Media Framing of Insecurity and Public Perception of Safety in Port Harcourt, Rivers State: Evidence from Local TV Stations Audience

By

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Abstract

This study examined the influence of media framing of insecurity and public perception of safety in Port Harcourt, Rivers State, Nigeria. It identified the dominant frames used in insecurity reporting, assessed audience exposure, examined the perceived influence of framing and report tone, and evaluated the provision of practical safety information. Framing Theory provided the principal analytical foundation, supported by Agenda-Setting Theory and Cultivation Theory. A quantitative survey was conducted among adult residents of Port Harcourt Metropolis. A sample of 400 respondents was drawn for the study and 384 valid questionnaires were analysed. Chi-square goodness-of-fit was used exclusively to test the null hypotheses. The findings revealed that exposure to local television reports on insecurity had a significant effect on viewers, $\chi^2 = 48.167$, $p < .001$. The framing of insecurity reports also significantly influenced public judgments about safety, $\chi^2 = 88.167$, $p < .001$, while the tone of the reports significantly affected viewers' confidence in their personal and community safety, $\chi^2 = 66.667$, $p < .001$. In addition, respondents significantly agreed that local television reports provided useful safety advice, $\chi^2 = 4.167$, $p = .041$. The findings show that television framing, repetition, tone, and practical information contribute to residents' interpretations of insecurity. Local television stations should strengthen thematic, balanced, and solution-oriented reporting while reducing avoidable sensationalism and improving follow-up safety communication.

Keywords*:* Media Framing, Insecurity Reporting, Local Television, Public Perception, Public Safety

1.0 Introduction

Insecurity has been a major concern in the public eye in Rivers State due to kidnapping, cult activities, armed robberies, communal violence, political violence and related threats have impacted mobility, trade, schooling, nightlife and confidence in public institutions. Residents rarely experience all security events first hand, but hear about danger in the news, witness reports, official statements, images, and repeated commentary. The importance of local TV stations to the public communication of insecurity cannot be overemphasized as they merge speech, visuals, captions, interviews, and immediacy in a manner that can bring distant events into a closer social and geographical proximity. Extant studies in Nigeria revealed that institutional placement, access to sources, religious and political environment and platform norms impact on the way the issues of terrorism, banditry, conflict and political leadership

disputes are covered (Akinro, 2020; Akpojivi & Aiseng, 2022; Alphonsus et al., 2022; Demarest et al., 2020).

Media framing provides a useful explanation of how this communication process operates. Journalists decide what part of an event to include, link to causes and consequences and prioritise it in language, sources, pictures and structure. Modern framing theory is emphatic that these decisions do not automatically dictate audience responses but they structure the considerations that can be made when individuals evaluate a public issue (Cacciatore et al. (2016); Lecheler & de Vreese (2016)). Insecurity can manifest itself in ways such as violent conflict or failure to secure, suffering and pain, economic disruption, moral decay or a problem with identifiable solutions. This is also reflected in Nigerian evidence wherein news organisations build terrorism and conflict through varying frames of ideology, politics, and discourses (Ette & Joe, 2018; Gever, 2019; Osisanwo, 2016).

The tone and visual intensity of security news also deserve attention. Comparative television research shows that sensationalism varies across media systems, while studies of homicide, terrorism, and crime news indicate that emotional presentation and prominent negative cues can increase attention and shape risk judgments (Arbaoui et al., 2020; Makkonen et al., 2020; Wong & Harraway, 2020). Cross-national experimental evidence confirms a broad human sensitivity to negative television news, and large-scale digital evidence shows that negative language can increase news consumption (Robertson et al., 2023; Soroka et al., 2019). These patterns are important because media exposure has been associated with fear of crime, fear of violence, and subjective fear of terrorist attack across different settings (Näsi et al., 2021; Williamson et al., 2019; Wu et al., 2019).

Yet the public value of local television reporting cannot be reduced to fear production. Reports may improve awareness of unsafe locations, correct rumours, identify official response channels, and communicate preventive information. One way to marry accurate problem reporting with evidence of responses, limitations and future options is through constructive or solutions-oriented journalism (McIntyre & Lough, 2021; McIntyre, 2019). However, recent research indicates that constructive reporting can impact the emotions, engagement, recall, trust, and perceptions of crisis communication, but this impact is not necessarily consistently positive (Hermans & Prins, 2022; Overgaard, 2021; Rusch et al., 2022; Schäfer et al., 2024). Although there has been increasing body of research in Nigeria on the coverage of insecurity, there has been little empirical research that focuses on how audiences in Rivers State interpret the practices of framing insecurity in local television stations. This study therefore examines the dominant frames recognised by viewers, their exposure to insecurity reports, the perceived influence of framing and tone on safety judgments, and the usefulness of practical safety information.

