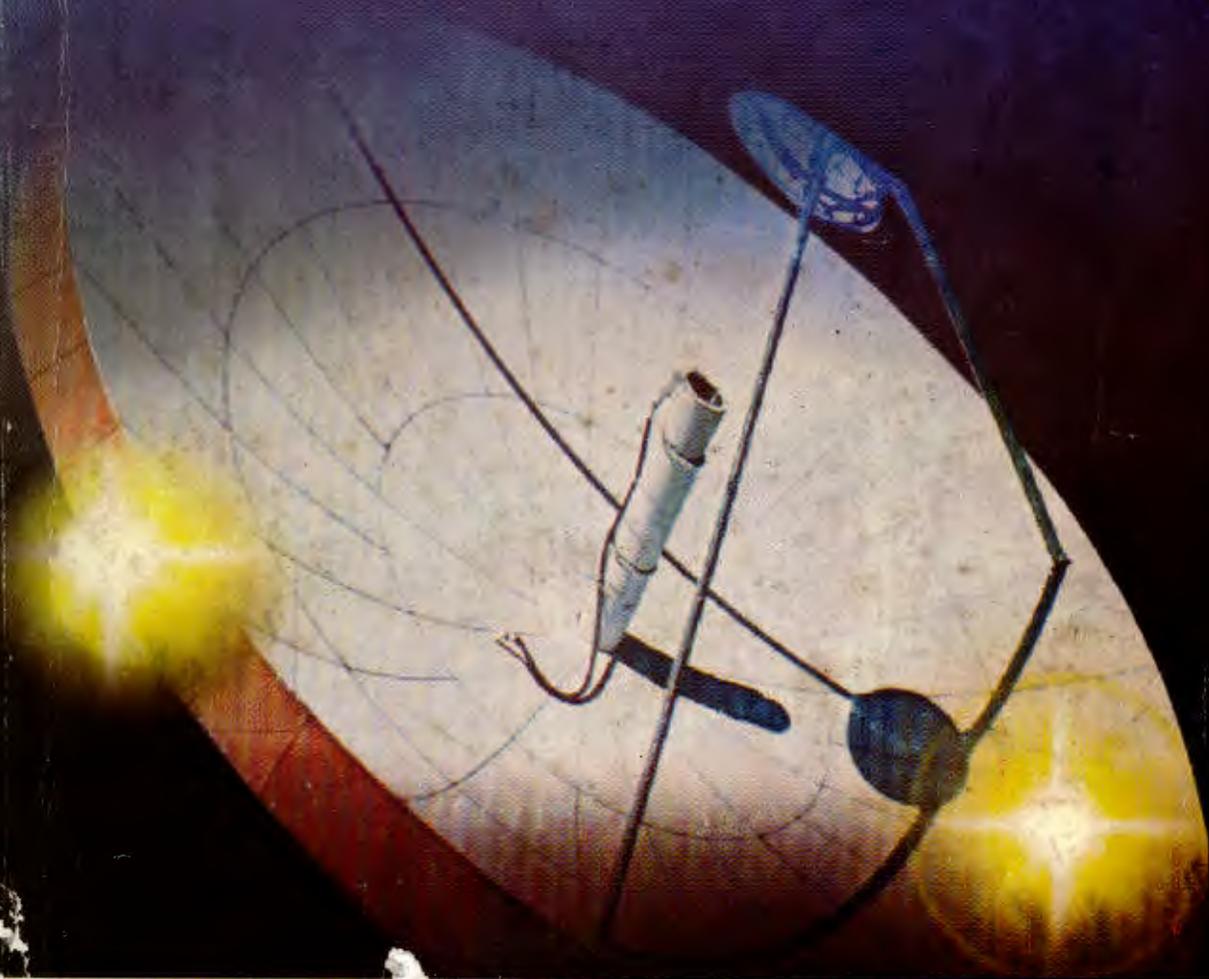


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THE MEDIA AND CULTISM IN NIGERIAN HIGHER INSTITUTIONS OF LEARNING: A STUDY OF COVERAGE, TREATMENT AND RELEVANCE

BY

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INTRODUCTION

Dating back to history, the word cult was seen as a term for religious practices that entail the performance of ritual rites to lesser gods or the practice of idolatry. Cults vary tremendously, and much disagreement surrounds the definition of a cult and which groups should be classified as cults (Encarta, 2005). The word 'cultism' originated from the Latin word 'Occulere' which denotes something hidden, occultic, concealed, enigmatical, mysterious, mystical, etc. Cultism is the deadly engagement in ritual practices. Subscribing to the opinion, Ajakaiye (2002:164-165) notes:

Cultism may be viewed as a system of beliefs binding together people of the same interest for the purpose of promoting and defending the common pursuit. The 1999 Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, in Section 318 (4), bans a secret society defined as a society or an association not being solely, a cultural or religious body that uses secret signs, oaths, rites or symbols:

i. Whose meeting or other activities are held in secret; and

ii. Whose members are under oath, obligation or other threat to promote the interest of its members or to aid one another under all circumstances without due regard to merit, fair play or justice, to the detriment of the legitimate expectation of those who are not members.

It has been noted that the trend towards cult violence began in the early 1980s. The nation delayed its decision to rise up to the challenge and deal with the problems associated with campus violence; the decision came up not until it was over 15 years since the inception of campus violence and nine years since the Pyrates Confraternity called the nation's attention to the trend of campus violence. The history of cultism in Africa is being associated with African culture and religion based on the existence of many gods in African Traditional Religion, the adherents of these gods as well as subsequent events that led to small religious cults.

