own food (nutrients) through the process of photosynthesis, whereas animals and the majority of other organisms acquire food by consuming other organisms or organic materials (Smithsonian Science Education Center, 2021), which is crucial for the growth and development of plants.

Food, defined as a substance ingested to supply nutritional support and energy to an organism, can be categorized as raw, processed, or formulated, and is consumed orally by animals for purposes of growth, health, or enjoyment. Consequently, food serves as a vital source of energy for the body, which is necessary to sustain daily activities and produce essential substances, thereby directly influencing the human body and its functionality. Therefore, it is posited that the primary element impacting human health and happiness is the composition or contents of food (Chauhan &Khandelwal, 2023).

Consequently, food is defined as any substance (typically derived from animal or plant sources) that contains nourishing and nutritive elements such as carbohydrates, fats, proteins, essential minerals, and vitamins, which, when consumed and processed through digestion, sustain life, produce energy, and support the growth, maintenance, and health of the body.

Food can be categorized based on their chemical properties, functions, essentiality, concentration, and nutritive value. In other words, according to their chemical composition, they encompass

carbohydrates, vitamins, proteins, dietary fiber, fats, water, and minerals; based on their role in the body, we classify them as energy-giving foods, body-building foods, and protective foods; and in terms of their chemical properties, they are classified as organic and inorganic nutrients. Humans depend on both plant and animal sources for their food. Plant-based food sources are further divided into seeds, fruits, vegetables, legumes, grains, and nuts (Fardet, 2017).

2.1.2 Food production in Nigeria

According to Ashley, (2016), Nigeria possesses a substantial agricultural sector, where food production plays a crucial role in its GDP and provides employment for a significant segment of the workforce. The nation is a prominent producer of numerous crops such as cassava, yam, maize, sorghum, rice, and millet.

To Ashley, the Key Aspects of Food Production in Nigeria include:

Major Crops like: Cassava, yam, maize, sorghum, rice, and millet are the most important crops, covering a large portion of cultivated land.

Cash Crops: Cocoa, rubber, cotton, and oil palm are also grown extensively, with cocoa being a significant export.

Livestock and Fishing: While crop production is the largest subsector, livestock and fishing also contribute to the overall food production system.

Agricultural Land: Nigeria has a substantial amount of arable land, with millions of hectares dedicated to various crops and livestock grazing.

Regional Variations: Different regions focus on specific crops. For example, the North Central zone is known for high production of starchy roots and tubers, while the South East and South-South zones produce more cassava and yam and,

Government Initiatives: The government has implemented programs like the Anchor Borrowers Program to boost domestic rice production (Ashley, 2016).

2.1.3 Causes of Low Food production in Nigeria

Nigeria's agricultural output encounters a variety of challenges, such as climate change, insecurity, insufficient infrastructure, and limited access to essential inputs like fertilizers and enhanced seeds. These factors result in low yields, elevated production costs, and ultimately contribute to food insecurity.

- **Climate Change and Environmental Degradation:**

Drought and Desertification: Parts of Nigeria are experiencing desertification and drought, reducing arable land and impacting crop yields.

Flooding: Conversely, other areas face severe flooding, destroying crops and infrastructure.

Soil Degradation: Poor farming practices and lack of soil conservation methods lead to soil erosion and reduced fertility.

- **Insecurity and Conflict:**

Farmer-Herder Conflicts: Conflicts between nomadic herders and settled farmers over land and resources disrupt agricultural activities and displace communities.

Insurgency: In the northeast, Boko Haram insurgency disrupts farming and humanitarian assistance, leading to food shortages and displacement.

- **Infrastructure Deficiencies:**

Poor Roads:Inadequate road networks hinder the transportation of agricultural produce to markets, leading to spoilage and high post-harvest losses.

Lack of Storage Facilities: Limited storage facilities contribute to post-harvest losses, especially for perishable goods.

Inadequate Irrigation: Insufficient irrigation systems limit agricultural productivity, particularly in arid regions.