Research Hypotheses

$H0_1$: Exposure to insecurity reports broadcast by local television stations has no significant effect on perception of local TV stations audience in Port Harcourt.

$H0_2$: Framing of insecurity by local television stations has no significant influences on viewers judgment of public safety in Port Harcourt.

$H0_3$: Perceived tone of insecurity reports has no significant effect on viewers confidence about safety in Port Harcourt.

$H0_4$: Local television reports do not significantly provide viewers in Port Harcourt with useful practical safety advice.

2.0 Literature Review

2.1 Conceptual Review

2.1.1 Media Framing and the Construction of Insecurity

The interpretation of events through the media is called framing. News has to compress the reality into a story-like form to communicate it and therefore, headline, source, pictures, ordering of the parts, explanatory context as well as choices about what to emphasise, to de-emphasise, to ignore completely and to insert into a narrative will establish certain conclusions about certain interpretations of reality as valid. Recent literature on framing identifies two types: Equivalency frames which 'present logically identical information in different ways' while emphasis frames 'select only a portion of the relevant consideration set'. 'It is this emphasis framing type which is particularly relevant for journalism studies because security stories, unlike a full account of causes, actors and consequences rarely cover all of the possible ones' (Cacciatore et al., 2016).

The framing effect can last longer than the immediate exposure to media coverage and the effectiveness of framing effects depends on repetition of the frame and/or subject matter, prior beliefs, other competing messages and salience of the issues (Lecheler & de Vreese, 2016). An examination of the reporting on insecurity shows this in practice very well. A situation can be interpreted as a police failure, as a political conflict, as an economic threat, a moral issue or as a humanitarian crisis. The understanding of one position toward such issue will lead to the examination of other positions. Studies concerning the reporting of terrorism in Nigeria revealed that geographical, ethnic and religious contexts will shape how perpetrators, victims and state authorities were categorized (Demarest et al., 2020).

Discursive choices also shape the social meaning of violence. Osisanwo (2016) demonstrated that Nigerian newspapers constructed Boko Haram through labels, agency patterns, and evaluative language. Ette and Joe (2018) found competing representations across newspapers and Twitter, confirming that platform cultures influence framing. Gever (2019) similarly reported that media frames and tone affected the presentation of the anti-open grazing law in Benue State. These studies support a view of insecurity news as an interpretive product whose meaning is negotiated through journalistic language, institutional position, and source selection.

2.1.2 Dominant Frames in Security News

Conflict, responsibility, human-interest, economic-consequence, morality, and solution-oriented frames are widespread in public-affairs reporting. Conflict frames highlight confrontation between criminals, security forces, communities, or political actors. Responsibility frames identify who caused problems, and who can solve them. Human-interest frames personalize events by showing those who suffered, who survived, who witnessed, and by adding emotional detail. Economic-consequence frames focus on losses to business, disruptions to transport or schools, reduced investment, and household insecurity.

Solution-oriented frames offer solutions, showing their effectiveness, their limitations, and lessons learned, in order to inform subsequent action.

These frames gain prevalence due to long-established news values. According to Harcup and O'Neill (2017), conflict, bad news, drama, magnitude, and emotion remain the key considerations in selecting and presenting news content. These values are particularly influential in crime and insecurity reporting, as crimes and acts of violence are sudden, visible and have public consequences. Schildkraut et al. (2021) noted ideological differences framing mass shootings, and Wong and Harraway (2020) established that sensational characteristics influence story prominence in homicide reporting. These studies suggest that characteristics of an event itself and the judgment that it will attract attention shape the presentation of insecurity.

Although human-interest framing can bring the lived experiences of violence to the forefront and, for instance, expand public understanding beyond that of elite discourse, this can further heighten perceptions of vulnerability. Higgins (2022) discusses how ordinary citizens in crime television news might pose a challenge to institutional narratives but can also be incorporated into collective discourse on fear. Similarly, Ojebuyi and Salawu (2018) presented how euphemistic visual strategies are incorporated into Nigerian newspapers and how images may convey harm but avoid Graphic nature. Consequently, the responsible presentation and dissemination of information about insecurity requires sensitivity with regard to dignity and context, and awareness that emotional testimony could inadvertently serve to reinforce perceived danger.