Cultism can be seen from either a traditional perspective or an institutional perspective. Institutional cultism is represented in the educational institutions in Nigeria

presently and its activities are spread within and outside the campuses. Many victims of such cult activities, which are violent in nature, and the cult members themselves, have constantly had premature deaths. Cult members cause a lot of havoc on Nigerian campuses as they maim and kill with acids, charms, matchets, knives, guns, etc, whenever they strike. Obada-Obieh (2002:29-30) highlights this thus:

Until very recently, enlightened or educated youths would have little or nothing to do with 'cult' except for academic research purpose since it was considered as some ritual ceremonies performed secretly in the bush or in some dark places by some primitive and barbaric group of people.... Youths now regard membership of secret cults as mark of pride, recognition and acceptance among their peer-groups, especially in the tertiary institutions of learning, now spreading into the secondary and even primary schools.

Cults of today in Nigerian campuses in line with their unhidden evils- robbery, murder, rape, thuggery, and all manner of malpractices- and the roles of their members in the mainstream of the economy and politics, have polluted the nation's wellbeing with their negative influence and image. It is therefore, worthy to note that peace and safety are major determinants of any meaningful pursuit of social, political, economic, religious or educational development activities in

our Universities in particular and in the country in general.

The conventional procedure(s) adopted by virtually all cult groups in undertaking their activities include: recruitment (of new members) and initiation. Under recruitment, cultists take advantage of an individual's financial status, family background, physical appearance, etc in luring him/her to the cult. Eberendu (1999) outlines some of the avenues via which recruitment is made and they are: general discussions and persuasions; threat and intimidation; invitation to parties and picnics; deceit; freewill; blackmail and sudden friendliness. Once recruitment has taken place, new members are interviewed orally before they are prepared for the initiation ceremony. During this ceremony, the old cult members celebrate with eating, drinking and dancing in frightful appearances. The new members undergo initiation drills that include rolling on the floor, receiving all manner of beating so as to enable them endure hardness (of heart). This initiation ceremony varies from one cult group to another. Some cult groups go as far as extracting the blood of their new member(s) for the purpose of swearing to an oath. The other members of the cult as a signal that the oath/covenant has been sealed, drink the blood. Sometimes, new members are asked to bear strange names.

Some factors responsible for students' involvement in cult activities, as identified by Eberendu (1999) are recognition, peer pressure, curiosity/adventure, toughness,

parental involvement, security, influencing the opposite sex, bulldozing their way through school, criminal tendencies, inferiority complex and (fake) promises. Others are weak spiritual foundation, material/luxury pursuit and acquisition.

Outlined below are the attributes, as noted by Eberendu (1999) that characterize the member(s) of a cult:

- They are extravagant.
- They are unusually reserved.
- They lack focus.
- They live in colonies instead of on campus.
- They engage in regular immoral/indecent acts (activities).
- They are arrogant.
- They are aggressive.
- They have signs that are peculiar to them.
- They are harsh, loud and noisy.
- They have colours that are peculiar to them. For instance, the colour of the Pirates is red; the Maphites are known with black and yellow.
- They identify with slogans that are peculiar to their cult. The slogan of the Buccaneers is 'No Pain, No Gain'; that of the Vikings is 'Kill First, Report Later'; that of the Black Axe is 'Eye(s) for an eye'.

There have been several cases of students' and lecturers' untimely death in the 90s and presently as a result of cultism.

"However, owing to its despicable lawlessness, it has become a precedent issue which needed combative measures to serve as a panacea" (Iyoha et al, 2003:84). Iyoha (2003) goes ahead to say that cultism has:

- * Stopped innocent students from studying at late hours in the classrooms.
- * Made prospective undergraduates develop cold feet and decide in anticipation to join, if persistently disturbed.
- * Made some affluent parents to send their wards to study overseas despite the dwindling economy.
- * Increased perpetrators of violence, rape, strike action/school closure etc.

The Nigerian higher education system has advanced both in terms of the additional establishment of higher institutions and the entirety of higher education right from 1932 when the Yaba Higher College was created. Higher education in Nigeria comprises various components- the university, polytechnics, colleges of education, colleges of preliminary studies, and/or the main preparatory programmes administered *in situ* in some of the universities. Other components include highly specialized colleges i.e. colleges of agriculture, civil aviation, metallurgy, school of health technology, petroleum training institute, the maritime academy, etc. Tertiary institutions all over the world are recognized as institutions which serve as centers of intellectual

curiosity, dedicated to teaching and research, engaging in creative work, motivating, seeking truth, advocating and propagating ideas and systems of thought through an empirical approach to the problems of learning. But today cultism has become a menace to the ivory towers.

Reliable sources reveal that no less than 53 cult groups exist in the Nigerian higher educational system today. Such groups include: **Air Lord, Black Axe, Black Beret Fraternity, Black Bra, Black Cats, Black Mamba, Buccaneers, Cappa Vendetto, Daughters of Jezebel, Eiye Confraternity, Green Beret Fraternity, Hard Candies, Jurist, KKK Confraternity, Knight Cadet, King Cobra, Lucifer Knights, Mafians, Maphites, Mgba Mgba Brothers, Musketeers Fraternity, Neo-Black Movement, Oasis of the Silhouette, Ostrich Fraternity, Panama, Pirates Confraternity, Red Berets, Red Sea Horses, Royal Queens, Sea Dogs, Soko, Sun Men, Temple of Eden Fraternity, Ten Angels, The Amazons, The Apostles, The Barracudas, The Canary, The Dragons, The Frigates, The Himalayas, The Lynx, The Mafioso Fraternity, The Scorpion Fraternity, The Soires Fraternity, The Vikings, The Walrus, Third Eye Confraternity, Trojan Horse, Vipers, Viqueens, West End, White Angels** and a host of others.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Achieving sustainability in the Nigerian higher education system is one topical

issue that needs to be addressed and adequately too. The Nigerian higher education system needs a positive reformation. The problems of cultism and examination malpractices also dominate the discussion on and around higher education in Nigeria. Hardly can an academic year pass by without scores of students being rusticated or reprimanded for involvement in cultism or in examination malpractices. It is, therefore, the duty of the press to help curb/eliminate cultism (especially in our tertiary institutions) via responsible and responsive journalism.

