

# Public Perception of Online Newspapers Reports of Unknown Gunmen by Residents of South East, Nigeria

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## **Abstract**

*This study examined the perception of online newspapers reportage of the killings by the so called 'Unknown Gunmen' (UGM), by South East residents of Nigeria. This paper was anchored on the Perception and Social Responsibility theories. The objective of the study were to ascertain whether the South East residents were exposed to online reports about the activities of the Unknown Gun Men; find out the online newspapers that the residents were exposed to; determine the perception of the residents on the menace of the Unknown Gun Men and ascertain the extent of influence of the online reports on the perception of the Unknown Gun Men. The study adopted the survey method, while the questionnaire served as the data gathering tool. Simple and purposive sampling techniques produced a sample of 576 residents. Findings revealed that majority of the respondents were exposed to online news reports on the activities of Unknown Gunmen (UGM) and most of them get their news on the activities of Unknown Gun Men from Premiumtimes.com The respondents perceived from the reports; Unknown Gun Men as agents of terror and fear whose activities have become inimical to the socioeconomic lives of the residents and that the reports largely influenced residents' perception of the Unknown Gun Men phenomenon. Given the correlation, the paper recommended, among others, that regular workshops and training programmes be organized for online reporters to instil in them the best global practices of terrorism and conflict reporting devoid of over sensationalism and propaganda of fear in the land.*

**Keywords:** *Online newspapers, Insecurity, Terrorism, unknown gunmen*

## **Introduction**

Besides a vibrant economy, a constitution in a democracy, one pre-

requisite which is an indispensable aspect of existence that makes a nation or a state, is an efficient security

apparatus to protect her territorially demarcated integrity. This in essence implies that a nation with all the wealth in natural and human resources and yet unable to protect her citizens, boundaries and properties can be classified as a failed state or non-existent country. Considering the enormous security huddles facing Nigeria; the inception of Boko Haram in the early 2000's, the pre-Amnesty violence in the Niger Delta, the current separatist movement of the Indigenous Peoples of Biafra (IPOB) and the raging Unknown Gunmen renegades in the South East, it could be said that the country is on the precipice. The implosive dangers posed by various separatists agitators; Yoruba/Oduduwa (Afenifere) in the South West, Hausa/Fulani (Arewa) in the North, bandits, Yahoo Yahoo boys, human ritual killers and outright brigand by various criminal gangs; all these point to the unavoidable conclusion that Nigeria has been weighed down by incessant quagmire of insecurity. Moreover, the summation of a failed state, as ranked by Failed States Index, of which Nigeria is among; is a nation whose leaders are incapable of safeguarding lives, properties, marked by infrastructure deterioration and corruption. In *There was a Country: A Personal History of Biafra*, late Chinua Achebe (2012,p.251) has this to say about Nigeria's macabre dance with terrorism, "...Nigeria's federal government has always turned a blind eye to waves of ferocious and savage massacres of its citizens – mainly

Christian Southerners; mostly Igbos or indigenes of the middle belt and others with impunity."

As it is, there is a tidal wave of insecurity, an avalanche of colossal proportion edging South East states into a cliff-hanger near the valley of death. According to Uche & Iwuamadi (2018), insecurity is reflected in criminal escapades like cattle rustling, kidnapping, armed robbery, drug abuse, arson, rape and the brazen and gruesome massacre of people of agrarian communities with sophisticated weapons by suspected herdsmen and reprisal attacks from survival victims. In Nigeria, the socio-economic, political existentialities, proliferation of assault rifles, Islamisation/Fulanization tendencies coupled with lack of proper education are considered the drivers, facilitators and root of monstrous activities of criminals, including the Unknown Gun Men savage killings in South East geopolitical region of Nigeria. Massive influx of Small Arms and Light Weapons (SALWs) are reportedly smuggled into Nigeria from the Sahel as consequential aftermath of the fall of the regime of Murmar Ghadaffi in Libya. According to Adeniyi (2018), Okoli & Ugwu (2019), in September 2018, military troops in joint operations with the Department of State Services (DSS) arrested two illicit arms dealers along Funtua-Gusau road with 1,479 rounds of 7.62mm (special) ammunition, on their way to deliver the weapons to armed bandits.

