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USE OF PROPAGANDA AND PUPILS/TEACHERS ABDUCTION IN ORIRE LOCAL GOVERNMENT OF OYO STATE, NIGERIA

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the influence of propaganda on abduction in Nigeria, focusing on how media framing, sensational reporting, and the glorification of criminal actors can shape public perception and possibly encourage kidnapping behavior. Propaganda in this context does not only mean false political messaging; it also includes exaggerated or misleading narratives that make abductors appear powerful, successful, or feared. Such portrayals can increase public anxiety, normalize violence, and contribute to the spread of abduction as a criminal strategy, especially when coverage gives excessive attention to ransom, notoriety, or the status of offenders. The paper is grounded in media and communication theories such as Agenda – setting theory, and Propaganda theory, which explain how repeated exposure to certain messages can influence attitudes and behavior. In Nigeria, the media has played a dual role: while some coverage has helped sustain public awareness and pressure authorities to respond, other coverage has unintentionally glamorized kidnapping and amplified its social impact. The study therefore argues that propaganda and sensational framing can worsen the abduction crisis by shaping fear, public interpretation, and even criminal imitation, while responsible reporting can support awareness and collective response. The paper concludes that the relationship between propaganda and abduction in Nigeria is both complex and significant, because media narratives can either discourage or reinforce criminal conduct.

Keywords : *Propaganda, Abduction; Sensational Reporting,*

INTRODUCTION

Propaganda, through the use of selective framing, sensational reporting, and deliberate misinformation, can magnify the incidence of abduction and its social acceptability in Nigeria by trivializing criminal tactics, signaling low risk and high reward to potential perpetrators, and undermining trust in official security responses.

Propaganda refers to communication designed to influence attitudes, beliefs, or behavior in a selective and often persuasive manner. In crime-related contexts, propaganda may take the form of exaggerated stories, one-sided framing, the circulation of rumors, or repeated narratives that present offenders in a powerful or attractive light. In Nigeria, such communication can circulate through newspapers, television, radio, and social media, making it especially important in understanding how public discourse may affect abduction. (Aborisade, 2017).

Odoemene (2024) stated that the history of abduction in Nigeria shows a clear evolution from pre-colonial human capture and ritual sacrifice to colonial suppression, post-colonial criminalization, and modern mass kidnappings. While the motives and methods have changed, the practice has remained tied to violence, coercion, and instability. He added that kidnapping is not only a criminal issue but also a major social and political problem that reflects deeper failures in governance and security. Understanding its historical roots is essential for developing more effective responses to the crisis.

The contemporary era has been defined by mass abductions and high-profile kidnappings across Nigeria. One of the most alarming developments has been the targeting of schools, especially in

northern Nigeria. Major incidents such as Chibok, Dapchi, Kankara, and other school raids drew global attention and exposed the vulnerability of children and educational institutions (African Studies Quarterly 2021, Guardian Nigeria, 2025). These attacks signify how kidnapping has transformed from isolated acts into large-scale violence used by armed groups to threaten communities and draw attention.

Recent reporting also shows that kidnapping remains widespread and financially lucrative. The Guardian Nigeria reported that thousands of people were kidnapped across the country within a 12-month period, with substantial ransom payments made by families and communities (The Guardian Nigeria, 2025). This pattern demonstrates that abduction is now deeply embedded in Nigeria's insecurity landscape. Instead of being confined to one region, it has spread across the country, affecting rural communities, highways, urban outskirts, and schools.

There are several factors that explain the persistence of abduction in Nigeria. These include poverty, unemployment, weak policing, corruption, political instability, and the availability of armed groups willing to profit from insecurity (Odoemene, 2024, University of Ibadan Institutional Repository, 2022). In some cases, kidnapping is also linked to insurgency and banditry, where abduction becomes a weapon for financing violence and exerting control over communities (The Guardian Nigeria, 2025).

The Oyo State school abductions in May 2026 were followed by a wave of propaganda and misinformation, including recycled videos, false relocation claims, and disputed reports about ransom or religious demands, which intensified public fear and complicated rescue efforts (Fact-Check Hub, 2026; BBC News Pidgin, 2026; Pulse Nigeria, 2026). Authorities repeatedly rejected misleading narratives circulating online, warning that such content was designed to deceive the public and undermine security operations (BBC News Pidgin, 2026; A1 News International, 2026). Analysts and commentators also noted that some actors used the incident to advance political or divisive narratives, showing how abduction cases can become tools for propaganda in a highly polarized environment (New Telegraph, 2026; The Guardian Nigeria, 2026).