This study looks at the Nigerian press with particular eye on the level of responsibility displayed in the coverage of cultism-related issues, the depth of such coverage and to also find out if they have shirked their responsibilities to the Nigerian public in this regard or not. This is the major focus and challenge this study hopes to confront.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The study aims at achieving the following:

1. To find out if cultism-related issues are covered by the Nigerian Media.
2. To ascertain the amount of coverage given to cultism-related issues in the Nigerian Media.
3. To determine the level of coverage given to cultism-related issues in the Nigerian Media.
4. To find out the level of importance the Nigerian Media

- attach to cultism-related issues.
5. To determine if the reportage of cultism-related issues by the Nigerian press is favourable, unfavourable or neutral.

THEORETICAL AND LITERATURE OVERVIEW

In trying to effectively describe what influences students into cultism, one may use the spiral of silence theory for this purpose. The theory describes the tendency of an individual or group to suppress their private opinion because of fear of intimidation or isolation. In the words of its originator, Elisabeth Noelle-Neumann (1984:5)

Observations made in one context (the mass media) spread to another and encouraged people either to proclaim their views or swallow them and keep quiet until, in a spiraling process, the one view dominated the public scene and the other disappeared from public awareness as its adherents became mute. This is the process that can be called a 'spiral of silence'.

In other words, because of people's fear of isolation or separation from those around them, they tend to keep their attitudes to themselves when they think they are in the minority. The media, because of a variety of factors, tend to present one (or at most two) sides of an issue to the exclusion of others, which further encourages those people to keep quiet and makes it even tougher for the media to uncover and register that

opposing viewpoint (Baran and Davis, 2002). Analysis of some of the reasons given by former cult members about what informed their belonging to such dangerous groups on campus cannot be removed from the dictates or suggestions of this theory.

Another vital theoretical model that could help us evaluate media's handling of campus cultism is the Public Health Model. Cole et al (2005:25) citing Steven define the public-health-reporting model as "reporting that includes risk factors, causes, and prevention strategies in stories about injury and death, regardless of whether the cause is disease or social problems such as violence..." This reporting places crime and violence in context after their patterns have been known. It provides information about how typical the type of violence is, what causes it, what defuses it, and how to intervene.... It necessarily entails changing attitudes from attributing responsibility only to individuals to encompassing underlying social factors. Creating a modification in the pattern adopted by the media in reporting an issue, which provides more information on social responsibility, is a major step in altering perceptions of responsibility for a problem. As noted by Coleman et al (2005:26-28):

The public health model has roots in the concept of framing. Framing essentially involves selection and salience. The frames that the media use in stories help define problems and call attention to some things while obscuring others.

At the most general level, framing refers to subtle alterations in statement or presentation. According to Entman (1993), frames have at least four functions: to define problems, diagnose causes, make moral judgments, and suggest remedies. This is essentially what the public health model is suggesting—that media stories on crime and violence be reframed to call attention to context, risk factors, and solutions, just as the public journalism approach has called for reframing of stories to include more context, solutions, and citizens' concerns....

As Coleman et al (2005) would have it, the media are responsible for disseminating information in a context that is meaningful. This has been acknowledged since the responsibilities of the press were outlined by the Hutchins Commission in 1947. The public is able to change the basic conditions that amount to crime and violence with the information the media provide in context. The media enhance discussion on violence and its remedies "and encourage views currently outside the dominant ideology that sees the causes of crime as individually located and the solutions in terms of punishment instead of prevention" by reporting on inherent causes and social factors.

Finally, we shall also look at the Second-Level Agenda And Object Salience and see what it adds to the

quality of our theoretical discussion. Over 30 years now, the scholars of mass communication have employed the agenda-setting theory as a major support for appreciating the effects of news on public opinion. Empirical work from this scholarly perspective, that is primarily concerned with the transfer of issue salience from the mass media to the public, have proven that modifications in media salience influenced perceived public salience as well as public attitudes. Such analyses have investigated the relationship between media attention towards objects in the news and public attitude towards those particular (or similar) objects. Only one obvious impact has been noticed between media salience and attitude strength based on the various aspects of public attitudes that have been highlighted.

Kiouis (2005:4) notes that:

The emergence of the second-level agenda-setting theory has shifted the focus of research away from investigating what topics news media cover to how they cover them. Conceptualized as attribute salience, this "second" level of agenda setting deals with the properties, qualities, and characteristics in news content that describe objects (McCombs and Evatt 1995; McCombs and Ghanem 2001). An object, defined in much the same way that an attitude object is thought of in psychology, is the element to which attributes refer, such as issues, political candidates, public relations messages, and so on (Lopez-

Escobar, Llamas, and McCombs, 1998).

Some literary scholars have debated on the relationship between attribute agenda setting and framing. While some scholars have argued for their separation..., others have called for their convergence.... In creating a solution to the problems raised, a distinction has been made between frames as "aspects" of coverage and frames as "central themes" of coverage. Kioussis (2005:6) goes further to state thus:

Direct linkages between second-level agenda setting and public attitudes are captured by Kim et al.'s (2002:11-12) notion of attribute priming, which "deals with the influence of mass media on the public's evaluation of issues. Specifically, attribute priming hypothesizes that certain issue attributes emphasized in the media will become significant dimensions of issue evaluation among the public"....