The insecurity of the South East is so dire that the incumbent governor of Anambra state, Prof. Charles Soludo was almost killed during gubernatorial campaign where he lost three of his police orderlies. Whereas, the governor has recently imposed curfew on several Local Government Areas of the state, there have been reports about the infamous Owerri, Imo State prison break, kidnapping and killing of traditional rulers, prominent Ndigbo indigents including the widowed husband of late NAFDAC boss, Dora Akunyili's; Dr, Akunyili who was assassinated by the so called Unknown Gun Men. Elections are now controlled by the Monday-sit-home order as *This day* online (Wednesday, May 18, 2022) reported that the PDP informed INEC in the letter that in case of the southeast, the Senatorial primaries, the election be moved from Monday May 23 to Tuesday May 24, "due to the sit at home currently being observed in the south-east region."

The Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB) is a separatist organization in Nigeria. The self-determination group was founded in 2012 by Mazi Nnamdi Kanu, British/Nigerian political activist known for his advocacy of the contemporary Biafran independent movement. Allison (2017) contends that the aim of IPOB is to restore an independent state of Biafra in the Old Eastern Region of Nigeria; and also parts of the Middle Belt states of Nigeria such as Benue State and Kogi State, through an independence

referendum. *Punch online* newspaper reported that in 2017, IPOB was proscribed by the federal government of Nigeria as a terrorist organization with sanctions and threats to its members. Soon after IPOB leader, Mazi Nnamdi Kanu was abducted from Kenya and detained by the Nigerian government, through its Media and Publicity Secretary, Emma Powerful, IPOB gave declarative Monday sit-at-home which has grinded all commercial activities and vehicular movements to a halt in the South East states.

With so much daily massacres and bloodletting by aggrieved and marginalized ethnic groups, purportedly spearheaded by Islamisation, Fulanization Agenda with the complacency of current rulers of Nigeria, a critical appraisal of the role of online newspapers in reporting and combating the upsurge of killings of innocent Nigerians becomes imperative. Particularly, public perception of how online newspapers reports on activities of hoodlums. This has become much more pertinent and urgent, particularly in Anambra, Imo and Ebonyi States, where the activities of hoodlums, IPOB sit-at-home enforcement and the overwhelming presence in the state by heavily armed men hold sway. These gun men are the prime suspects of assassinations, murders, killings, decapitations, kidnappings, arsons and killing of security men and innocent civilians. The invasion of the South East states, particularly Anambra and Imo states,

by so called unknown gun men has left both the federal and state governments grappling for solutions while leaving the security forces incapable of containing the conundrum in the once peaceful South East region of Nigeria. This has led to general state of insecurity in the region albeit the entire Nigeria. The puzzle remains on the identities of these so called Unknown Gun Men. Neither the government, IPOB, citizens seem to know who they are or their sponsors. The dilemma deepens as no apprehension or public profiles of detained members of the dreaded Unknown Gun Men have been made. Oloyede, (2011, p. 64) was accurate in citing Joseph Pulitzer, “there is not a crime, there is not a dodge, there is not a trick, there is not a swindle, there is not a vice which does not live by secrecy. Get all these things out in the open, describe them, ridicule them in the press and sooner or later, public opinion will sweep them away.” It purports the pertinence of the media; print, broadcast and online/social media platforms as foremost mainstay in shaping, pacesetting, influencing, informing and educating the society. This role in turn, facilitates the mass media in shaping public opinion.

The traditional roles of the mass media in times past devolved around informing, educating and entertaining the public. However with the advent of online media, particularly online newspapers, where readers are also content creators, the crucial mandate of mass media become much more

prominent. Since the invention of the World Wide Web (www) by English scientist Tim Berners-Lee in 1989, the Internet has radically taken over other types of mass media. This is because the Internet is faster in dissemination of information and news, with lightning speed, easy access, interactivity (web 2.0) and much advanced digital technology. *New Media* is an interactive two-way communication (web 2.0) with users being the active producers of content and information. The status quo of the media, as cited by Mustapha and Abudulbaqui, (2012, p. 130), obviously prompted Thomas Jefferson, 3<sup>rd</sup>. United States President to acclaim, “were it left for me to choose whether we should have a government without newspapers or newspapers without government, I shall not hesitate a moment to choose the latter.” According to Seldes (1985, p. 344) Joseph Pulitzer (1847-1911), on his retirement, April 10, 1907 uttered ‘the moral obligation of journalism to the society is to always speak for the voiceless, siding unmistakably and unreservedly with the weak and vulnerable.’ Likewise, Awonyinfa and Igwe (2011), state that:

...At the heart of journalism is the reporter...the news hound, the ever curious and restless cynic with ears to the ground, sniffing out every whiff of news -whatsoever is public significance, whatsoever is topical,

whatsoever is timely,  
whatsoever is hidden,  
whatsoever somebody tries to  
hide, whatsoever somebody  
wants to read about.

The above citations accentuate the utmost significance of both traditional and online media in the society. While the media promote culture, moral values, knowledge, proffering solutions to societal maladies such as criminality, purveyors of violence, also fall within the prerogative of the media.

Acts of terrorism, violent conflicts and murders as orchestrated by Unknown Gun Men in the South East states, no doubt, have contributed in creating a state of insecurity, fear, economic sabotage and revulsion in the region.

This discourse examines the perception of online newspaper reportage of activities of Unknown Gun Men by South East residents. By adopting the quantitative approach in evaluating the correlation between online newspapers reports of the menace of the Unknown Gun Men and the insecurity in the South East of Nigeria, the study lays emphasis on public perception of online newspaper reports of the mayhem unleashed in the region by phenomenal forces. The gory and macabre scenes of violence associated with every sit-at-home order continue to urge serious challenges to federal/state governments, individuals and security forces in the region. The incredulity and obstinacy of South East residents,

compelled by fear, to comply with IPOB sit-at-home mandate, while ignoring government assurances to resume routine commercial activities and civil functions is unsettling. In effect, negating government authority and lauding the stranglehold IPOB has on the populace. South East states, particularly Anambra and Imo states like the Titanic seem to be sailing straight towards glacial icebergs. No doubt, a tinder box of dynamite is brewing in the region. Obviously, timing of the emergence of Unknown Gun Men coincided with the detention of IPOB leader, Mazi Nnamdi Kalu. Hence a study of online newspaper reportage of Unknown Gun Men activities cannot be divested from IPOB. The prerogative for this study therefore, is to investigate the perception of the residents about online newspapers reportage of Unknown Gun Men activities in the South East.

### **Statement of the Problem**

Since its inception in August 2021, there have been serious apprehensions on the effects of the enforcement of the IPOB sit-at-home order with a mandatory lockdown of commercial activities in the South East region of Nigeria. There have been equally serious concerns on how the media, particularly online media have been reporting the carnage caused by Unknown Gun Men in the region. In effect the quest to gauge public perception as to how online newspapers report of Unknown Gun

Men activities in the South East. Both the IPOB sit-at-home lockdown, hoodlums who may have hijacked the situation for criminality and savage assassinations of public and private citizens have continued unabated till this day, causing socioeconomic hardship.

From all indications, so long as the treason legal battle between the federal government and Mazi Nnamdi Kalu continues, there is no end on the enforcement of sit-at-home order. As a result the crisis, chaos, killings and unbridled security challenges will remain unabated. Therefore, the problem of the study is to provide empirical evidence of the public perception of the South East residents on the activities of the Unknown Gun Men.

### **Objectives**

1. Ascertain whether South East residents read online news on the activities of Unknown Gun Men
2. Find out the online newspaper through which South East residents get news on the activities of Unknown Gun Men.
3. Determine the perception of the South East residents on the menace of the Unknown Gun Men
4. Ascertain whether the South East residents' perception of the Unknown Gun Men was influenced by online newspapers reports of the news about Unknown Gun Men.

### **Theoretical Framework and Review of Related Studies**

According to Demuth (2013, p.24) the theory of perception is based on the fact that the content and quality of sensory input play a determinative role in influencing the final human perception. Sensory input represents the cornerstone of cognition and by its own nature it determines further sensory data processing. Because to look and to see is not the same just as to see and to know (why and) how I see what I see are two completely different types of understanding. What we perceive are only perceptions and there is nothing else accessible to us except perceptions. What we assume is behind our perception and what allegedly causes it, is just a rational construct. Besides perceptions, humans possess images, rational constructs and ideas we create ourselves. The question, however, is what we created them from, on what basis and how we perceive these ideas, how we understand them.