Statement of the Problem

The increasing occurrence of school abductions seems to have generated widespread fear among parents, teachers, pupils, and all citizens across Nigeria. While government interventions seems to have largely focused on security measures and law enforcement responses, less attention might have been paid to the role of communication in shaping public understanding of insecurity. Abdulkarim (2024) lamented that abduction has become a major security and social problem in Nigeria, with devastating effects on victims, families, businesses, and public confidence. The crime has evolved beyond isolated criminal acts into a recurring threat that affects economic activity, mobility, and trust in government institutions. In the contemporary media environment, propaganda, sensational reporting, and misleading narratives have become important concerns because they may shape how people understand and respond to abduction. Aiden et al. (2020) expressed their fears on the trajectory of the twist and turns of the narrative of the incidence of abduction, they cautioned that, when propaganda remains unchecked, crime reporting and social media circulation go beyond information dissemination and begins to amplify fear, spread misinformation and normalize violent behaviour.

The abduction of 39 pupils and seven teachers from three schools in Oriire Local Government Area of Oyo State on May 15, 2026 represents a critical security and communication crisis that has exposed deep vulnerabilities in Nigeria's educational infrastructure and information ecosystem (Al Jazeera, 2026; Reuters, 2026). This incident, which resulted in the death of one teacher in captivity and the subsequent beheading of another, marks the first major mass school abduction in Nigeria's southwestern region, shattering the perception of relative peace in the area

and triggering widespread fear, industrial action, and community displacement (BBC Pidgin, 2026; Vanguard, 2026; The Academic Watch, 2026).

However, beyond the immediate security implications, the Oyo abduction crisis has been characterized by a parallel epidemic of misinformation and propaganda that has significantly complicated response efforts and public understanding of the situation. Within days of the incident, the Nigerian Digital Rights (NDR) fact-checking organization documented a surge of false claims, recycled images from unrelated kidnappings, doctored videos, and unverified reports of victim releases flooding social media and mainstream news platforms (Nigerian Digital Rights, 2026).

The study seek and recommend more viable ways to add to the existing knowledge on how to curb propaganda, because if it is left unchecked, in agreement with Aiden et al (2020), it can amplify fear, spread misinformation and normalize violent behavior.

Objectives

The study seek to examine how propaganda is represented in:

- (1) Media narratives about abduction in Nigeria.
- (2) Determine the extent to which sensational reporting influences public perception of abduction.
- (3) Assess whether media glorification of kidnappers encourages imitation or criminal motivation.

Research Questions

The study is guided by the following questions:

- (1) How are propaganda represented in media narratives about abduction in Nigeria?
- (2) To what extent does sensational reporting influence public perception of abduction?

METHODOLOGY

This study adopts a qualitative research method, anchored on Historical method, Newspaper reports, Social media posts, Government publications and Academic literature.

Theoretical Framework

Maxwell (2013) notes, theories should be viewed not as rigid templates but as flexible tools that researchers adapt, combine, or even challenge based on empirical findings and contextual realities. Ultimately, the judicious use of theory enables scholars to produce research that is both empirically grounded and conceptually rich.

The study is established on the Agenda setting theory and Propaganda theory.

Agenda-Setting theory

The theory was developed by McCombs and Shaw (1972), the Agenda-Setting Theory posits that the media influence public priorities by determining which issues receive prominence.

The theory operates on two core levels: First-level agenda-setting: The transfer of object salience (which issues gain prominence). Second-level agenda-setting: The transfer of attribute salience (how issues are framed).

The Oyo abduction received extensive media coverage across television, radio, and social media platforms, making it a dominant public agenda item. The dominant media frame positioned the

abduction as evidence of government security failure, with President Tinubu's delegation to Ogbomoso and his directive of "whatever it takes" to rescue victims receiving extensive coverage. This framing emphasized government accountability and urgency (BBC Pidgin, 2026).

Mbaka contested the dominant frame, dismissing the abduction as "a satanic political agenda aimed at provoking Nigerians to kick President Bola Tinubu out of office". He compared it to the 2014 Chibok girls' abduction, asserting it was part of efforts to "put panic in the county so that everybody will say the president should go" (Mbaka, 2026).

Applying Agenda-Setting theory to the Oyo State abduction case seems to demonstrate that the media set agenda for the public.