- **Input Issues:**

Limited Access to Fertilizers and Improved Seeds: Farmers often face shortages of essential inputs like fertilizers and high-quality seeds, leading to low yields.

High Input Costs:The cost of agricultural inputs can be prohibitive for many smallholder farmers.

Other Factors are:

- ✓ **Low Mechanization:** Low levels of mechanization in agriculture limit productivity and efficiency.
- ✓ **Limited Access to Finance:** Farmers often struggle to access credit and financial services, hindering investment in their farms.
- ✓ **Weak Extension Services:** Limited access to agricultural extension services means farmers may not have access to the latest information and technologies.
- ✓ **High Post-Harvest Losses:** Inefficient harvesting, handling, and storage practices result in significant post-harvest losses, impacting food availability.
- ✓ **Weak Market Access:** Poor access to markets and inadequate market information hinders farmers' ability to sell their produce at fair prices.
- ✓ **Climate Change Adaptation:** Farmers need support to adapt to the changing climate through the adoption of climate-smart agricultural practices.
- ✓ **Rapid Population Growth:** The increasing population puts pressure on food production and resources.
- ✓ **Policy and Regulatory Issues:** Complex land tenure systems and inconsistent government policies can also hinder agricultural development.

These, among other factors, present challenges that necessitate a multi-faceted approach involving the mass media, government, private sector, and civil society to tackle. This includes investments in infrastructure, enhanced access to inputs and financing, support for climate-smart agriculture, and conflict resolution.

2.2 Food security

The term 'food security', which was first introduced at the World Food Summit in 1996, pertains to the physical, social, and economic ability to access adequate, safe, and nutritious food consistently, in order to satisfy dietary requirements and food preferences for a healthy and active lifestyle (Afzal, Ahmad, Imran, Khan, Zubair, Akram& Khalid, 2023).

Food security shifts focus from limited perspectives that view hunger merely as a consequence of insufficient global food production – exemplified by the Malthusian theory – and recognizes that, despite the availability of sufficient food worldwide, individuals suffering from malnutrition are unable to 'access' this food due to social and political factors that disempower and marginalize them (Galie, 2019).

Food security is characterized as a condition in which all individuals, at all times, possess physical, social, and economic access to adequate, safe, and nutritious food that fulfills their dietary

needs and food preferences for a healthy and active life. Food security is a major concern that holds significant interest for practitioners, scholars, and policymakers worldwide. Food insecurity is also crucial due to its tangible impact on every facet of social life.

As noted by Afzal (2023), food security encompasses various elements such as appropriate food options, equitable pricing, improvements in food safety, access to open and competitive markets, nutritious diets, and a more sustainable food supply chain. Food security represents a complex interplay of issues related to food utilization, accessibility, and availability.

It is achieved when all individuals, at all times, have physical, social, and economic access to adequate, safe, and nutritious food that satisfies their dietary requirements and food preferences for a healthy and active lifestyle (FAO, 1996 cited in Frongillo, 2022).

Moreover, the concept of food security necessitates that food is both nutritious and fulfills dietary requirements. The achievement of food security, whether for individuals or communities, is not possible without sufficient nutritious food (Bahn, 2021). Consequently, food security is often referred to as "food and nutrition security," abbreviated as FNS, which combines the ideas to highlight the importance of both food and health needs for a more comprehensive understanding.

2.3 Food Insecurity

The concerning increases in food insecurity within Nigeria calls for immediate intervention. In 2020, it was reported that approximately 21.4% of Nigerian households faced severe food shortages (Osabohien et al., 2020a). Furthermore, Erokhin and Gao (2020) indicated that 50% of the Nigerian populace lives beneath the poverty threshold of 1.9 USD. According to the Global Food Security Index (GFSI), Nigeria was positioned 94th out of 113 countries in 2019, achieving a score of 48.4 out of 100, which places it behind Ethiopia, Niger, and Cameroon (Ayinde et al., 2020). Additionally, Nigeria has surpassed India to become the most impoverished nation globally (Ayinde et al., 2020).