2.1.3 Episodic, Thematic, and Contextual Reporting

Episodic reporting presents insecurity as a sequence of separate incidents, arrests, attacks, or official reactions. It suits television deadlines because it offers immediate visuals and clear narrative events. However, incident-centred reporting may encourage viewers to interpret insecurity as recurrent but disconnected, with little explanation of structural causes or institutional patterns. Thematic reporting places events within broader contexts such as policing capacity, unemployment, community conflict, arms circulation, political competition, or failures of justice. This approach can improve understanding by connecting specific events to recurring social conditions.

Recent research on agenda formation shows that traditional news organisations continue to influence the wider information environment even when social media and partisan outlets compete for attention. Harder et al. (2017) found that established media actors remained influential in intermedia agenda setting during election periods, while Vargo et al. (2018) showed that emerging and false-news sites could also shape issue salience in the online media landscape. For local television stations, this means that insecurity reports circulate within a network of radio discussions, social media posts, community messages, and national news. Thematic and contextual reporting can help audiences evaluate this mixed information environment rather than treating every circulating claim as equivalent.

Alphonsus et al. (2022) found limitations in newspaper and television agenda setting on banditry in northern Nigeria, indicating that the volume and depth of coverage may be

inadequate even when insecurity receives visible attention. The distinction between episodic visibility and sustained public explanation is therefore important. Frequent incident reports can increase salience without improving knowledge of causes, institutional responsibilities, or credible preventive measures.

2.1.4 Television News, Visual Framing, and Tone

Television gives framing a strong audiovisual dimension. Presenter language, camera distance, image duration, captions, background sound, live footage, and repetition can intensify or moderate the meaning of a report. Visual evidence may improve credibility by showing affected locations or official responses, but repeated scenes of violence can also make danger appear widespread and continuous. Midberry and Dahmen (2020) argue that visual solutions journalism should show responses and evidence rather than relying exclusively on images of damage, suffering, or confrontation. This principle is relevant to local television because visuals often become the most memorable part of insecurity coverage.

Sensationalism describes presentational techniques that privilege shock, novelty, conflict, and emotion. In a comparative analysis of 14 television systems, Arbaoui et al. (2020) found meaningful differences in the use of sensational features, showing that sensationalism is partly shaped by media-system conditions. Negative information also has a measurable attentional advantage. Soroka et al. (2019) found cross-national evidence of stronger psychophysiological reactions to negative television news, while Robertson et al. (2023) demonstrated that negative words in headlines increased online news consumption. These studies explain why newsrooms may emphasise alarming details, but they also show the need to distinguish audience attraction from public understanding.

Tone affects urgency without encouraging speculation. A calm, fact-based tone can point out the presence of real danger while refraining from jumping to unsupported conclusions, assigning generalized guilt, and indicating that everyday life is inherently insecure. Research on terrorism has documented how scenarios of threat can generate fear, irrespective of national contexts (Makkonen et al., 2020). In line, Williamson et al. (2019) found a link between exposure to media and subjective fear of terrorist attacks. In local contexts, tone accordingly determines whether it becomes concrete information, an indictment of institutional failure, or confirmation that insecurity is a dominant feature of daily life.

2.1.5 Public Perception of Safety and Fear

Public perception of safety consists of judgements about the perceived severity, proximity, controllability and likelihood of danger. Victimization experiences, neighbourhood environment, trustworthiness of institutions, vulnerable social positions, discussions with acquaintances, and media engagement all shape the ways in which people experience safety. Consequently, such perceptions have an impact on what individuals see as practical concerns-travel patterns after dark, avoiding certain locations, altering opening hours for businesses, investing in private security, and distrusting strangers, for example, without any clear or logical relationship to official crime statistics.

Empirical studies have demonstrated that people's experience of media does not only depend on its quantity but also on the nature of the channel, target audience, and other factors. Wu et

al. (2019) found that consumption of television and internet services had a positive correlation with increased fear of crime in an urban setting in China, but that newspapers and radio did not show the same connections. Nsi et al. (2021) discovered an association between exposure to news stories about violent crimes across traditional and new media and outcomes including fear and avoidant behavior. Intravia et al. (2017) have reported positive associations between engagement with social media and fear of crime, again among largely young people. These results combined suggest that exposure matters but what form it takes, which source is used, existing beliefs and social contexts are all important elements.