Historically speaking, first-level agenda-setting investigations do show linkages between media salience and shifts in public attitudes (Leff et al. 1986; Smith 1987). A key distinction made in research is between attitude change and attitude strength. In particular, prior examinations have demonstrated that shifts in attitude formation and extremity may result from agenda setting (Weaver, 1984)....

Odukamaiya (2004:20), writing from the perspective of McCombs and Shaw (1974), bases his notion on (the) salience attached to media news on the fact that the audience has the tendency of viewing an event as important when the media lay emphasis on such an event. He, therefore, notes that before the audience are exposed to media news, the individual journalist has done considerable selection as to what is important enough to report and what to reject.

Cultism, in Nigerian tertiary institutions, is a specific behavioural issue being examined in this discussion. The intense focus on cultism issues may develop exaggerated perceptions about the prevalence of cultism on campuses. To the extent that normative perceptions about the prevalence of a behaviour further deepens those same behaviours, it is likely that the continuous focus on cultism-related issues may contribute to increased acceptance of cultism by tertiary students. Rimal et al (2003:199) aver that the news media are one of many vehicles through which norms are transmitted. They debunk the argument that communication causes risky behaviour believing that communication among like-minded individuals is a principal mechanism through which norms are transmitted. The formation and dissemination of norms likely occur through communication.

Reporting is an activity. It is double-fold, namely: newsgathering and news writing. Both are of equal importance

since the ability to use techniques to gather and verify news will determine how to write the news (Apooyin, 2003:2). The findings of some surveys of issues related to social violence in mass media content reveal that the mass media focus generally on the individual atomistic 'act' rather than on issues of cause and prevention. For this reason, many advocate the public-health model of news reporting on cultism and violence so as to look at 'interactions between the victim, the agent of injury or death, and the environment in which the injury or death took place rather than viewing it in strictly individual terms.' (Coleman et al, 2005:24).

It is the major responsibility of mass communication to produce products that have fairness and truth of the highest quality, which requires that it develops an awareness of the depth and breadth of the public's needs and interests (Rivers et al, 1980:273). Responsibility of the mass media can follow two patterns: self-regulation and professionalization. The responsibility of mass communicators is said to be 'a higher horizon than can be reached through codes of conduct' (Rivers et al, 1980:275).

Oha (1999:11) describes news reporting, with emphasis on its communicative aspect, as a very crucial activity in a world confronted by a multitude of problems. The crucial nature of news reporting is tested by the informative and educative responsibilities the reporter discharges to society. He notes as follows:

News reporting is therefore one

facet of communication that needs to be fully and properly involved in the attempt at solving political, social, religious, economic and environmental problems. News reporting can therefore not be a neutral affair. It is (and ought to be) a purposeful activity.

In talking of the non-neutral or purposeful nature of news reporting, attention has to be drawn to the very political and ideological underpinnings of news reporting itself. In a world where meanings are political commodities, it is impossible, in fact absurd, to think of news reporting as an act formed for its own sake. In news reporting, the relationship between the reporter (or addresser) and his audience (or addressee) in the rhetorical situation could be linked to other macro socio-political relationships that are either in existence already, or that are being sought. It may also reflect a wider political situation of some Deceiver-Deceived relationship.

As a measure of addressing the issue of cultism, various institutions have mounted some form of publicity. But such publicity does not seem to be enough as it has been channeled to a specific audience of only those who visit the institution. Also, newspapers sometimes report about cultism, but this is only when they wreck havoc and the newspaper is carrying it only as news (Iyoha et al, 2003:34).

Like watchdogs or newshounds, active collectors and disseminators of information, journalists offer a public service. The public-service ideal is seen as a mighty component of journalism's ideology. It is said to be an ideal that journalists aspire to, and use to legitimize aggressive or increasingly interpretative styles of reporting. As Deuze (2005:447) puts it:

Journalists share a sense of 'doing it for the public', of working as some kind of representative watchdog of the status quo in the name of the people, who 'vote with their wallets' for their services (by buying a newspaper, watching or listening to a newscast, visiting and returning to a news site). One may find evidence of such a value by specifically examining journalists' images of their audience, and by looking at their views on what they do and how their work may affect (intended) publics- as citizens or consumers. The expanding body of literature on the public journalism movement has actualized this value serving to rethink journalism's role in society by invoking old or new notions of the public service ideal through 'people's journalism' (Merrill et al., 2001).

The practices of public journalists are noted to have tendencies of reinforcing the stronger side of news media in society and at the same time approving a more responsive attitude towards

publics, thereby indicating how 'an age-old ideological value can serve to maintain the status quo in journalism while its practitioners adapt to a changing media culture' (Deuze, 2005:448). The public journalism movement is a way of bridging the gap between the oppositional expectations of reporters and editors; it maintains its rank carefully considering the wants and needs of an audience.

Idowu (2005) stresses that there is great need for the media to carry out more experiment(s), stand out from amongst the crowd, use more resources to conduct investigations, increase the link(s) with their audiences and justify the time and money the public spend on media products. Too many people are in journalism with other interests than a love for it, a commitment to the public good, a willingness to go all the way. The urge or need to watch the media arises as a reminder to the various media management that the audience is the reason for the being/existence of the media; the media are nothing without the audience. There is no better time than now for us to begin to pay more attention to watching the watchdogs. We need to because the media do not exist for themselves alone but for society. In order to safeguard the public trust reposed in the media, regular and special attention need to be given to these keepers of public conscience and morality.