Otekunrin et al. (2019) and Amzat and Aminu (2020) reported that food insecurity in the country is aggravated by rapid population growth; they predicted that Nigeria's population would grow to 400 million people by 2050. The country therefore needs to check her population growth if food security is to be improved. The Kano River Irrigation Project (KRIP) is one of the pioneer projects established by the Federal government of Nigeria in 1970 (Ahmad, 2018).

In recent decades, however, the inadequate local rice production to satisfy local consumption has become a notable food insecurity concern (Seck et al., 2012; Matemilola, 2017). The historical over-reliance on rain-fed agriculture, combined with minimal investments in irrigated rice production, forces the country to depend significantly on rice imports to fulfill the increasing demand (Uduma et al., 2016). Prior research has examined food security from multiple perspectives, including governmental involvement, climate change, and the necessity for food and related resources for human consumption (Ayinde et al., 2020).

2.3.1 Food Insecurity Issues

Conflict is a significant factor contributing to severe food insecurity. Food security and violent conflict share a bi-directional relationship (Martin-Shields & Stojetz, Citation 2019). Nutritional status, agricultural output, coping mechanisms, and consumption patterns are all affected by violent conflict. Violent conflict leads to the displacement of individuals. Conflicts adversely affect the height of children and adolescents, impacting the nutritional status of both boys and girls equally (Acharya et al.,

Citation2020). Moreover, conflicts impose economic production costs from two perspectives (Arias et al., Citation2019).

To begin with, conflicts have a direct detrimental effect on public assets, private investments, and human resources. Consequently, the productivity in these areas experiences a significant decline (Justino&Verwimp, Citation2013).

Furthermore, conflicts can adversely affect agricultural output by imposing regulations, levying taxes on households and production, and compelling families to cultivate specific crops (Arjona, 2016; Korf, 2004).

Lastly, economic shocks represent another factor that intensifies food insecurity. Globally, economies continue to face challenges in recovering from the severe repercussions of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Nevertheless, numerous individuals continue to encounter difficulties in returning to work and revitalizing their businesses as a consequence of the pandemic. The economic challenges and disruptions in the supply chain related to the pandemic have led to increased global commodity prices, which in turn restrict household access to food in numerous countries facing food insecurity. A significant number of African nations are reliant on food imports. The public's demand for action during pandemics has compelled governments to pursue emergency food assistance; however, some of these initiatives have been marred by extensive corruption scandals and substandard food quality.

Moreover, various countries have adopted agricultural policies that prioritize exports from commercial agricultural sectors to enhance the sector's contribution to GDP and improve the balance of payments. These policies have rendered subsistence farming illegal and have disheartened many small family farms, ultimately leading to their exit from production (Mukiibi, 2020).

2.3.2 Effects of Food insecurity in Nigeria

Food Scarcity: Food scarcity, also known as food insecurity, denotes a condition in which a population does not have reliable access to adequate, safe, and nutritious food. This is a multifaceted problem influenced by numerous factors such as conflict, climate change, economic instability, and insufficient agricultural productivity. Nigeria, especially in the northeast region, is currently confronting a significant food crisis, with millions suffering from severe hunger and malnutrition.

Rising Food Prices: The increasing cost of food is a major issue in Nigeria, as inflation has reached concerning levels, severely affecting low-income families. This crisis is driven by various factors, such as economic difficulties, insecurity, and the repercussions of the COVID-19 pandemic along with the Russia-Ukraine conflict.

Malnutrition and Hunger: Malnutrition and hunger are interrelated global challenges that have serious repercussions, especially for at-risk groups such as children. Hunger denotes a condition of insufficient food availability, whereas malnutrition pertains to the inadequacies, surpluses, or imbalances in an individual's nutrient consumption. Both conditions can result in numerous health complications, with malnutrition being a significant factor in child mortality and developmental challenges.

Social Instability: Social instability denotes a condition in which a society undergoes a disintegration of its typical operations and order, resulting in disturbances within social frameworks, institutions, and interactions. This phenomenon may present itself through heightened crime rates, political turmoil, economic disparity, and social agitation.