These cornerstones of knowledge, such as exposure to online newspapers are perceptions as objects which form the content and diversity of the world. Perceptions and sensing represent a unique source of how to experience something. It is no surprise that most human perceptions significantly correlate with philosophical realism, which suggests that people's perceptions are directly induced by external objects and more or less correspond to them. Demuth (2013, p.25) cited Gibson (1979), who

believed that a human perceives objects (their sensory qualities) in a way by which packets of information, arrays determined (structured) by objects, enter human sensors. It may seem that in Gibson's view an observer is more or less a passive space into which the information coming from the environment is being imprinted. However, the opposite is true. Gibson realized that, to some extent, our perception is effected by our active approach. And it doesn't mean only focusing our attention and perceptual accommodation.

The basic reason for presumption of individual distinctions in the perception of objects is frequently occurring inconsistencies in the description of individual experiences. Humans assume that our perception is realistic and that we grasp objects as they really are. We start doubting this assumption only when we encounter a conflict between perceptions or if someone calls our attention to this conflict. How can we explain the existence of these distortions? How is it possible that individual percipients acquire different perceptions if they are induced by the same stimuli? One of the possible answers is that we are not alike. It becomes peculiar to current study which focuses on South East residents of various cultural, educational and behavioural backgrounds and beliefs; as regards their perception of the Unknown Gun Men activities.

Asemah, E.; Nwammuo, A. and Nkwam-Uwaoma, O (2017, p.122) contend that the notion of the social responsibility of the press, including online media, arose as result of the ability of the media to influence the belief, ideas and behaviour of the people on very important issues. It came about as a result of the view that since the press (newspapers) was influential, it had social responsibilities hence every media as well as online newspapers ought to deliver accurate and unbiased news to meet the divergent needs of the heterogeneous public without confining their role to being the "mouth piece of those with special interest or political agenda.

The impact of the media in society is tremendous (Herdis 2003: Marsh and Melville cited in Wolfeman 2010)

The social responsibility of the media is fostered when the media engage in what is referred to as "Committed Journalism" in which priority is placed on values such as democracy, free choice, openness morality and serving the common good thereby informing the public about political, social, economic, and cultural affairs.

Committed Journalism would best manifest when the media undertake to be the public watchdog (Lusgarten and debrix 2005, p.365), "in terms of human rights promotion or protection

the concept of media social responsibility, committed journalism or watchdog journalism are perhaps irrelevant fragmentations of the role expected of the media as long as media makes sincere efforts in clinging to their professional code of ethics”.

### **Empirical Review of Literature**

The ways in which news and information is reported by online newspapers, shared and talked about on social media by engaged young people demonstrate the importance of communicative forms of action for the future of political engagement and connective action (Vromen, Xemos & Loader, 2015). The pervasiveness of social media in the lives of young people is no longer in doubt. Accordingly, researchers have continued to interrogate the correlation between social media and political participation by youths and young adults. Hence, some empirical studies have been done on the activities of IPOB with the group's continuing sit-at-home order. Chukwudi, Gberevbie, Abasilim and Imhonopi (2019) remarked that such studies unravel different ways the government has been responding to IPOB agitations for self-determination. Their study also avails more information on how agitations by IPOB has affected political stability in Nigeria and fuelled the phenomenon of the Unknown Gun Men whose faceless alliances set the South East on the colossal scale of insecurity never experience in the region since after the

civil war which ended in 1970. The current status quo in the region has also set the nation afire as regards national security. Nwozor (2018), Nwozor, Olanrewaju & Ake (2019) contend that national security is no longer interpreted from a myopic militaristic and strategic perspective that focuses on the absence of threats to governmental authority and the presence of domestic capacity to contain activities that threaten the cooperate existence of the state. Nwozor, Olanrewaju & Ake (2019) further contend that human security centers mainly on protecting people against insecurities by addressing the issues that threaten their well-being. Since the fundamental responsibility of any state is the protection of lives and properties, it is incumbent on the government to provide for issues that support the actualization of human security.