It is often claimed that violent media reflect the violence that already exists in society. It has also been noted that 'violence is grossly overemphasized'

(Encarta, 2005). The media, especially newspapers, are noted for attempting to force or effect decisions on issues, which they should merely report on. Newspapers remain a powerful force in any society. A foremost example of the power of the press occurred in 1974 when President Richard M. Nixon resigned his office after revelations about the Watergate scandal involving his administration, which had first been brought to public attention by the *Washington Post*. (Encarta, 2005).

A comparison of news reports and scientific knowledge about media effects reveals a disturbing discontinuity: Over the past 50 years, the average news report has changed from claims of a weak link to a moderate link and then back to a weak link between media violence and aggression. However, since 1975, the scientific confidence and statistical magnitude of this link have been consistently increased overtime. Reasons for this discontinuity between news reports and the actual state of scientific knowledge include the vested interests of the news, misapplied fairness doctrine in news reporting, and the failure of the research community to effectively argue the scientific case (Bushman et al, 2005).

Scholars have been investigating media violence as a potential contributor to societal violence... since the early 1960s (Encarta, 2005). Some have argued that viewing violence increases aggression while others opine that exposure to media violence does not produce violent criminals out of all viewers. Because so many people

are exposed to violent media, the effect on society can be immense even if only they affect a small percentage of viewers. It takes only one or two affected students to wreck murderous havoc in a school (Encarta, 2005). Of more interest is the pattern of news reports across time. Because media violence studies did not exist in the early years of societal concern, one might expect that early mass media reports would on average note that there is little relationship between media violence and aggression (Encarta, 2005).

Mass media magazines and newspapers have consistently failed to capture the changes in the scientific state of knowledge as research evidence supporting the causal link between exposure to media violence and aggression....

A second plausible explanation for the apparent misreporting of the state of media violence evidence concerns a misapplied fairness doctrine. There may be a sort of journalistic "fairness" heuristic guiding the reporting of scientific findings that systematically leads to an overemphasis on minority views. Specifically, an attempt to get both sides of the story may itself lead to a final story that puts too little emphasis on the few dissidents who can be found on almost any scientific issue (Encarta, 2005).

METHOD

This study is designed to ascertain

whether or not cultism is reported and how it is reported in the Nigerian press. Content analysis was employed for the purpose of obtaining data needed for the study. Wimmer et al. (2003:141-142) citing Walizer and Wienir (1978) define content analysis as "any systematic procedure devised to examine the content of recorded information." Berelson (1952) also describes content analysis as a research technique for the "objective, systematic, and quantitative description of the manifest content of the media."

The population of this study comprises the mass media i.e. the entire press (print and electronic). The study population of this study, however, is limited to the Nigerian print media from which two national newspapers of opposing ideological dispositions were selected for study. *The Punch*, which represents a liberal newspaper, and *The Guardian*, which represents a conservative newspaper, were selected for the study. Also, *The Guardian* is noted for its appeal to the elite/ruling class while *The Punch* is noted for its appeal to the general public/masses. *The Guardian* and *The Punch* have been assessed by the African Media Directory (1996) as newspapers in Nigeria as well as Africa that are most widely read.

The study of only the print media was informed by the fact that the method of storage and retrieval of electronic media content is very cumbersome and not easily accessible to private researchers (Ekeanyanwu, 2005:261). Five issues per month, for each of the

newspapers under study, were chosen from an aggregate of 2,192 issues of both newspapers selected- *The Guardian* and *The Punch*. This amounted to 60 different issues for a period of three years for each of the chosen newspapers. Thus, 360 issues of the two different newspapers were analyzed. The 360 issues, which form the study's sample size, were chosen by employing the simple random sampling technique. Below are issues of the newspapers under study that were chosen as sample using the simple random sampling technique:

- i. January 2003/2004/2005 issues:
11, 12, 15, 16, 30
- ii. February 2003/2004/2005 issues:
6, 8, 11, 19, 26
- iii. March 2003/2004/2005 issues:
5, 6, 8, 11, 21
- iv. April 2003/2004/2005 issues:
5, 6, 13, 15, 20
- v. May 2003/2004/2005 issues:
19, 25, 26, 29, 31
- vi. June 2003/2004/2005 issues:
3, 15, 16, 19, 23
- vii. July 2003/2004/2005 issues:
1, 9, 14, 22, 25
- viii. August 2003/2004/2005 issues:
1, 7, 12, 16, 30
- ix. September 2003/2004/2005 issues:
6, 11, 16, 22, 25
- x. October 2003/2004/2005 issues:
17, 19, 22, 27, 31
- xi. November 2003/2004/2005 issues:
3, 5, 17, 20, 30
- xii. December 2003/2004/2005 issues:
1, 6, 12, 24, 28

The first five issues to be studied per month for each newspaper were chosen by employing the simple random sampling technique because the technique gives every unit of the population an equal chance of being included in the sample. Based on each

month under the study, numbers one to thirty-one were assigned to the units in the population on identical cards. The identical cards were placed in a container and reshuffled vigorously each time a draw was made. As the container was gently lowered (after vigorous reshuffling), the first card that came out was drawn until the five issues for each month were selected.

This process ensured that all the issues had an equal chance of being selected and no issue or date was given any form of preference or advantage. Also, the draw was done with replacement. Any date or issue picked twice for a particular month was returned to the container until a different issue was picked from a subsequent draw. This implied that all the issues had equal probabilities of being selected. The probability was one over thirty or over thirty-one depending on the month in question.