2.4.0 Food Lost/Waste in Nigeria

Nigeria experiences a considerable loss in its food production, with estimates varying between 30% and 50% (Atanga 2015). This loss, especially concerning fresh produce, poses a significant issue considering the elevated rates of poverty and hunger within the nation. The food that is wasted, which is valued at trillions of Naira each year, results from issues such as inadequate storage, insufficient transportation, and a lack of proper cold chain infrastructure. A substantial number of Nigerians are confronted with serious malnutrition and food insecurity.

These issues arise due to climate change, insecurity, poverty, and systemic corruption. Additionally, food loss, spoilage, and waste play significant roles. Approximately 25–40% of the food produced globally to nourish people is ultimately not consumed by them (Matemilola and Elegbede, 2017). This challenge is widespread and affects all food sources, whether they are plant-based or animal-based, albeit to different extents (Matemilola and Elegbede, 2017).

In Nigeria, it has come to light that a considerable amount of food is wasted both prior to and following storage, with losses reaching 20 to 30% of all grains, 30 to 50% of roots and tubers, and an even higher percentage of fruits and vegetables (Abbas, 2018). In 2020, the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development of Nigeria indicated that around 700,000 tons of tomatoes are wasted annually (Agricultural Financing and Food Production in Nigeria, 2022).

According to Lipinski et al. (2016), the term food loss and waste refers to plants and animals cultivated or harvested with the intention of human consumption, yet ultimately not consumed by humans. This term signifies any stage in the food value chain where edible food intended for human consumption loses its mass caloric content or nutritional value (Lipinski et al., 2016). Food loss specifically pertains to the reduction in the quantity or quality of food throughout the supply chain, from the point of harvest up to, but not including, the retail phase. It encompasses losses that occur during production, post-harvest handling, storage, processing, and transportation. Various factors can contribute to food loss, including inadequate infrastructure, substandard handling practices, pests, and diseases.

Worldwide, approximately 14% of food, valued at an estimated USD 400 billion, is lost from the point of harvest up to, but not including, retail (Umeseaka, 2021). In contrast, food waste specifically denotes the reduction in the quantity or quality of food that takes place at the retail and consumer levels. This includes the disposal or loss of edible food that remains suitable for human consumption. Food waste occurs when retailers dispose of unsold or expired items, consumers discard leftovers or food that has spoiled, and food is not consumed prior to its expiration date.

Approximately 17% more food is wasted at the retail and consumer levels in comparison to the earlier stages of the supply chain (FAO, 2023). This significant level of loss and waste is prevalent throughout the food value chain. A thorough examination of the pathways our food takes until it is consumed will uncover the dynamics of food loss and waste from farm to plate. Food loss and waste typically happen during production, storage, processing, distribution, and consumption.

2.4.1 Factors Responsible for Food Loss and Waste

The problem of food loss signifies a waste of scarce natural resources, which could exacerbate poverty and lead to food and nutrition insecurity in several Sub-Saharan African nations, including Nigeria (Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2021). One of the primary reasons for food waste in Nigeria is the lack of adequate storage facilities. To prevent the degradation of agricultural products, appropriate storage conditions must be established (Gustavsson et al., 2011).

For instance, soft and leafy fruits and vegetables necessitate specific storage environments. They are particularly susceptible to spoilage due to variations in temperature and the presence of pests, such as rodents and insects, as well as blight in storage areas. Flood disasters, in particular, seem to be on the rise, threatening global food security, especially in developing countries such as Nigeria. Research suggests that the frequency and extent of floods may increase substantially in the future (Daniel Idoko, 2016).

In recent decades, the frequency and severity of floods and other factors such as soil erosion, water management, soil quality, and both air and water pollution coupled with elements such as climate, and biodiversity in Nigeria have intensified, significantly affected food production across the nation (Daniel Idoko, 2016). Concerns regarding climate change, the reduction of greenhouse gases (GHG), and the adoption of renewable energy sources represent only a fraction of the numerous challenges associated with environmental sustainability (Ghosh et al., 2019). It is estimated that Nigeria loses and wastes 40% of its annual food production, which corresponds to 31% of the total land use in the country.