As for the economic impact of IPOB's sit-at-home order and brigands of the Unknown Gun Men, Ikeh (2021) states that Port Harcourt, Abakaliki, Enugu, Ikom and Yenagoa recorded about three incidences related to the problem of disruption of economic activities is the issue of disengagement of investments in the South East. Poverty in the region is at all time high, while economic activities have grinded to abrupt halt. The decline in economic activities is reflected in the number of publicly quoted companies in the region, is the lowest in the nation. *This day* online (Wednesday, May 18, 2022) reported



that he Minister of Information and Culture, Alhaji Lai Mohammed, has asked Facebook and other social media platforms to prevent the proscribed Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB) from using their platforms to incite violence and instigate ethnic hatred in Nigeria. He made the demand yesterday in Abuja, at a meeting with a team from Facebook. The minister said Facebook had no justification to yield its platform to IPOB to further its campaign of hate and destabilisation of the country given that the Federal government had proscribed and classified the group as a terrorist organisation.

In a study titled ‘Impact of Sectional Agitation for Self Determination on National Development: A Study of IPOB and MASSOB of South-Eastern’’. Ikeh (2021) examined the impact of sectional agitations for self-determination on national development, with reference to IPOB and MASSOB of South East. The study, which employed the survey method, used the questionnaire for data collection; analysed the causes, consequences, impact and recommendations into the call for Biafra separatism in the South East. The study revealed that recurring agitations in the region fall into three categories: those that focus on ethnicity – ethnic divisions and rivalry, those that focus on economic frustrations and those that focus on state-society relations that is the government’s attitude towards the

society and societal affairs. It recommended dialogue rather than militaristic options in dealing with the separatists. Abada, Omeh and Okeye (2020) in their study “Separatist Agitation by the Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB) and National Question in Nigeria” examined the link between separatist agitations by IPOB and its implication on the existence of the Nigerian state. The study also interrogated on how the use of inflammatory statements by IPOB exacerbated ethnic disharmony, and the extent state repression undermined IPOB separatist agenda in Nigeria. Their paper appropriated documentary method, and data were ostensibly generated through secondary sources of data collection and content analysed. The findings revealed that the use of inflammatory statements by IPOB exacerbated ethnic rancour between the Igbo tribe and their Hausa/Fulani counterpart, as well, noted that federal government military repression failed to halt IPOB agitation. The government is urged to dialogue rather than use of military force.

Chukwudi, Gberevbie, Abasilim and Imhonopi (2019) in their study “Federal Government of Nigeria: Implications for Political Stability” examined the strategies of the Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB) agitations and the response of the Nigerian government towards IPOB agitators and its implications on political stability of Nigeria. he study adopted the survey research design

with the questionnaire, including in-depth interview, as data gathering instrument, the study with a sample of 385 respondents showed that the government's strategy for dealing with the separatists has mainly been focused on military and police action. It concluded that recurring agitations for Biafra has dire implications for political stability and democratic consolidation in Nigeria. It recommended that the government respond positively with key development projects, provide jobs and conduct inclusive governance.

Suffice these brief framed online newspapers reports about Unknown Gun Men activities: *Punch online* (Tuesday, May, 17, 2022) reported that gun men set ablaze the EEDC office in Ogidi. ...The suspected arsonists burnt down the Idemili North Local Government secretariat in Ogidi, a magistrates' court in the area, including Nnewi South L.G.A secretariat headquarters at Ukpok.

*Vanguard online* narrated how a group of gunmen kidnapped a member of the Anambra State House of Assembly, Dr Okechukwu Okoye. The lawmaker, popularly known as Okey Di Okay, was kidnapped late on Sunday while driving in his Sienna car.

*Vanguard online* also reported that a group of hoodlums, wielding weapons, including guns, opened fire on a military checkpoint at the 3-3 Estate in Nkwelle Ezunaka, near Onitsha. Two soldiers died in the shootout.