The units of analysis for this study comprised of cartoons, editorials, features, interpretative articles, news stories, pictures and others (crime/corruption-related content(s)). Content(s) on cultism-related issues were tested for magnitude, frequency, slant, prominence, etc. Prominence was determined by the position/placement of each item on cultism-related issues. Those that appear on the front pages will be regarded as very important. This will be followed by back page stories. The inside pages will be regarded as the least in the order of importance. The slant of cultism-related content(s) will

be determined by the stand of the newspaper as reflected on such issues reported. Basically, the newspaper slant would either be negative, positive or neutral. The slant is considered negative when undue coverage is given to cultism-related issues; media messages are such that cannot stir up any reaction from the audience against cultism. It is positive when media messages are such that can stir reaction(s) from the audience against cultism; media messages emphasize the negative implication(s) of cultism. It is, however, neutral when cultism is presented as a natural phenomenon or normal occurrence in society by the press; emphasis is not made only on the violence involved in cultism but also on the negative implications of cultism.

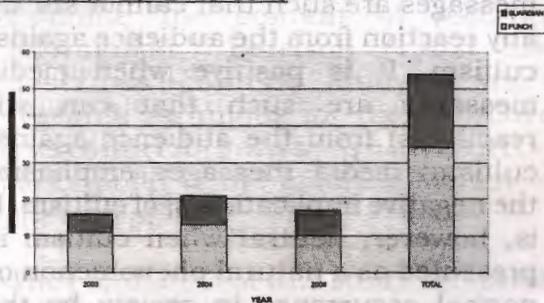
DATA ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

This study generally aims at ascertaining the Nigerian press involvement in the fight against cultism in higher institutions of learning. As stated earlier, a total of 360 issues of the two newspapers were sampled. These issues gave rise to 54 items on cultism and 1,045 items on crime/corruption. This implies that for the study period of three years (January 2003 to December 2005), the Nigerian press reported only 54 cultism-related items out of a total of 1,099 items on crime/corruption. The percentage of this to the entire news reports in the Nigerian press for the study period was not determined as it is not within the purview of this study.

TABLE A: DISTRIBUTION OF CULTISM-RELATED ISSUES IN THE NIGERIAN PRESS.

NEWSPAPER	2003	2004	2005	TOTAL
PUNCH	11 (68.8 %)	13 (61.9%)	10 (58.8 %)	34(63%)
GUARDIAN	5 (31.3 %)	8 (38.1%)	7 (41.2 %)	20(37%)
TOTAL	16 (100 %)	21 (100%)	17 (100 %)	54(100%)

FIG. 1: FREQUENCY OF CULTISM-RELATED CONTENT IN THE SELECTED NEWSPAPERS



From the above table and diagram, the newspapers reported a total of 54 items/issues on cultism. The table indicates that, for each year in question, The Punch covered more on cultism with a total of 34 issues representing 63 % of the total issues on cultism. The above results indicate that the Nigerian press covers cultism-related issues.

TABLE B: DISTRIBUTION OF CULTISM-RELATED CONTENT IN THE PUNCH NEWSPAPER.

CONTENT CATEGORIES	2003	2004	2005	TOTAL
EDITORIAL	0	0	0	0
NEWS STORY	11 (5.5 %)	12 (7.95 %)	8 (2.96 %)	31 (5%)
INTERPRETATIVE STORY	0	1 (0.67 %)	2 (0.74 %)	3(0.5 %)
PICTURES	0	0	0	0
CARTOON	0	0	0	0
FEATURE	0	0	0	0
OTHERS [CRIME RELATED]	189(94.5%)	138(91.4%)	260(96.3 %)	587(94.5%)
TOTAL	200 (100%)	151 (100 %)	270 (100 %)	621(100 %)

TABLE C: DISTRIBUTION OF CULTISM-RELATED CONTENT IN THE GUARDIAN NEWSPAPER.

CONTENT CATEGORIES	2003	2004	2005	TOTAL
EDITORIAL	0	0	0	0
NEWS STORY	2 (1.87 %)	5 (2.96 %)	6 (3 %)	13(2.72%)
INTERPRETATIVE STORY	2 (1.87 %)	2 (1.2 %)	1 (0.5 %)	5(1.05%)
PICTURES	0	0	0	0
CARTOONS	0	0	0	0
FEATURE	1 (0.94 %)	1 (0.59 %)	0	2 (0.42 %)
OTHERS [CRIME RELATED]	102(95.33 %)	161(95.3%)	195(96.5%)	458 (95.82%)
TOTAL	107 (100 %)	169 (100%)	202(100%)	478 (100%)

In analyzing the frequency of cultism-related content in the Nigerian press, it can be deduced from the tables above that the Nigerian press did not report cultism as much as it reported crime/corruption within the stipulated period. Also, most of the reports appeared as mere news stories devoid of any analysis or interpretation. Interpretative stories came second while editorials, pictures, features and cartoons contained no issue related to cultism. The tables above show that crime/corruption-related content outweighed that of cultism in the selected newspapers.

TABLE D: DISTRIBUTION OF CULTISM-RELATED ISSUES ACCORDING TO TOPIC CATEGORIES.

CONTENT CATEGORY	PUNCH	GUARDIAN	TOTAL
EDITORIAL	0	0	0
NEWS STORY	31 (91.2 %)	13(65 %)	44 (81.5 %)
INTERPRETATIVE STORY	3(8.8 %)	5 (25 %)	8 (14.8 %)
PICTURE	0	0	0
CARTOON	0	0	0
FEATURE	0	2 (10 %)	2 (3.7 %)
TOTAL	34 (100 %)	20 (100 %)	54 (100 %)

FIG: 2.: TOPIC CATEGORIES OF CULTISM-RELATED CONTENT IN THE SELECTED NEWSPAPERS BETWEEN 2003 AND 2005.