Furthermore, the anxiety regarding the capacity of agriculture to sustain the ever-growing global population has been prevalent for an extended period as the issues continue to be a significant focus on the international agenda today. One of the Millennium Development Goals established by the United Nations in 2000 aimed to alleviate poverty and hunger. A key objective was to decrease the percentage of individuals experiencing hunger from 1990 to 2015 (Rosegrant & Cline, 2003).

2.5.0 Public perception on food crises in Nigeria

The food crisis in Nigeria is widely regarded by the public as a significant and escalating issue that has extensive implications (Salau, 2017). It is viewed as a crisis that impacts every segment of society, not solely the impoverished, and is contributing to social instability and conflict. There is a growing concern among the populace regarding the availability, accessibility, and affordability of food, as increasing prices and diminishing supplies are leading to widespread anxiety and hardship.

2.5.1 How the public perceives the food crisis

A. Widespread Anxiety and Fear

The ongoing crisis is instilling a profound sense of fear and uncertainty regarding the future, leading many Nigerians to be anxious about the source of their next meal. The escalating prices of food are a significant worry, as numerous individuals report that they can no longer afford essential staples. This anxiety is not confined to the impoverished; even individuals with higher incomes are discovering it increasingly challenging to sustain their former levels of food consumption.

B. Impact on Social Stability

The food crisis is regarded as a significant factor contributing to social unrest and conflict. When individuals cannot fulfill their fundamental needs, it may incite widespread anger and frustration, which can lead to protests and various forms of social disruption. Additionally, the crisis is intensifying existing conflicts, especially those associated with resource scarcity and competition for land.

C. Impact on Livelihoods

The ongoing crisis is causing significant disruptions to livelihoods in multiple sectors, particularly in agriculture. Farmers are encountering difficulties stemming from insecurity, climate change, and restricted access to essential inputs, which results in diminished production and increased food prices.

Consequently, this situation adversely impacts the earnings of farmers and other businesses related to food, thereby exacerbating poverty and hardship.

D. Concerns about Government Response

Numerous Nigerians express criticism regarding the government's management of the food crisis, pointing to policy inconsistency, inadequate execution, and insufficient intervention measures. There is an increasing belief that the government is failing to adequately tackle the underlying issues contributing to the crisis. Additionally, some individuals contend that government actions, including the elimination of fuel subsidies, have worsened the situation by driving up transportation expenses and food costs.

E. Impact on Nutrition

The ongoing food crisis is severely affecting the nutritional well-being of numerous Nigerians, especially children. Alarming high levels of malnutrition, such as stunting, wasting, and underweight, have been observed in children under the age of five. This situation is resulting in enduring health issues and developmental setbacks.

In a nutshell, the Nigerian populace perceives the food crisis as a significant and complex issue that has extensive implications for individuals, communities, and the nation at large. This crisis is marked by escalating food prices, diminished availability, and an increasing sense of insecurity and apprehension, with many believing that the government is insufficiently addressing the underlying causes.

2.6.0 Mass Media and Food Crises/Security in Nigeria

Media serves as a method for conveying messages to a specific audience. Conversely, mass media denotes a technological system, including radio, television, and newspapers, which is predominantly utilized as the main channel of communication to engage with a large segment of the population, namely the general public. In simpler terms, mass media represents the tools that individuals utilize to interact with others, functioning as a medium that disseminates information.

According to Musaeva (2021) "Mass media" is a deceptively simple term encompassing a countless array of institutions and individuals who differ in purpose, scope, method, and cultural context. To him the mass media include all forms of information communicated to large groups of people, from a handmade sign to an international news network. Mass media incorporates channels or networks used to communicate to people either in audio, visual, audiovisual, written, or orally.