Meanwhile, *The Nation online*, (Monday, May 16, 2022), reported that the police have killed two gunmen said to be enforcing the sit-at-home in the state. The incident happened along the Umunze Road, Orumba South LGA. The attacks came less than three days after the state Governor, Prof. Chukwuma Soludo, visited the leader of the proscribed Indigenous People of Biafra, Nnamdi Kanu, in the custody of the Department of State Services

*Daily Trust online* (Tuesday, May 17, 2022) also reported how Gunmen suspected to be members of the proscribed IPOB on Sunday night allegedly killed two military men in a shootout at 3-3 Estate, Nkwelle Ezunaka, near Onitsha, Anambra State.

*Daily Trust online*, Editorial (Tuesday, May 17, 2022) had the following dreadful caution: ...Nigeria is now a seething cauldron of discontent manifested in the edginess of its citizens, the resort to self-help by groups on perceived grievances against the state and its institutions, intolerance, bigotry, alienation and a general state of angst. Indeed all-round the country there is a razor thin level of tolerance amongst Nigerians on the state of the country leading to a palpable state of combustible anger that all too often comes to the surface at the slightest provocation.

*Daily Trust online*, (Tuesday, May 17, 2022) titled Britain, IPOB and Terrorism.

Two consequential implications stand out in the recent United

Kingdom Government statement on separatist groups in Nigeria's South East. The first is that the deteriorating security situation in the region, the stomach-churning and senseless bloodletting and barbarism that has lately seized the region, and which is at least in part blamed on IPOB and other groups, has dealt it probably an irreversible damage in the international community. The second and a corollary to the foregoing is that the United Kingdom which hitherto was a haven for persons associated with IPOB, will no longer be as welcoming, once such persons are deemed to favour violent methods in the pursuit of their cause. Vanguard online (May 3, 2022) headline: Army couple killed in Imo State: Nigeria army confirm killing of soldiers by gunmen. Master Warrant Officer (MWO) Audu Linus (retired) and Private (Pte) Gloria Matthew, were on their way to the south-eastern Nigerian state of Imo state for their traditional wedding when they were killed by suspected unknown gunmen. The army blames the Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB) and their armed affiliate, Eastern Security Network (ESN) for the attack.

Steve Oko writing an opinion column in the *Vanguard online* (February 19, 2022), titled Killings by Unknown Gunmen: Is South-East becoming a failed zone? The resurgence of the activities of the ominous unknown gunmen in the South-East geopolitical zones in the recent weeks is becoming worrisome.

Unknown gunmen became a phenomenon in the zone in the aftermath of the #EndSARS protests in 2020, got to an alarming height up till mid-2021 but began to show a downward curve before the end of the same year.

In a video, that has gone viral online, through Premium Times online, IPOB warned that their grievance is the continued detention of their leader Nnamdi Kanu and threatened to disrupt the 2023 elections.

*Saharareporters.com (MAY 03, 2022) reported that gunmen on Tuesday killed a yet-to-be-identified police officer in Imo State, in Nigeria's South-East region at Agwa, Oguta Local Government Area. Attacks by gunmen have increased in the South-East in recent times. The attacks often target security agencies and government facilities. The Nigerian government has accused the outlawed Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB) of being responsible for the deadly attacks in the South-East, but the group has repeatedly denied their involvement in the attacks.*

### **Methodology**

Survey method was used for this study, while the questionnaire was deployed to gather data. Onwuamalam (2012), and Ohaja (2003) opined that survey is a study of a sample through questionnaire which enables a researcher to make generalizations. In this case, survey through questionnaire facilitates the generation of data

regarding the perception of South East residents on online newspapers reportage of the Unknown Gun Men. The population of the South East as retrieved from the National Population Commission (NPC) website (2022) is 21,674,924. A sample size of 576 was drawn, using Krejcie and Morgan (1970) sample size calculation chart when the population is finite and known and over one million.

The sampling technique used was simple random sampling. A structured questionnaire was used in soliciting data from the respondents. Random sampling technique was used through balloting to select three states out of the five states that made up the South East geo-political zone, which yielded Anambra, Enugu and Imo states, with capital cities; Enugu, Awka and Owerri. The choice of state capitals is predicated on the premise that capital cities present proximity to the seat of government, heavy commercial activities, tertiary institutions and educated elites likely to read online newspapers. Sampling through balloting, yielded 5 local governments within the states' capitals, 2 villages (wards) were selected from each of the selected 3 communities in each of the five local government areas with a total of 36 wards from the selected 15 communities (districts). Purposive

sampling was used to select one person over the age of 18 from each household in the selected wards. Hence, 16 copies of the questionnaire were distributed to each of the 36 selected districts with the total of 576.