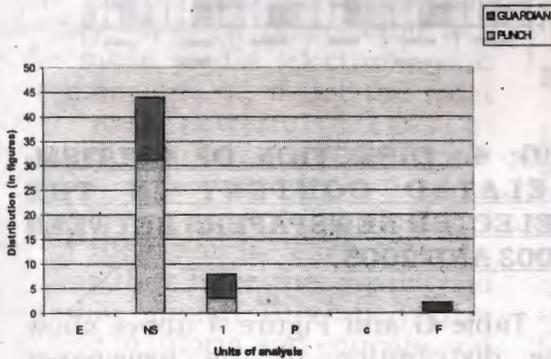


Table D shows that the selected newspapers did not give the highest level of coverage to issues pertaining to cultism within the period under study (as no editorial was reported on cultism). However, the above diagram illustrates that both newspapers carried most of the cultism-related content as news stories with a volume of 44 representing 81.5 %, followed by interpretative articles with a volume of eight representing 14.8 % while features (reflected in *The Guardian*) came last with a volume of two representing 10%.

TABLE E: PLACEMENT OF CULTISM-RELATED CONTENT IN THE PUNCH NEWSPAPER.

CONTENT CATEGORIES	2003			2004			2005			TOTAL
	Front	Inside	Back	Front	Inside	Back	Front	Inside	Back	
EDITORIAL	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	0
NEWS STORY	-	10	1	1	11	-	-	8	-	31(91.2%)
INTERPRETATIVE STORY	-	-	-	-	1	-	-	2	-	3(8.8%)
PICTURE	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	0
CARTOON	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	0
FEATURE	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	0
TOTAL	0	10	1	1	12	0	0	10	0	34
PERCENTAGE	0	29.4	3	3	35.3	0	0	29.4	0	100

TABLE F: PLACEMENT OF CULTISM-RELATED CONTENT IN THE GUARDIAN.

CONTENT CATEGORIES	2003			2004			2005			TOTAL
	Front	Inside	Back	Front	Inside	Back	Front	Inside	Back	
EDITORIAL	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	0
NEWS STORY	-	2	-	-	5	-	-	6	-	13(65%)
INTERPRETATIVE STORY	-	2	-	-	2	-	-	1	-	5(25%)
PICTURE	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	0
CARTOON	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	0
FEATURE	-	1	-	-	1	-	-	-	-	2(10%)
TOTAL	0	5	0	0	8	0	0	7	0	20
PERCENTAGE	0	25	0	0	40	0	0	35	0	100

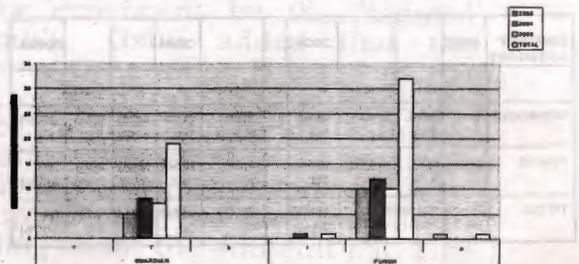


FIG: 3: PLACEMENT OF CULTISM-RELATED CONTENT IN THE SELECTED NEWSPAPERS BETWEEN 2003 AND 2005.

Part of the aims of the study is to determine the prominence given to cultism-related issues by the Nigerian press. The researchers attempts to achieve this through an analysis of the position/placement of cultism-related content in the selected newspapers. This analysis is done based on the interpretation of the different positions of a newspaper. That is, the front page contains the most important information, followed by the back page and the inside page (which contains information of least importance).

Table E shows that *The Punch* did not accord great prominence to cult related issues in 2004. Table F also shows that *The Guardian* never placed cultism-related content as highly significant as no report appeared on the front page within the stipulated period. However, the diagram above, clearly illustrates that the number of cultism-related content carried by the selected newspapers on their inside pages were highest in 2004 with a volume of 20; followed by 2005 with a volume of 17, and 2003 with a volume of 15.

TABLE G: DISTRIBUTION OF CULTISM-RELATED CONTENT BETWEEN THE SELECTED NEWSPAPERS ACCORDING TO DIRECTION.

CONTENT CATEGORY	2003			2004			2005			TOTAL
	-	+	Neutral	-	+	Neutral	-	+	Neutral	
GUARDIAN	0	2(28.6%)	3(43%)	2(50%)	-	3(43%)	3(50%)	2(28.6%)	2(50%)	20(37%)
PUNCH	2(100%)	5(71.4%)	4(57%)	2(50%)	-	4(57%)	3(50%)	5(71.4%)	2(50%)	34(63%)
TOTAL	2(100%)	7(100%)	7(100%)	4(100%)	-	7(100%)	6(100%)	7(100%)	4(100%)	54(100%)

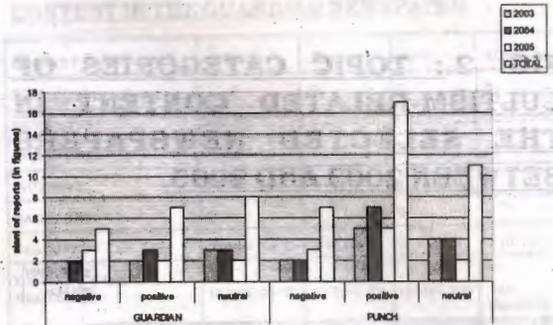


FIG: 4.: DIRECTION OF CULTISM-RELATED CONTENT IN THE SELECTED NEWSPAPERS BETWEEN 2003 AND 2005.