Cultivation oriented research also suggests the ways in which stable patterns of crime reporting construct public perception and attitude. Kort-Butler and Habecker (2018) have illustrated that mediated perception of crime is interconnected with personal victimisation experiences and social networks. Alitavoli and Kaveh (2018) proposed cultivation as cycle with agenda setting; their work demonstrates the perpetuation of public expectations of crime through the continuous repetition of the same narratives of risk and safety within a social sphere. Crucially, cultivation theory does not represent insecurity as an imagined phenomenon; rather it proposes people make sense of the physical threat in a structured symbol world, where certain aspects of risks are amplified, whilst others are obfuscated.

2.1.6 Practical Safety Information and Constructive Reporting

In offering verified and, therefore, trustworthy information that allows the public to respond to danger or threat responsibly, security journalism assumes a public service role. Relevant practical information includes methods of contacting services, official avenues of reporting, advise on moving safely, ways to correct rumors with reliable data, explanations of police actions, and progress of investigations. The accuracy of practical advice must, however, be maintained; misleading information can do more to exacerbate danger to the public. The reputation of local news providers, thus, hinges on the ability of news organizations to present credible sources, the transparency about the limitations, and the eagerness to correct erroneous pieces.

Solutions journalism provides an alternative structured approach to dealing with crime and insecurity and provides a frame other than just reporting the problem. Studies show that effective solution information can decrease negative emotional response and improve reader perceptions of news stories, although does not guarantee behavior change (McIntyre, 2019). Further researches by McIntyre and Lough (2021) revealed solutions journalism as an approach for constructive and evidence based reporting on effective solutions, not simply positive framing. Reviews on solutions journalism reveal varying results, in terms of enhancing audience perceptions of efficacy, trust and emotion, depending on the content, medium and measure used (Lough & McIntyre, 2023; McIntyre & Lough, 2023).

Constructive journalism also includes future orientation, depolarisation, diverse perspectives, and audience relevance. Hermans and Drok (2018) placed the approach within established journalistic roles, while Hermans and Gyldensted (2019) found that audiences generally valued constructive elements. Mast et al. (2019) described constructive journalism as an emerging field of concepts, practices, and discourses, and Bro (2019) traced its professional precedents and principles. Aitamurto and Varma (2018) noted continuing normative debates

about whether constructive reporting extends or alters journalism's watchdog role. These debates are important for insecurity reporting because solution-oriented coverage should not weaken scrutiny of security agencies or political authorities.

Empirical research suggests that presentation and audience interest shape constructive-news effects. Meier (2018) found multifaceted audience responses across print and audio experiments. Kleemans et al. (2019) reported that constructive television news reduced negative emotional responses among children and changed the recall of story elements. Hermans and Prins (2022) found that news interest conditioned emotional and engagement responses among millennials. Rusch et al. (2022) showed that constructive television journalism influenced adult viewers' affective and cognitive responses, while Overgaard (2021) found that constructive social-media news updates altered reactions during a crisis. Schäfer et al. (2024) likewise demonstrated that perspective and constructive elements can affect responses to prolonged crisis communication.

2.2 Theoretical Review

2.2.1 Framing Theory

Framing Theory is the principal framework for this study because it explains how news presentation organises audience interpretation. The theory assumes that communication makes some aspects of reality more salient than others through selection, emphasis, association, and omission. Contemporary scholarship cautions against treating all message effects as framing and recommends clear identification of the interpretive considerations made prominent in a report (Cacciatore et al., 2016). In insecurity coverage, conflict, responsibility, human-interest, economic, and solution frames direct attention toward different causes, actors, and remedies.

The relevance of the theory lies in its ability to connect production choices with perceived audience meaning. A report dominated by violent visuals and institutional failure may make uncontrollability more accessible, whereas a report that combines verified threat information with context and response evidence may support informed vigilance. Framing effects are neither automatic nor permanent; longitudinal research shows that their duration depends on repetition, competition from alternative frames, and audience characteristics (Lecheler & de Vreese, 2016). The present study therefore examines viewers' perceptions of framing rather than assuming a uniform causal effect.