#### Data Presentation and Analysis

576 copies of the questionnaire were distributed and administered to the respondents, 568 were found valid for the study and statistically analysed as follows:

**Table 1: South East residents' exposure to online newspapers reports on the activities of Unknown Gun Men (UGM)**

Options	Respondents	%
Yes	515	90.6
No	49	8.6
Don't Know	4	.70
<b>Total</b>	<b>568</b>	<b>100</b>

Table 1 illustrates that overwhelming number of respondents 515 (90.6%) answered in the affirmative that they read online newspaper reports on Unknown Gun Men (UGM) activities, while 49 (8.6%) stated in the negative. In other words, an overwhelming majority of South East residents access online newspapers websites and are aware of Unknown Gun Men activities though online newspapers reports.

**Table 2: Online newspaper sources through which South East residents obtain news on activities of Unknown Gun Men**

Options	Respondents	%
<i>Blueprint</i>	6	1
<i>Business Day</i>	2	.3
<i>Daily Champion</i>	6	1
<i>Daily Independence</i>	8	1.4
<i>Naija News</i>	6	1
<i>Newsdiary online</i>	12	2.1
<i>Netng</i>	6	1
<i>Nigeronpoint.com</i>	Nil	Nil
<i>Premiumtimes.com</i>	188	33
<i>Saharareporters.com</i>	100	17.6
<i>Sunshine Newspaper</i>	Nil	Nil
<i>TheCable</i>	19	3.3
<i>The Nation</i>	12	2.1
<i>The Punch</i>	34	5.9
<i>The Sun Newspaper</i>	8	1.4
<i>The Guardian</i>	36	6.3
<i>This Day</i>	9	1.5
<i>Nigerian Tribune</i>	Nil	Nil
<i>Vanguard</i>	122	21.4
Other	Nil	Nil
<b>Total</b>	<b>568</b>	<b>100</b>

Table 2 shows that 188 (33%) respondents chose *Premiumtimes.com* as their most online source for news on the activities of Unknown Gun Men, while *Vanguard online* was chosen by 122 (21.4%) as *Saharareporters.com* came in third with 100 (17.6%) respondents.

**Table 3: Responses to who South East residents blame for the menace of the Unknown Gun Men**

Options	Respondents	%
The Federal Government /Detention of Nnamdi Kanu	280	49.2
The State Governments	34	5.9
IPOB/ESN	120	21
MASSOB	Nil	Nil
Criminals	96	16.9
Fulani Herdsmen	26	4.5
Boko Haram	12	2.1
Bandits	Nil	Nil
Other	Nil	Nil
<b>Total</b>	<b>568</b>	<b>100</b>

Table 3 clearly illustrates that South East respondents, 280 (49.2%) blame the federal government detention and treason trial of Nnamdi Kanu as the instigator of the Unknown Gun Men menace. The fact that IPOB and ESN were blamed by 120 (21%) of the respondents for causing the Unknown Gun Men mayhem in the South East region (Anaiabo – land of the Igbos) shows similar connection that Nnamdi Kanu’s case with the federal government of Nigeria is at the root of the Unknown Gun Men phenomenon. Criminals are fingered by 96 (16.9%) respondents for taken advantages of the security situation to create havoc disguised as IPOB/ESN members.

**Table 4: Responses to the extent of human lives and economic damage caused by the menace of the Unknown Gun Men**

Options	Respondents	%
Very High	441	77.6
High	117	20.6
Minimal	Nil	Nil
No Damage	Nil	Nil
Don't Know	10	1.8
<b>Total</b>	<b>568</b>	<b>100</b>

Table 4 shows an overwhelming majority of the respondents, 441 (77.6%) stating that the extent of human lives and economic damage caused by the menace of the Unknown Gun Men has been so far very high, while as, 117 (20.6%) respondents agreed the cost in human and socio-economic carnage was high. Besides potential loss of international and local investment opportunities, the terrible global negative image; the South East region may take years to recover from the colossal human and economic damage done by savage activities of the Unknown Gun Men. By extension, the reputation of IPOB as a peaceful separatist organization eager to save Ndigbo from perpetual slavery to the Fulani Caliphate has been severely tarnished and tainted by implicit or inferred association to the Unknown Gun Men.

