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Public Perception of Nigerian Newspaper Coverage of Xenophobic Attacks in South Africa

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Abstract

This study investigates public perception of Nigerian newspaper coverage of xenophobic attacks in South Africa with specific emphasis on portrayal of Nigerian victims, perpetrators and the South African Government. With the aid of Cochran formula, a sample size of 385 respondents was drawn from Enugu State, Nigeria. The questionnaire was used as an instrument of data collection while the reliability of the instrument was determined through a test retest approach and this yielded a correlation coefficient of 0.92. Result revealed that respondents perceived Nigerian newspaper portrayal of Nigerian victims of xenophobia as positive while the perpetrators were found to be portrayed in the negative light. Result also revealed that the South African Government was perceived to be portrayed as incompetent. Within the frame work of perception theory, the researcher argues that the perception of the respondents may have been influenced by patriotism and recommends, among others that the media should avoid the temptation of portraying the South African Government in negative light as doing so will not help matters.

Keywords: newspaper, perception, portrayal, South Africa and xenophobia

1.1 Introduction

For some time now, the world has been struggling to understanding why xenophobic attacks have continued in South Africa. World leaders, had at different point, condemned the gale of xenophobia in South Africa with a call on the government of the country to expedite action against the heinous activities. Commenting on this, Olijo (2015, p. 1) notes that Xenophobic attacks have remained regrettably consistent in So uth Africa since the country got her independence in 1994. The submission by Olijo gives more insight on the growing rate of xenophobia in the Rainbow Nation. Although those attitudes were a feature of life in South Africa before 1948, the government policy of apartheid, in place from 1948 to 1994, firmly entrenched intolerance of "difference" in South African society. Although the State and its people have since made significant progress in their efforts to overcome the country's apartheid past, racial and tribal identities still have a strong impact on the prevailing culture (International Committee of the Red Cross 2013).

A survey conducted in 2006 by the South African Immigration Project, a government-funded programme aimed at establishing the extent of the immigration problems, found that 60% of South Africans believe that immigrants weaken society, Economic frustration, joblessness and competition over scarce resources are elements often used to characterize a context that can be conducive to the rise of anti--migrant sentiments and attitudes. In fact, many South African workers consider foreign co--workers to be responsible for 'driving down wages and conditions'- a belief supported by many managers' claims that foreigners work 'harder for less'. For example, in a study carried out by Di Pola, (2012) at the Marco Polo bus factory in Ekurhuleni, South Africa showed that xenophobic sentiments and practices are indeed present in formal workplaces. It, thus, challenges the assumption underlining the prevalent neglect of workplaces among studies on xenophobia in South Africa, namely that xenophobia will be found among unemployed people or informal workers but not in formal workplaces. The difficulty is explained by the fact that members are embedded in a climate characterized by suspicion toward foreigners; such suspicion is amplified by the national discourse and reinforced in communities.

The general public, which constitute the audience of the mass media are very critical component in the analysis of media contents. What this simply means is that public, or better still, audience perception of media coverage on xenophobic attacks in South Africa is a subject of public interest. This is because there are Nigerians who are victims of these attacks. Odunwa (2015, para, 4) paints the picture of migration of Nigerians to South Africa thus:

The migration of Nigerians to South Africa in search of better jobs and improved standards of living, started shortly after that country's independence in 1994. Nigerian experts had been seconded to that country to help in its governance. Some of them are still there in their professional capacity. A second wave of economic Nigerian migrants started moving to South Africa from 1999 when nascent democracy took root in Nigeria. Since then, we have witnessed increased migration with the usual negative effect, such as Nigerians getting involved in crime, drug pushing, sex trade and other vices

The submission above shows that what the media say about xenophobia is of public interest to Nigerians. It is in pursuant of this reality that this study investigates public perception of Nigerian newspaper coverage of xenophobia.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

For some time now, xenophobia has become a common feature of the Rain bow Nation. It continuous occurrence has posed a puzzle to world leaders as all treaties aimed at resolving the problem have so far proved abortive. As recent as 2015, there was another round of xenophobic attack in South Africa that led to the loss of lives and property. This is suggestive of the sad reality that xenophobia has come to stay in South Africa. Beyond the xenophobia is the power of the media as agenda setters. The manner of coverage of issues by the media is largely believed to have a corresponding effect on the general society. This therefore constitutes a challenge to researcher as there exist paucity of literature on public perception of media coverage of xenophobia. Most of the studies have focused more on media coverage of the issue, thus creating a study gap. The problem in Nigeria has even been compounded because, even though Nigerians are affected by the gale of xenophobia in South African, Nigerians scholars have done little in this regard.