Other scholars like Ibrahim, Abdullahi, & Yusuf, (2021). refer to mass media as; technologies used to disseminate information to a wide audience. The key function of mass media is to communicate various messages through television, movies, advertising, radio, the internet, magazines, and newspapers. Mass media informs, educates, and entertains people in a wide variety of ways.

As mentioned by Tafazzoli, & Bayat (2015) mass media has some advantage and sources that these advantages are resulted from the identity and function of new media that are mostly mass media. Broadcast media transmit information electronically via media such as films, radio, recorded music, or television. Digital media comprises both Internet and mobile mass communication. Internet media comprise such services as email, social media sites, websites, and Internet-based radio and television.

Mass media refers to technology designed to engage a large audience. It serves as the main channel of communication aimed at reaching the vast majority of the public. The most prevalent platforms for mass media include newspapers, magazines, radio, television, and the Internet. The general public usually depends on mass media for information about political matters, health concerns, economic topics, social issues, entertainment, and news.

Adams, & Ahmad (2023) stated that mass media refers to the communication channels that are used to transmit information and messages to a large audience simultaneously. These channels include various forms of media, such as television, radio, print publications, and internet-based platforms. Mass media plays a significant role in shaping public opinion, disseminating news, and influencing social, cultural, and political discourse.

2.6.1 Roles of Mass Media in promoting food security in Nigeria

Food security, as defined by the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), refers to the condition in which "all people, at all times, have physical, social, and economic access to sufficient, safe, and nutritious food." This concept is vital for human survival and development. The mass media significantly contributes to the promotion of food security by shaping public awareness, influencing government policies, and affecting food-related behaviors. Due to its capacity to disseminate information broadly, the media serves as an effective instrument in combating food insecurity and ensuring that food-related matters are thoroughly addressed (Munene and Kebenei (2021).

In Nigeria, the mass media holds a crucial position in influencing public perception and reactions to food crises and insecurity, which are intensified by conflict, climate change, and economic instability. The media's reporting on these matters can affect policy decisions, donor assistance, and the general public dialogue regarding food security. For instance, in 2023, the UN World Food Programme indicated that 33.1 million Nigerians were anticipated to encounter severe food shortages during the lean season, with the Northeast region shouldering a significant burden.

The media has been instrumental in bringing attention to this crisis and advocating for greater international assistance. In 2024, the Federal University of Agriculture, Abeokuta, organized an event focused on Nigeria's food crisis, emphasizing the vital importance of Public Relations in influencing the agricultural discourse and promoting collaboration. Additionally, the media has covered the effects of conflict and climate change on food security, especially in the Northeast, where millions have been uprooted and their means of livelihood have been severely affected.

Another key informative function of mass media is to inform the public regarding sustainable agricultural practices and cutting-edge technologies that can improve food production. By equipping farmers with insights on crop management, pest control, and climate-smart strategies, media organizations can assist in enhancing yields and minimizing losses. For example, initiatives that showcase success stories of local farmers employing sustainable methods can motivate others to embrace similar practices, thereby ultimately aiding in the enhancement of food availability (Ogunjimi, 2021).

Additionally, mass media serves a vital function in fostering nutritional awareness and encouraging healthy eating practices. Through the dissemination of nutritional information and recipes that focus on local foods, the media can address malnutrition and advocate for a varied diet. Initiatives that underscore the significance of micronutrients and balanced diets can greatly affect public attitudes and behaviors concerning food selections (Nigerian Institute of Food Science and Technology, 2022).

Furthermore, mass media serves as a watchdog by ensuring that both government and private sector stakeholders are held accountable for their food policies and practices. Investigative journalism plays a crucial role in revealing problems associated with food wastage, corruption in food distribution, and disparities in resource access. Thus, they serve as an essential platform for raising public awareness about food security challenges, such as food shortages, malnutrition, and hunger. This type of reporting is vital for promoting policy reforms designed to eradicate hunger and guarantee fair access to food (Food and Agriculture Organization, 2023).