2.2.2 Agenda-Setting Theory

Agenda-Setting Theory refers to the process by which the importance of a particular issue is influenced by the attention, frequency and repetition in media representations. In today's fragmented media environment, agendas are set across traditional news media, social media, partisan news sites and even informal social networks. Harder et al. (2017) found that traditional media are influential in cross-platform agendas, and Vargo et al. (2018) noted that newly emerging online actors may also affect issue salience. It is possible that the insecurity reports on local TV could thereby affect a viewer's opinion of the salience of that issue both directly and indirectly, through re-sharing on other platforms. It is the use of this theory to explain exposure and salience, and not that particular coverage is expected to dictate a unique opinion. Even if the audience agrees that the issue is important enough for coverage and

coverage frequency that it affects perceived safety (as they do in hypothesis two), the audience might still disagree on the causes, responsibilities, or acceptable responses. Alphonsus et al. (2022) illustrated that coverage is insufficient for an acceptable agenda set if the intensity or continuity in media coverage does not exist. It works in tandem with Framing Theory since the one explains whether a given issue is important (and thereby merits attention), and framing explains the specific angles which viewers are invited to consider in interpreting the issue.

2.2.3 Cultivation Theory

Cultivation Theory posits that exposure to patterns of television content may contribute to common social perceptions of the world. In the modern, high-choice media system, "cultivation processes are best understood as cumulative, interactive processes combined with selective exposure, direct experience and interpersonal communication" (Alitavoli & Kaveh, 2018, p. 153). Alitavoli and Kaveh (2018) explained the link between cultivation and agenda-setting theory in terms of their influence on crime expectations, and Kort-Butler & Habecker (2018) showed the complex interplay of media and victimisation and social support on crime perceptions.

This theory is relevant to the study because insecurity reports often contain recurring symbols of danger, conflict, and institutional weakness. Repetition may contribute to a general impression that threat is widespread, even when each report concerns a specific location or event. Evidence from Wu et al. (2019) and Näsi et al. (2021) supports the broader proposition that crime-news consumption is related to fear, although the relationship varies by medium and audience. Cultivation Theory therefore helps explain the possible cumulative significance of exposure and tone without denying the reality of insecurity in Rivers State.

2.3 Empirical Review

International evidence consistently links crime and threat reporting with risk perception, although results differ by context. Intravia et al. (2017) found that social-media consumption was significantly related to fear of crime among young adults. Kort-Butler and Habecker (2018) showed that media use, victimisation, and social networks jointly shaped crime attitudes. Wu et al. (2019) reported medium-specific relationships between news consumption and fear of crime, while Näsi et al. (2021) found that violent-crime news from traditional and alternative sources was associated with fear and avoidance. Williamson et al. (2019) similarly linked media exposure to fear of terrorist attack.

Studies of presentation provide further evidence. Arbaoui et al. (2020) documented cross-system variation in television sensationalism. Wong and Harraway (2020) found that sensational homicide characteristics were related to article prominence, and Higgins (2022) showed how ordinary voices in crime television news participated in broader vulnerability narratives. Makkonen et al. (2020) demonstrated that terrorism news scenarios could trigger fear across countries. Soroka et al. (2019) and Robertson et al. (2023) provide complementary evidence that negative news cues attract stronger physiological and behavioural attention.

Constructive-journalism research offers a different set of outcomes. McIntyre (2019), Meier (2018), and Hermans and Gyldensted (2019) found generally favourable but varied audience

responses to solution or constructive elements. Kleemans et al. (2019), Hermans and Prins (2022), Overgaard (2021), Rusch et al. (2022), and Schäfer et al. (2024) showed that effects on emotion, recall, engagement, trust, and efficacy depend on audience interest, platform, crisis context, and story design. These studies support the inclusion of solution-based reporting while cautioning against claims that constructive formats always produce stronger behavioural outcomes.

Nigerian studies show that insecurity coverage is shaped by regional politics, media ideology, and platform differences. Osisanwo (2016) identified discursive constructions of Boko Haram in newspaper reporting. Ette and Joe (2018) found competing frames across newspapers and Twitter. Akinro (2020) documented shifting spatial and temporal frames in coverage of the Boko Haram crisis, while Demarest et al. (2020) showed that religious and political demography influenced representations of religious violence. Akpojivi and Aiseng (2022) found ideological differences in the framing of political leadership during the Bring Back Our Girls campaign.

Broadcast and conflict-oriented studies provide direct relevance to the present work. Gever (2019) found distinctive frames and tones in coverage of the anti-open grazing law. Alphonsus et al. (2022) reported weaknesses in newspaper and television coverage of banditry, while Ojebuyi and Salawu (2018) identified ethical and euphemistic strategies in the visual presentation of terror acts. Agwanwo and Bello (2019) documented governance and internal-security challenges in Rivers State, providing the local context within which residents evaluate televised insecurity reports.