1.3 Research Objectives

The general objective of this study is to determine public perception of media coverage of xenophobic attacks in South Africa. Specifically, the study seeks to achieve the following

- 1. To determine public perception of Nigerian newspaper portrayal of Nigerians affected by xenophobia
- 2. To investigate public perception of Nigerian newspaper portrayal of the perpetrators of xenophobia
- 3. To find out public perception of Nigerian newspaper presentation of the South African government

1.4 Research Questions

This study seeks answers to the following questions:

- 1. What is public perception of Nigerian newspaper portrayal of Nigerians affected by xenophobia in South Africa?
- 2. What is public perception of Nigerian newspaper portrayal of the perpetrators of xenophobia in South Africa?
- 3. What is public perception of Nigerian newspaper presentation of the South African government in relation to xenophobia in South Africa?

1.4 Research Hypotheses

This study formulated the following hypotheses and were tested at 0.05

Ho₁: The public does not perceive Nigerian newspaper portrayal of Nigerians affected by xenophobic attacks in South Africa as positive

Ho₂: The public does not perceive newspaper portrayal of South Africans as positive

Ho₃: The public perceive Nigerian newspaper portrayal of South African Government as not incompetent.

2.1 Xenophobia and its Causes

Xenophobia means fear or dislike of foreigners. Laher (2008) defines xenophobia as the "hatred or fear of foreigners" (immigrants and refugees) by the nationals of a particular country. Laher avers further that xenophobia in South Africa is not restricted to fear and dislike. Instead, it results in 'intense tension and even violence by South African's toward African immigrant. Additionally, Nyar (2010) avers that xenophobic violence may be seen as a deeply institutionalized legacy of South Africa's apartheid past and has to be specifically contextualized against a broader pattern of attacks conducted against African non-nationals since the beginning of 1994. The attacks on foreigners in South Africa have been attributed to a number of factors which range from competition for scarce resources to health implication, to social vices, to even competition for

women. The Human Science Research Council (2008) lists the causes of xenophobic attacks in South Africa to include relative deprivation, group process, South African exceptionalism and exclusive citizenship. Relative deprivation is the lack of resources to sustain the diet, lifestyle, activities and amenities that an individual or group are accustomed to or that are widely encouraged or approved in the society to which they belong. Measuring relative deprivation allows an objective comparison between the situation of the individual or group compared to the rest of society (HSRC 2008). Relative deprivation may also emphasize the individual experience of discontent when being deprived of something to which one believes oneself to be entitled; however emphasizing the perspective of the individual makes objective measurement problematic. Based on this therefore, it can be argued that the feeling of deprivation by South Africans led to xenophobia. Group process or dynamics is a system of behaviours and psychological processes occurring within a social group (intragroup dynamics), or between social groups (intergroup dynamics). The study of group dynamics can be useful in understanding decision-making behaviour, tracking the spread of diseases in society, creating effective therapy techniques, and following the emergence and popularity of new ideas and technologies (Backstrom, Huttenlocher, Kleinberg, & Lan, 2006). Group dynamics are at the core of understanding racism, sexism, and other forms of social prejudice and discrimination. Also, South African exceptionalism, or a feeling of superiority in relation to other Africans has contributed greatly to xenophobia and exclusive citizenship, or a form of nationalism that excludes others.