Propaganda Theory

Propaganda Theory explains how communication is strategically deployed to manipulate attitudes and behaviours. The theory is particularly relevant for understanding how insecurity narratives are framed to influence public opinion. Propaganda is the management of collective attitudes by the manipulation of significant symbols. The word attitude is taken to mean a tendency to act according to certain patterns of valuation. (Laswell, 1972)

Propaganda Theory, developed by scholars including Edward Bernays, Harold Lasswell, among others, explains how organized efforts to manipulate information serve political and ideological purposes. The theory identifies several key mechanisms: message control, emotional Appeals, symbolic mobilization, repetition, authority endorsement, and disinformation.

The abduction of 39 pupils and 7 teachers from three schools in Ahoro-Esiele and Yawota communities, Oriire Local Government Area, Oyo State, on May 15, 2026, has become a critical case study for examining the intersection of propaganda, media, and public policy in Nigeria. Within 48 hours of the attack, official narratives emerged alleging that the abductors demanded a one billion naira ransom, weapons, and the implementation of Sharia law in Oyo State. These claims were subsequently disputed by one of the abducted victims, Mrs. Folawe Alamu, who appeared in a video from captivity urging politicians and the public not to politicize their ordeal (Badmus, 2026; Al Jazeera, 2026; Vanguard, 2026).

It seems from the Oyo State abduction case, propaganda theory reveals how competing narratives emerged to frame the incident for political advantage, security justification, and public mobilization.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The concept of propaganda seems to have evolved significantly from its traditional association with wartime communication, in contemporary societies, propaganda permeates politics, governance, security communication, public relations, and digital media ecosystems.

According to Jowett and O'Donnell (2022), propaganda involves strategic attempts to influence perceptions and direct behaviour towards achieving predetermined objectives. Propaganda becomes particularly influential during periods of social crisis when uncertainty creates demand for information.

Likewise, several Nigerian scholars have argued that media framing significantly influences public understanding of insecurity. Nwabueze (2021) observes that media organizations frequently

adopt conflict-oriented reporting styles that amplify fear and anxiety. Similarly, Ekwueme and Obayi (2022) contend that sensational reporting of insecurity contributes to public distrust of government institutions. Studies by Okoro and Odoemelam (2023) indicate that security-related misinformation often travels faster than verified information because emotionally charged content attracts greater public engagement. One of the studies on the media and insecurity in Nigeria was conducted by Nwankwo and Okoro (2019), who investigated the role of social media in amplifying security crises in the North-East region. Using content analysis of Facebook and Twitter posts related to insurgency activities, the study found that misinformation and propaganda significantly heightened public fear and distrust of government security agencies. The researchers concluded that social media has become a powerful tool through which both state and non-state actors manipulate public perception during security crises.

Similarly, Asemah (2020) examined the impact of social media messages on public reactions to insecurity in Nigeria. Through survey research involving 500 respondents across six geopolitical zones, the study revealed that repeated exposure to propaganda content influenced citizens' perception of government performance in managing security challenges. The study found that emotionally charged narratives often received greater engagement than verified information, thereby reinforcing fear and uncertainty among the populace. In Nigeria, Edegoh et al. (2021) investigated how social media narratives influenced public opinion during major security incidents. Employing a mixed-methods approach involving surveys and focus group discussions, the researchers discovered that exposure to unverified information significantly shaped citizens' perceptions of government competence and security preparedness. Their findings showed that social media users were more likely to share sensational content than factual reports, thereby contributing to the spread of propaganda. Likewise, Ojebuyi (2022) examined public responses to online narratives surrounding insecurity in Nigeria. The study found that propaganda messages disseminated through WhatsApp groups and Facebook communities often generated moral panic, particularly among parents and guardians. The research concluded that digital propaganda contributes to the construction of public realities that may not necessarily reflect actual security conditions.

Adamu and Muhammad, (2021) analyzed media coverage of school kidnappings in Northern Nigeria. Using qualitative content analysis, the researchers found that social media platforms frequently circulated exaggerated casualty figures, fabricated rescue stories, and unverified claims about government actions. These narratives often intensified public anxiety and undermined confidence in security agencies.

In another study, Abubakar and Yusuf (2023) investigated the relationship between insecurity and school enrolment in Northern Nigeria. Their findings revealed that widespread circulation of kidnapping-related propaganda discouraged school attendance and contributed to increased dropout rates. The study emphasized the need for accurate information dissemination during security emergencies.

The relationship between propaganda and public opinion has been extensively studied within communication and media research. McCombs and Shaw (1972), through the Agenda-Setting Theory, established that media platforms influence what people think about by determining which issues receive prominence.