**Table 5: Responses to the relationship in the South East residents’ perception of the manner news about Unknown Gun Men is presented online and public perception of Unknown Gun Men**

Options	Respondents	%
Terror Group	521	91.7
Evil Group	40	7
Anti-Development	NIL	NIL
Pro-Development	NIL	NIL
Don't Know	7	1.2
<b>Total</b>	<b>568</b>	<b>100</b>

Table 5 illustrates that nearly most of the respondents, 521 (91.7%) concurred that they perceived the Unknown Gun Men as a terror group and that their perceptions are based on the manner news about Unknown Gun Men is presented online. There is a clear evidence that online newspapers reports about the activities of Unknown Gun Men influence how these gun men are perceived by the public.

### **Discussion of Findings**

Demographic variables confirm that those actively involved in the IPOB struggle for Biafra independence and Eastern Security Network (ESN) and enforcement of sit-at-home order fall under the age bracket of 18 to 45 years. The most poignant point by way of the title of this study was found in table 5 which illustrates that nearly most of the respondents, 521 (91.7%) concurred that their perceptions of Unknown Gun Men are influenced by the manner news about Unknown Gun Men is presented online. Thereby, a compelling evidences that online newspapers presentation of news about the activities of Unknown Gun Men influence how these gun men are perceived by the public. This notion can be generalized to other regions of Nigeria on the power of online newspapers reports on public perception of the Unknown Gun Men.

Further findings show that the current strategies adopted by the five South East state governments, fuelled by federal government military force

to repress the sit-at-home order, has zero possibility to halt the lockdown. This is further bolstered by IPOB member's boldness in enforcing the order. Hence the state governments have rather applied poor uncoordinated towards containing the crisis, by issuing back to work, business as usual threats. However, the five states governments are hamstringing on dialoguing with IPOB for the fact that IPOB remain proscribed in Nigeria. The findings equally revealed the South East residents believe that the phenomenon of the Unknown Gun Men (UGM) and their murderous rampage could be traced to continued detention and treason trial of IPOB leader, Mazi Nnamdi Kalu by the federal government of Nigeria. More so, that respondents, albeit those who suspect federal government connivance in destabilizing and depopulating Igbo land, majority of the respondents believe that the identities of the Unknown Gun Men lay between dreadful members of IPOB's Eastern Security Network (ESN) and criminals who seized the opportunity of the lockdown to commit atrocities.

### **Conclusion and Recommendations**

The study revealed that online newspapers reports about the activities of Unknown Gun Men influence how these gun men are perceived by the public. Based on the findings, first and foremost, the federal government should expedite the trial of Mazi Nnamdi Kalu since his detention has proven as catalyst to sit-at-home

orders, arsons, kidnappings and murderous carnage ongoing in the South East. These will also check-mate criminals marauding in lawless rampage. Obviously, the use of police and military forces with several Egwu Eke or snake dances have yielded zero results in the crises in the region, the federal government and state governors of the region should re-strategize and consider the use of dialogue with the separatists. The often repeated routine of verbal threats to workers and commercial enterprises, including banks to defy IPOB's sit-at-home order have been counterproductive and embarrassing to the states' governments whose business-as-usual directives have largely been ignored by the public. More so, those governments at state level cannot guarantee the safety of their citizens who may defy the sit-at-home order. With ongoing Fulani herdsmen killings across the country, followed by ceaseless reports of invasive massacres of Christians and Catholic clergy, as Fulanization and Islamisation agenda debacle rife in the South East, to avoid disintegration of this country, the current leadership of Federal Republic of Nigeria is urged to be more responsive to plights of marginalization and concerns of the citizens of the South East geo political region of Nigeria. Given the correlation, the paper recommended, among others, that regular workshops and training programmes be organized for online reporters to instil in them the best global practices of terrorism

and conflict reporting devoid of over sensationalism and propaganda of fear in the land.

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