In other words, South Africa belongs to South Africans. Neocosmos (2006) opines that the most remarkable feature of xenophobia experienced in South Africa is that it appears to have taken on a primarily racial form; it is directed at migrants, and especially black migrants, from elsewhere on the continent, as opposed to, for example, Europeans or Americans, who are, to a certain extent, practically welcomed with open arms. This racially selective xenophobia is exemplified by the fact that many of those in leadership positions are of 'foreign' origin, suggesting that exclusion is not simply directed against 'foreigners' but against those who seem to correspond to stereotypes of the stranger, especially that from Africa. Andile (2015) blames xenophobia on poor governance and the influx of foreigners into South Africa. Andile gives a brief break down of foreigners in South African thus:

1) Over 1-3 million Zimbabweans live in South Africa

2) Over 32000 Somalis live in South Africa as per Home Affairs Department, and this is surely underestimated as many of them come into the country illegally. They have taken control of small businesses in most of the townships especially in the Eastern Cape and Western Cape.

3) Over 250000 Nigerians live in South Africa. These people enjoy a better living in the Suburbs and in Town centres.

4) We have 'China Cities' in South Africa.

The argument of foreigner taking over jobs meant for South Africans is not supported by facts. This is because a study on Migration and employment in South Africa conducted by the Migrating for Work Research Consortium (2014) showed that those born outside the country were far less likely than those born in South Africa to be employees, and far more likely to be their own account workers (self-employed without employers) or employers. The study showed that 82% of the working population aged between 15 and 64 were "non-migrants", 14% were "domestic migrants" who had moved between provinces in the past five years and just 4% could be classed as "international migrants." With an official working population of 33,017,579 people, this means that around 1.2 million of them were international migrants. A racial breakdown of the statistics reveals that 79% of international migrants were African, 17% were white and around three percent were Indians or Asians. According to the MIWORC research, 32.65% of international migrants are employed in the informal sector in South Africa compared to 16.57% of "non-migrants" and 17.97% of "domestic migrants". The study suggested this is because the informal sector offers the lowest entry cost into the labour market. The majority of international migrants also come from African countries which have large informal sectors.

The result further suggests that foreign-born workers constitute a larger proportion of domestic workers than of any other occupation category. In contrast, they are least evident among skilled agricultural workers, clerks and operators. The overwhelming majority of skilled agricultural workers live and work in the province in which they were born. In contrast, only 59 percent of domestic workers were reported to live in the province in which they were born. Based on this study, Wilkinson (2015) argues that migrant are contributing to the economic progress of South Africans. This according to Wilkinson is because the study further indicates that international migrants are far more likely to run their own businesses. 11% percent were reported to be "employers" and 21% were classed as "self-employed." By comparison, only 5% of non-migrants and domestic migrants were employers, and only 9% of non-migrants and 7% of domestic migrants were self-employed. In the face of this is the pale of the mass media of communication, they are very important agents of social change.

2.2 The Media and Xenophobia

The media of mass communication cannot pretend that everything is well with the relationship between South Africa and Nigeria. The manner of media coverage of xenophobia is thus, of paramount important. Consequently, empirical insight is needed.

First, Mohammed (2011) in a study on "Xenophobia and media: An exploratory study on the public perception of the Nelson Mandela Bay Community" was reviewed. The main purpose of the study was to explore the public perception pertaining to foreign nationals establishing whether their representation by the press is indeed reflected in public perception. The assumption of the study was that the media misrepresented foreign nationals and therefore have influenced NMB residents' perceptions towards the foreigners. The random probability sampling was adopted by the researcher to select 150 subjects for the study. In addition, 10 interviews and 2 focus groups discussions were conducted. The result showed that 60% of the respondents reported that they get most of their information on foreign nationals from the media. However, 40% of the responses bolster belief that the media misrepresents foreign nationals. 50% of respondents think the media do not only misrepresent the non-nationals, but that the media directly contributes to anti-migrant sentiments. 35% of the respondents reported that the media have negatively influenced their perception towards the foreign nationals in the country. This study is related to the current one because it investigates media coverage of foreigners in South Africa and how this coverage can propel xenophobia. The study was conducted in South Africa; hence the environment may have influenced the result of the study.