DISCUSSION AND ANALYSIS

The discussion and analysis of the study will be centered on the research questions of the study. Propaganda - understood in mass communication scholarship as strategically crafted information, whether true, false, or emotionally charged, designed to influence public perception and behaviour—has become a defining feature of how school abduction crises unfold in contemporary

Nigeria (Ellul, 1965; Herman & Chomsky, 1988). During the Oyo incident, multiple actors—including government agencies, security forces, political opponents, civil society groups, and online influencers—engaged in competing narrative construction, each advancing framings that served particular institutional or ideological interests (Frontiers in Communication, 2022; Nigerian Digital Rights, 2026).

However, beyond the immediate security implications, the Oyo abduction crisis has been characterized by a parallel epidemic of misinformation and propaganda that has significantly complicated response efforts and public understanding of the situation. Within days of the incident, the Nigerian Digital Rights (NDR) fact-checking organization documented a surge of false claims, recycled images from unrelated kidnappings, doctored videos, and unverified reports of victim releases flooding social media and mainstream news platforms (Nigerian Digital Rights, 2026).

Studies of Nigerian media coverage of high-profile abductions, particularly the 2014 Chibok schoolgirls' kidnapping by Boko Haram, reveal that the story was predominantly framed as a mass abduction, an act of terrorism and Islamic militancy, and evidence of government inaction (Baker, 2018; Ekeh & Ojebode, 2022). These frames were not neutral; they often reflected ethnic and regional biases, with some newspapers emphasizing narratives that suggested ethnic solidarity or blame, thereby potentially increasing fear of the “other” and deepening polarization along ethnic and religious lines (Baker, 2018). At the same time, government sources dominated the coverage, while alternative voices—such as families of victims, community leaders, and independent experts—were marginalized or excluded, allowing state-centered narratives to function as a form of propaganda that legitimized official positions while downplaying structural causes of insecurity (Baker, 2018; International Centre for Counter-Terrorism, 2022).

Moreover, much of the reporting on kidnapping in Nigeria has been straight news with limited interpretive or investigative depth, even as the frequency and severity of abductions increased (Mohammed, 2024; Udeze et al., 2023). Sensational headlines, repetitive crime stories, and the disclosure of ransom payments can inadvertently normalize or glamorize the crime, creating a propaganda-like effect that may influence public perception and even encourage vulnerable individuals to engage in kidnapping-for-ransom (Mohammed, 2024; Oluwafemi, 2025). Research indicates that Nigerian mass media disclosure of ransoms paid by kidnapping victims influenced vulnerable Nigerians to indulge in kidnapping-for-ransom, suggesting that media practices can have unintended criminogenic effects (Oluwafemi, 2025).

Furthermore, the manner in which kidnapping is covered—sensational headlines, repetitive crime stories, and disclosure of ransom payments—can inadvertently normalise or glamorise the crime, creating a propaganda-like effect that may influence public perception and even encourage vulnerable individuals to engage in kidnapping-for-ransom (Mohammed, 2024; Oluwafemi, 2025). Research indicates that Nigerian mass media disclosure of ransoms paid by kidnapping victims influenced vulnerable Nigerians to indulge in kidnapping-for-ransom, suggesting that media practices can have unintended criminogenic effects (Oluwafemi, 2025).

Armed groups such as Boko Haram and the Islamic State West Africa Province (ISWAP) have deliberately used propaganda to contest state narratives, glorify their operations, and frame abductions as evidence of their strength and the government's weakness (VOA News, 2018; International Centre for Counter-Terrorism, 2022). For example, the release of videos featuring

some of the Chibok schoolgirls stating they did not want to return was described by security analysts as a propaganda counter-strike aimed at undermining the Nigerian government's claim that Boko Haram had been defeated (VOA News, 2018). Such propaganda efforts are designed to sustain the group's ideological appeal, attract recruits, and negotiate from a position of perceived strength during ransom or prisoner-exchange discussions (VOA News, 2018).

The Oyo State Government's dissemination of specific attribute, namely, the alleged demands for ransom, weapons, and Sharia law, constitutes a second-level agenda-setting maneuver. By framing the abductors as religiously motivated extremists rather than economically driven criminals, the government sought to divert attention from governance failures, framing the incident as an external threat (religious extremism) rather than a failure of local security infrastructure (Badmus, 2026).

Oamen, 2023 & Sarah, 2024 in their submission lamented the devastating effect of propaganda on abduction when manipulated and framed in a stylistic **trauma-focused reporting alone, they noted that the** coverage often centres on the emotional suffering of victims and families, which can generate sympathy but also reduce complex political and security issues to human-interest stories, diverting attention from structural causes.