In summary, the mass media plays a vital role in promoting food security and advancing the goal of Zero Hunger in Nigeria. By educating the public on sustainable agricultural practices and nutritional awareness, media platforms empower individuals and communities to make informed choices. They also serve as a critical watchdog, holding stakeholders accountable and advocating for policy changes that address food insecurity. Through targeted campaigns and informative content, mass media fosters dialogue and collaboration among various sectors, driving collective action. Ultimately, leveraging the power of mass media can significantly contribute to a more sustainable and equitable food system in Nigeria, enhancing resilience against hunger

2.6.2 Effect of promoting food security in Nigeria

Enhancing food security in Nigeria is crucial to the nation's development strategy, considering its substantial population and the difficulties it encounters in food production, distribution, and accessibility. Therefore, the impact of implementing food security initiatives in Nigeria carries significant social, economic, and health consequences, as it tackles malnutrition, encourages economic growth, and promotes overall societal stability. Various researchers, including Adeyemo and Adeagbo (2023), have noted the effects of advancing food security in Nigeria, which encompass the following:

Reduction in Malnutrition and Improved Public Health

Enhancing food security directly tackles the pervasive issue of malnutrition that impacts millions of Nigerians, especially children and at-risk groups. As indicated by reports from the United Nations, Nigeria is confronted with significant malnutrition issues, with stunting, wasting, and underweight conditions being common among children under the age of five. By guaranteeing that all individuals have access to adequate and nutritious food, these initiatives mitigate health complications associated with malnutrition, including hindered cognitive development, compromised immune systems, and increased vulnerability to illnesses. Better nutrition also leads to improved physical and mental capabilities, resulting in a healthier and more productive populace.

Enhanced Agricultural Productivity

Efforts to promote food security often include strategies to boost agricultural productivity in Nigeria. This involves the adoption of modern farming technologies, improved seed varieties, and climate-smart agriculture practices. These initiatives enable farmers to increase crop yields, diversify production, and reduce post-harvest losses. The effect of such interventions is critical, as agriculture remains a significant contributor to Nigeria's economy, employing about 70% of the rural population. When farmers can produce more efficiently and sustainably, food availability increases, reducing dependence on food imports and enhancing national food sovereignty.

Poverty Reduction and Economic Growth

Food security is intricately connected to poverty alleviation, given that agriculture and food-related industries serve as significant income sources for millions of Nigerians. By fostering food security

through the advancement of agriculture, job opportunities are generated, especially in rural regions where poverty is most prevalent.

Moreover, local food production diminishes the reliance on costly food imports, preserving foreign exchange reserves and bolstering Nigeria's economy. As food security enhances, disposable incomes rise, allowing families to allocate resources towards education, healthcare, and other vital needs.

Social Stability and Conflict Mitigation

Food insecurity frequently serves as a catalyst for social unrest, especially in areas experiencing significant food shortages. In Nigeria, food insecurity has played a role in escalating tensions and conflicts, particularly in regions impacted by Boko Haram insurgencies, herder-farmer disputes, and banditry in the North. By enhancing food security, both the government and non-governmental organizations can address the underlying factors contributing to these conflicts.

Promotion of Sustainable Development

Advancing food security is in harmony with the overarching objectives of sustainable development in Nigeria. Sustainable agricultural methods, frequently incorporated into food security initiatives, safeguard the environment by preserving soil fertility, optimizing water resource management, and minimizing greenhouse gas emissions. Moreover, zero hunger initiatives enhance food distribution networks and ensure fair access to food, promoting social inclusion and diminishing inequalities, which are essential components. These methods enhance long-term food production, guaranteeing that future generations will have adequate access to food.

3.0 METHODOLOGY THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

3.1 Methodology: The research utilized a survey research method in conjunction with a purposive sampling technique to derive the findings, during which a total of 400 questionnaires were distributed. Ultimately, 10 questionnaires were unaccounted for, resulting in 390 returned questionnaires.