Further more, Touwen (2009) conducted a study on "Reporting on xenophobia in South Africa: An analyses of Dutch print media coverage of the 2008 xenophobic violence in South Africa." The objective of the study was to find out the image(s) of South Africa as constructed in the Dutch print media as a result of the coverage of xenophobic violence in South Africa in May 2008. Within the field of print media, the researcher analyzed three mainstream national newspapers with different audiences: The social-liberal NRC Handelsblad, the more religious and socially oriented Trouw and the 'Capitalist' Telegraaf. The researcher also analyzed a regional newspaper BN/De Stem, two free tabloid newspapers, Metro and Spits and one weekly newspaper, Elsevier. The researcher analyzed the news coverage on xenophobic violence from the May 19th when the first items were published until two months after the major outburst. General information on the news items, such as length of articles, place in the newspapers, and use of images were considered. The researcher also analysed the texts using detailed content analyses and general discourse analyses (prepositions).

Touwen structured the list of key words along the five building blocks of news: who, what, when, where, and why. The 'when' was not a distinctive category in the key word list but the researcher did use it to describe the time factor. Touwen used some simple statistics and presentation methods to illustrate the news coverage over time. The first two categories deal with 'who' and consists of words used to describe victims of xenophobic violence on the one hand and, perpetrators on the other. The third category deals with 'what', it includes words used to describe the events. The reasons 'why' were listed in the fourth category. Finally Touwen collected information on the 'where'. In the latter category it's foremost interesting to see how the locations were described and what the level of detail was, in different newspapers.

The result of the study showed that the victims were mainly represented through a dependency frame, however not too the extreme of helplessness which is common in the representation of refugees in conflict areas in other parts of Africa. Trouw newspaper was found to be the most outspoken in the representation through this frame. The representations of the economic status of the victims (employed) and perpetrators (unemployed) align with representations of class struggle which were common in the dependency image. Trouw was found to also sympathise with the victims, in this way involving the readers in processes of bothering in which a moral superiority of the victims over the perpetrators is clearly underlying the discourse. Telegraaf was reported to add characteristics of the colonial image to the representation of the victims. The representation of the events as brutal added another ethnic component to the image in Telegraaf. But in this case it resulted in a sloppy representation because part of the truth was thus concealed. It turned out that over 20% of the victims were South Africans of minority ethnic groups. The perpetrators were for the large part represented through the colonial frame of the primitive savage. This image was found to be present and dominant in all newspapers and was the only way in which the perpetrators were visualized in photographs. Commenting on the negative effect of media coverage of the xenophobic attacks, the researcher opines that the representation of xenophobic violence, through frames of dependency, conflict and state failure are a clear indication that the rainbow image is in decline and also an indication that South Africa is now represented through the same images as the rest of Africa .This study is relevant to the current one because it investigated media coverage of xenophobic attacks. However, the issue of public perception was not addressed.

Finally, Smith (2008) conducted a study on 'The media's coverage of xenophobia and the xenophobic violence prior to and including May 2008.' The researcher adopted a meta design which entails reviewing previous empirical studies. The result showed as follows: The media are anti-immigration, or at least make

negative references to migrants and immigrants, of an un-analytical/ simplistic approach, with little in-depth analysis; persist in using certain labels when referring to migrants such as 'illegal immigrants'; and perpetuate negative stereotypes about migrants using such terms as 'job stealers', 'criminals', and 'illegals.' This study is related to the current one because it investigated media coverage of xenophobic attacks.

One thing that is missing across all the studies so far reviewed is the inability of the researchers to examine public perception of media portrayal of the government of South Africa and Nigeria. The current study will fill this gap.

2.3 Theoretical Framework

This study was anchored on perception theory. Perception theory posits that the process of interpreting messages is complex and that these communicator goals may be difficult to achieve (Cantril, 2002, p.74). Perception has been defined as the process by which we interpret sensory data (Lahlry, 1991). Sensory data come to us through our five senses. Research has identified two types of influences on our perception: structural and functional. Structural influences on perception come from the physical aspects of the stimuli to which we are being exposed—for instance, the closer together a series of dots, the more they are seen as forming a line. Functional influences are the psychological factors that influence perception, and therefore, introduce some subjectivity into the process. This theory provides an understanding on the perception of media reports on xenophobia in South Africa. Their perception may however, not be free from external influence such as environmental influence, family tie etc.