Aiseng & Akpojivi, 2022 in their submission explains how the presentation of information influences public interpretation, stating that in abduction reporting, media may frame events as heroic, political, tragic, or profitable, and each frame can produce different audience reactions. They explained that Nigerian studies on media framing suggest that selective emphasis on kidnappers, ransom, or government failure can shape public opinion and may also affect the behavior of impressionable audiences, warning that framing can either discourage crime or unintentionally reinforce it.

A call has been made, warning that the focus on the abduction itself, rather than on broader patterns of school insecurity in Nigeria reflects a classic first-level agenda-setting strategy: drawing attention to a specific incident while obscuring systemic trends (Al Jazeera, 2026).

Findings

The findings to the research question one - How are propaganda represented in media narratives about abduction in Nigeria? The result of the study shows that propaganda in the media narratives is significantly represented through the manipulation of facts and framing the details to conform to the narratives of the conveners of the reports, even when the narratives seems deceptive and misleading.

The findings of the study is in agreement the submission of Baker, 2018; Ekeh & Ojebode, 2022, revealing that, 'Nigerian media coverage of high-profile abductions are predominantly framed as a mass abduction, an act of terrorism and Islamic militancy, and evidence of government inaction. These frames were not neutral; they often reflected ethnic and regional biases, with some newspapers emphasizing narratives that suggested ethnic solidarity or blame, thereby potentially increasing fear and deepening polarization along ethnic and religious lines.'

The study discovered that there is a huge amount of distortion in how propaganda are represented in media narratives about abduction in Nigeria. This discovery coincides with Badmus, 2026 position, He cautioned that by framing the abductors as religiously motivated extremists rather than economically driven criminals, the government sought to divert attention from governance

failures, framing the incident as an external threat (religious extremism) rather than a failure of local security infrastructure.

Furthermore, the study outcome noticed that the usage of propaganda reports in the Oyo abduction led to a lot of misleading and unverified reports, which seems to complicate the investigation process. The outcome was in collaboration with the submission of NDR, 2026 which noted that: the Oyo abduction crisis has been characterized by a parallel epidemic of misinformation and propaganda that has significantly complicated response efforts and public understanding of the situation. Within days of the incident, the Nigerian Digital Rights (NDR) fact-checking organization documented a surge of false claims, recycled images from unrelated kidnappings, doctored videos, and unverified reports of victim releases flooding social media and mainstream news platforms.

The findings to the research question two - To what extent does sensational reporting influence public perception of abduction? Findings from the study revealed that sensational reporting influence public perception of abduction. It was discovered that if not checked, it could lure the audiences' in engaging in abduction. Mohammed, 2024; and Oluwafemi, 2025 warned that sensational headlines, repetitive crime stories, and the disclosure of ransom payments can inadvertently normalize or glamorize the crime, creating a propaganda-like effect that may influence public perception and even encourage vulnerable individuals to engage in kidnapping-for-ransom.

Adamu and Muhammad, (2021) in their study found out that these narratives often intensified public anxiety and undermined confidence in security agencies, lamenting that social media platforms frequently circulated exaggerated casualty figures, fabricated rescue stories, and unverified claims about government actions.

Aiseng & Akpojivi, 2022 in their submission on sensationalism reporting on abduction stated that media may frame events as heroic, political, tragic, or profitable, and each frame can produce different audience reactions. They explained that Nigerian studies on media framing suggest that selective emphasis on kidnappers, ransom, or government failure can shape public opinion and may also affect the behavior of impressionable audiences, warning that framing can either discourage crime or unintentionally reinforce it.

Conclusion

The study concludes that the challenge of insecurity in Nigeria extends beyond physical threats to include information threats. Propaganda has become a powerful force in shaping public perceptions of school abductions and insecurity. While insecurity remains a genuine concern, the distortion of information through propaganda often magnifies fear, weakens institutional trust, and complicates security responses. Addressing insecurity therefore requires both physical security interventions and effective information management strategies.

Recommendations

The study recommends that journalists and media organizations report abduction cases responsibly, avoid glorifying abductors, and prioritize accurate, ethical coverage that informs the public without spreading fear or criminal prestige. It also suggests that government and civil

society should support public enlightenment campaigns to counter harmful narratives and strengthen trust in credible information.

In addition, media organizations should prioritize fact-based reporting, schools should implement crisis communication mechanisms; citizens should be educated on media and information literacy; social media companies should strengthen measures against false narratives and fake news; security agencies should improve transparency and public engagement; and media professionals should promote information verification and digital literacy initiatives.

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