3.2 Theoretical Framework: The impact of mass media on public perception regarding the food crisis and food insecurity in Nigeria is guided by agenda-setting theory of the media proposed by McCombs and Shaw, who suggests that the media's ability to influence what the public thinks about is a powerful force. To these scholars, by focusing on specific issues, the media can shape public perception of their importance (Baran, & Davis, 2006).

According to their research, in the realm of food insecurity, when the media regularly covers the topic, it can enhance public awareness of the issue and increase the likelihood of it being viewed as a serious concern. The media's portrayal of food crises in Nigeria can profoundly affect public perception, as suggested by the agenda-setting theory. Through persistent reporting on food insecurity, the media can raise its profile as a significant public issue, shaping what citizens deem important and possibly encouraging action from policymakers. This influence is vital in a nation where food insecurity poses a substantial challenge.

The agenda-setting theory posits that the media has the ability to shape public perception by deciding which issues are deemed significant and deserving of attention. By concentrating on particular elements of the food crisis, including shortages, price increases, or conflicts between farmers and herders, the media can affect what the public views as the most urgent concerns. For instance, media reports on food poisoning linked to imported apples, as highlighted in a certain study, resulted in a phase of caution among Nigerians, illustrating the media's capacity to sway consumer behavior.

Moreover, the media's role in shaping public perception of food crisis in Nigeria is significant, as they assist in keeping the government accountable and ensuring that food security is prioritized as a core responsibility. Through agenda-setting, the media can influence what issues the public focuses on, impacting public opinion and policy decisions related to food security.

This theory is pertinent to the research in that the media not only informs the public but also shapes their perceptions regarding what is significant to understand, thereby establishing an agenda for our thoughts and guiding us on what appears to be important. In the context of this study, the media must not hesitate to take the lead in setting the agenda for public discourse, particularly concerning agricultural mechanization in Nigeria.

4.0 STUDY FINDINGS

Findings from the study revealed that:

1. In Nigeria, mass media plays a crucial role in shaping public perception by influencing narratives and actions.
2. Research shows that broadcast media can greatly influence public awareness regarding food security matters and encourage vigilance within the community.
3. Effective communication, including dedicated programs on sustainable farming and empowering farmers, is crucial for fostering a more resilient food system
4. The mass media has the capacity to educate the public about sustainable agricultural practices and innovative technologies that can enhance food production
5. Findings have shown that insufficient storage facilities are among the primary contributors to food waste in Nigeria.
6. Factors like, conflict, climate change, economic shocks, and pandemics are the major causes of food crises in Nigeria.
7. Ultimately, the study has disclosed that millions of individuals across the globe are presently experiencing severe food insecurity, with some teetering on the edge of starvation.

5.0 CONCLUSION

Based on the findings in above, the paper concludes that; the mass media plays a complex role in shaping public perception regarding food crises and food insecurity in Nigeria. It serves as a potent instrument for fostering positive change by influencing public attitudes, behaviors, and policy discussions, in addition to raising awareness that can lead to beneficial outcomes. However, if not managed with care, it may also intensify conflicts and foster negative perceptions.

6.0 RECOMMENDATION

From the conclusions, the paper recommends that:

1. Media organizations ought to create additional specialized programs that emphasize sustainable farming methods, cutting-edge technologies, and success narratives from local farmers to motivate and inform audiences.
2. Utilize social media and mobile technology to reach younger audiences and rural communities, providing them with timely information on food production, market access, and food insecurity.

3. The media organizations should adopt responsible reporting practices, ensuring accuracy, objectivity, and cultural sensitivity. This will enable the media to play a constructive role in shaping public perception, promoting informed decision-making, and driving positive change in the face of food crises and food insecurity and as well, promote positive behaviors like food preservation and sustainable agricultural practices.
4. Finally, to alleviate the effects of food loss and waste on national food security and environmental sustainability, it is essential for the government, private sector, and individuals to assume significant responsibilities in ensuring food protection and environmental sustainability in Nigeria. This necessitates the establishment of sufficient agricultural product storage facilities throughout the country, particularly in regions where farming activities are concentrate

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