3.1 Methodology

This study adopted survey research design to investigate public perception of media coverage of xenophobic attack in South Africa. Survey is usually the most appropriate method for behavioural research and hence this study borders on audience perception of media coverage of xenophobia, survey was considered the most appropriate (Babbie 2013 and Wimmer & Dominick 2013). The sample size for this study was 385 respondents. With 95 percent level of confidence (confidence interval - \pm 5%), population estimate of 50% (.5) and a permitted margin of error at .05 (5 percentage points), the researcher determined the sample size for the study with the Cochran (1963,p.75) Equation '1' which yields a representative sample for population that are large and it is as follows:

 $n0 = [\underline{Z/_2}]^2 (p q)$ e^2 $n0 = [\underline{Z/_2}]^2 (P) (1-P)$ e^2

Where: n0= sample size, Z^2 = confidence level (the abscissa of the normal curve that cuts off an area α at the tails), p= rate of occurrence or prevalence (the estimated proportion of an attribute that is present in a population), q= complement of p and e= margin of error. Therefore;

$$n = \frac{[1.96]^2 \ 0.5 \ (1 - 0.5)}{0.05^2} \qquad n = \frac{3.8416 \ (0.25)}{0.0025}$$

n= 385

To assess public perception of newspaper portrayal of Nigerian immigrants in South Africa, six generic frames were delineated as professionals, victims of crimes, entrepreneurs desperate Nigerians, criminals and job seekers Nigerians. These frames were subsequently classified into two broad nominal scale as positive portrayal and negative portrayal. The first three frames were classified as positive portrayal while the other three were classified as negative portrayal. To determine public perception of Nigerian newspaper portrayal of South Africans, the following frames were delineated: freedom fighters, innocent citizens, wicked people and unnecessary attacks. The first two frames were classified as positive portrayal where the other two were classified as negative portrayal. With regards to the portrayal of the government of South Africa, the researcher adopted a polar adjectival scale of competent and incompetent. Reliability of instrument was determined through the use of a test retest approach. A pre-test questionnaire of 20 copies were designed and administered

to respondents in the study area. After two weeks interval, the same pre-test copies of questionnaire were administered again to the same respondents with the aid of SPSS version 16.0, the correlation coefficient was determined and this yielded 0.92 reliability which was considered high. The analyses in this study were done with the aid of SPSS version 16.0 while simple percentage and Chi- square were used as a statistical tools.

4.1 Results

Out of the 385 copies of the questionnaire that were administered, 356 were filled and returned. This represents 92% which was considered high enough for analysis. It should be noted that the demographics of the respondents were insignificant.

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Professionals	96	27.0	27.0	27.0
	Victims of crime	87	24.4	24.4	51.4
	Entrepreneurs	107	30.1	30.1	81.5
	desperate Nigerians	45	12.6	12.6	94.1
	rejected Nigerians	10	2.8	2.8	96.9
	Criminals	11	3.1	3.1	100.0
	Total	356	100.0	100.0	

Table 1:Public perception of newspaper portrayal of Nigerian affected by xenophobia

Source: Field Survey, 2015

Result from table 1 above shows that public perception of Nigerian newspaper portrayal of Nigerians affected by xenophobic attacks in South Africa is that, they are mostly portrayed as professionals (27%), victims of crimes (24.4%) entrepreneurs (30.1%). This implies that they are portrayed positively. A further analysis of the data yielded Chi-Square, $\chi^2 = 157.70$ and p-value of 0.001 and 5 degree of freedom. Therefore, the first null hypothesis- public does not perceive Nigerian newspaper portrayal of Nigerians affected by xenophobic attacks in South Africa as positive was rejected, an indication that they are portrayed in positive light. Table 2 shows public perception of newspaper portrayal of South Africans