Table G and Figure 4 above show the distribution of the newspaper reports according to the direction or slant. In 2003 for instance, negative reports totaled 2, positive 7 and neutral 7. In 2004 negative reports totaled 4, no positive report and neutral reports were 7. In 2005 negative reports were 6, positive 7 and neutral 4.

SUMMARY

Cultism is a subject matter that is of national significance. It has permeated the country at an alarming rate, particularly the country's tertiary institutions. The normal vulnerability of the adolescent/youth to insecurity has been exacerbated by social and economic problems such as absence of employment opportunities, disregard for merit and ethnic favoritism, which refuse to abate in the Nigerian society (NPC, 2002:136-137). These are part of the reasons why the youth plunge into cultism as a means of their survival. The problem has been escalating during the last several years in our

tertiary institutions as cultists terrorized both lecturers and students. (NPC, 2002:137).

Although, there may be a reduction in the violence associated with cultism due to government intervention, the mass media need to wake up in its social responsibilities by addressing the issue not only objectively but also responsibly. It is an indisputable fact that the mass media (electronic and print) remain one of, if not the most effective and powerful means of disseminating information the world over. Media professionals have to come to grip with the awesome responsibility placed in their hands. They must be aware that they have the capacity to mould public opinion. This is derivative of their role to inform and educate and of course, as a major agent of social change, reorientation and reformation.

It is essential to note that how the public view topical national issues like cultism, almost invariably determines its response. This is why the Nigerian press must engage in responsible journalism while disseminating such topical national issues as cultism. If cultism is seen as an aberration or strange phenomenon that must be destroyed, then efforts must be tailored towards eliminating it completely. Based on the research findings, the quality of the Nigerian press reportage on topical national issues, as it concerns cultism is not okay. Also, the rising volume of unfavourable stories between 2003 and 2005, indicate that the Nigerian press still needs some room for improvement on the reportage of topical national issues such as cultism. This will help to build and enhance a favourable corporate image and reputation for the Nigerian press as a socially responsible arm of

government. The little coverage given to cultism-related content will not help in achieving the task of reducing/eliminating the vice called cultism. Considering the units of analysis used in the study, it is high time the Nigerian press started reporting cultism-related issues in its editorials, interpretative articles and feature stories.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The Nigerian President, Chief Olusegun Obasanjo at the outset of his administration, gave a directive to Nigerian University Vice Chancellors to wipe out cultism from their institutions within three months or be kicked out of office. This directive was mandated after cultists killed four students from Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife, in Osun state. Expectedly, the nation witnessed stage-managed renunciations and our usual fire service approach to serious issues was employed to give effect to the directive. Afterwards, it became business as usual. Also in 2003 the Federal Executive Council approved a blueprint for cultism elimination in the entire Nigerian educational institutions. The then Minister of Education, Prof. Fabian Osuji, at the 51st National Council on Education Meeting in Minna, Niger State stated that the Ministry of Education in collaboration with the Federal Ministry of Justice would produce an anti-cult bill for enactment by the National Assembly. Osuji added that the Inspector-General of Police and the Director-General, State Security Service, would collaborate with the Education Ministry and heads of tertiary institutions to enforce security. But up till now, we have not heard anything about the anti-cult bill. This amounts to double standard and paying of mere lip service by

Government. This attitude must change if we are truly desirous of change

There are quite a number of laws (aside the government's fresh legal framework against cultism) that can combat cultism. The Students Union Activities (Control and Regulation) Act promulgated in 1989, for example, can eliminate cultism if well enforced. According to Deji-Folutile (2005:48)

The Act also prescribes a prison sentence, upon conviction, for anyone belonging to any proscribed groups. But we hardly hear of any university making use of this legal provision. The only university that has moved close to implementing the law is University of Ilorin, which has so far, prosecuted six of its students for cultism. Two of them were recently jailed for 10 years each. But even at that, the court gave the students an option of #50,000 fine, which is another serious dimension.

This is because the fine option is capable of undermining whatever inroad the university may have made in taming the monster. It is believed, and many cases have confirmed this, that one of the reasons why cultism is untamable in our higher institutions is because the children of the high and mighty are the main culprits. These children easily get off the hook of law enforcement agents because their parents have enough money to bail them out. So asking such students to pay fine is like offering them a lifeline.

However, we should not because of this trend ignore the effects of cultism on our campuses. But before we can

achieve anything meaningful, government must first of all be committed to ridding our institutions of this problem. It must be prepared to ensure the prosecution of whoever is caught regardless of his/her parental background (Deji-Folutile, 2005:48). Government should also organize national conferences, for primary, secondary, and higher institutions where morality and values should be highlighted.

Then, sponsors of cultists should also be made to face stiffer penalties and the media must as a matter of professional duty ensure that no perpetrator of this evil is left unpunished. This they (media) must do through timely exposure of those involved.

The Federal Ministry of Education in conjunction with that of Information and National Orientation must as a matter of priority engage in massive reorientation of the Nigerian youths. This is very vital to the fight against cultism.

Narrowing down to the Nigerian media, the issue of cultism can be drastically reduced/eliminated when the media continually give maximum attention to the issue; the stand of the Nigerian media against the vice must be clearly reflected in the amount, the slant, the magnitude and the placement of cultism-related content. Also, employing language in a manner that can create misunderstanding or misinterpretation of events and facts as the (Nigerian) print media relay messages to the populace must be avoided.

The nature of attention given to the AIDS Awareness Campaign in the media by both Government and corporate bodies and individuals

should also be given to the campaign against cultism. Both are deadly scourges against the human race.

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