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Freedom fighters	7	2.0	2.0	2.0
innocent citizens	6	1.7	1.7	3.7
Wicked people	147	41.3	41.3	44.9
Hostile citizens	196	55.1	55.1	100.0
Total	356	100.0	100.0	

Table 2 : Public perception on newspaper portrayal of South Africans

Source: Field Survey, 2015

The result from table 2 above shows that respondents perceived newspaper portrayal of South Africans as largely negative. This is because the hostile citizen frame had the highest percentage of 55.1, followed by wicked citizens with 41.3%. A further analysis of the result yielded a Chi-square $\chi^2 = 319.393$ and p-value of 0.001 and 3 degree of freedom at 0.05 level of significance. Based on this, the second null hypothesis-the public does not perceive newspaper portrayal of South Africans as negative was rejected. The following table (3) shows public perception of Nigerian newspaper presentation of the South African government.

_		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Competent	118	33.1	33.1	33.1
	incompetent	238	66.9	66.9	100.0
	Total	356	100.0	100.0	

Table 3: public perception of South African Government
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Source: Field Survey, 2015

The result from the table (3) above shows that the public perceive newspaper portrayal of South African government as incompetent. This is because only 118 of the respondents representing 33.1% reported that Nigerian newspaper portray South African Government in negative light while a whopping 238 representing 66.6% reported that Nigerian newspapers portray the South African Government as incompetent. A further analysis of the data yielded $\chi^2 = 40.449$ and p-value 0.001 at 1 degree of freedom. With this result, the third null hypothesis-public perceive Nigerian newspaper portrayal of South African Government as not incompetent was rejected.

5.1 Discussion of Findings

The result of this study revealed that the public perceived the Nigerian newspapers as promoting dominant positive frames in the portrayal of Nigerians affected by the xenophobia in South Africa. This result could be because of the location of the media and the people concerned. Naturally, Nigerian media are most likely to have bias for the Nigerian citizens. This result runs contrary to that of Mohammed (2011) who in a study on "Xenophobia and media: An exploratory study on the public perception of the Nelson Mandela Bay Community" reported that the public perceived the media as negatively portraying foreigners.

The result of the study also revealed that the respondents reported that most of the perpetrators were largely represented by Nigerian newspapers in the negative frames. (see table 2). They were perceived to be mostly presented as wicked and hostile citizens. This result is a marginal departure from Touwen (2009) who in a content analysis reported that perpetrators were presented in a frame the researcher called colonial frame of the primitive savage. This simply means, the perpetrators were portrayed as those with primitive and colonial ideas.

Finally, the result of this study revealed that the government of South Africa was perceived to have been portrayed as incompetent in handling xenophobia which is gradually becoming a way of life in the Rainbow Nation. For sure, xenophobia has been going on in South Africa for many years now. This result further provides a framework for understanding the perception theory especially the functional influences that are said to be the psychological factors that influence perception, and therefore, introduce some subjectivity into the process. It can be said that the perceived understanding of the fact that xenophobia has been going on in South Africa for a very long time may have influenced the media portrayal and even the public perception of such portrayals.

5.2 Conclusion/Recommendations

It is a sad reality that xenophobia has been going on in South Africa for a very long time. More disturbing is the fact that in most cases, it is Africans that are the target; this reality has a way of threatening the unity of Africa. At a time when Africans should unite and speak with one voice, some misguided elements, are by their actions, threatening the unity of the continent. The media of mass communication have a great role to play in the face of growing cases of xenophobia. The media as agenda setters must do everything within their reach to bring a lasting peace in South Africa. This study thus makes the following recommendations

- Nigerian newspapers should avoid the temptation of portraying the South African Government as incompetent as doing so does not solve any problem.
- The media, both in Nigeria and South African should through editorials and commentaries, educate the general public on the need to avoid all forms of xenophobia.
- The media should continue to set agenda for the government on xenophobia with a view to stemming the tide.

• Further studies should compare the perception of media portrayal of both victims and perpetrators of xenophobia with sample drawn from both Nigeria and South Africa.

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