Methodology

The study adopted a quantitative descriptive survey design to examine audience perceptions of insecurity reporting by local television stations in Port Harcourt Metropolis. Survey research was appropriate because it permits the systematic measurement of exposure, attitudes, judgments, and reported responses within a defined population (Ball, 2019). The population comprised adult residents of Port Harcourt City and Obio/Akpor Local Government Areas who had access to local television insecurity reports. The projected metropolitan population was 1,888,646, and Taro Yamane's formula at a 5% margin of error produced a sample of 400 respondents. Data were collected with a structured four-point Likert questionnaire covering exposure, recognised frames, tone, safety perception, and practical information. Face and content validity were assessed against the objectives, hypotheses, and reviewed literature. The instrument-development process followed established recommendations on item relevance, clarity, and alignment with measurement goals (Oosterveld et al., 2019; Ricci et al., 2019). Of the 400 questionnaires distributed, 384 valid copies were analysed. Chi-square goodness-of-fit tests was used, used to analyse the data at 0.05 level of significance

4.0 RESULT AND DISCUSSION

4.1 Results

The analysis showed that respondents recognised conflict, attribution of responsibility, human-interest, economic-consequence, and solution-based frames in local television reports on insecurity. Conflict and responsibility frames were more prominent than solution-based

framing. The four hypotheses were tested with chi-square goodness-of-fit using the response item that most directly represented each proposition.

Test of Hypotheses

Hypothesis	Agreement	Disagreement	χ^2	p-value	Decision
H01	260	124	48.167	.000	Reject H_0
H02	284	100	88.167	.000	Reject H_0
H03	272	112	66.667	.000	Reject H_0
H04	212	172	4.167	.041	Reject H_0

Hypothesis One: The null hypothesis was rejected, (1) = 48.167, p < .001. A total of 260 respondents agreed that they regularly watched insecurity reports broadcast by local television stations, while 124 disagreed. The response pattern indicates audience exposure.

Hypothesis Two: The null hypothesis was rejected, (1) = 88.167, p < .001. A total of 284 respondents agreed that the way local television stations reported insecurity affected how safe they considered Rivers State to be, while 100 disagreed. It shows a significant impact of framing on personal safety judgments.

Hypothesis Three: The null hypothesis was rejected, (1) = 66.667, p < .001. A total of 272 respondents agreed that a balanced tone in insecurity reports increased confidence about their safety, while 112 disagreed. The pattern in the report's tonal effect on personal safety judgment was statistically significant.

Hypothesis Four: The null hypothesis was rejected, (1) = 4.167, p = .041. A total of 212 respondents agreed that local television stations provided useful practical safety advice, while 172 disagreed. The result indicates significant agreement, though the relatively smaller difference shows practical guidance was not as strongly established as exposure, framing effect and tones, etc.

4.2 Discussion

The findings indicate that local television stations frame insecurity mainly through conflict, attribution of responsibility, and human consequences, while solution-based framing receives less emphasis. This pattern supports contemporary framing research, which explains that news accounts organise interpretation by selecting causes, actors, consequences, and responses (Cacciatore et al., 2016). Conflict frames can clarify opposing positions and establish urgency, but their repeated use may make insecurity appear continuous and beyond control. The result is consistent with Nigerian studies showing that security news frequently relies on conflict, blame, political interpretation, and emotionally compelling narratives (Akpojivi & Aiseng, 2022; Gever, 2019).

The significant exposure result demonstrates that local television remains relevant within a fragmented media environment. Respondents reported regular attention to televised insecurity reports, especially when serious incidents occurred. This supports agenda-setting reasoning because frequent and prominent coverage increases the accessibility of security issues in public thought. Alitavoli and Kaveh (2018) argue that repeated crime coverage can

interact with public concern to shape expectations about danger. In Nigeria, Alphonsus et al. (2022) also treated television as an important agenda-setting platform, although they found that television and newspapers did not provide adequate attention to banditry. The present result suggests that viewers still turn to local stations for confirmation and interpretation even when they encounter initial information through social media or interpersonal networks.

The strongest chi-square result concerned the perceived influence of framing on safety judgments. Respondents agreed that the manner in which insecurity was reported affected how safe they considered Rivers State. This finding corresponds with Lecheler and de Vreese's (2016) conclusion that framing effects can persist beyond immediate exposure, particularly where audiences do not encounter strong competing frames. It also reflects the Nigerian evidence that political, religious, regional, and platform contexts affect the representation of insecurity (Akinro, 2020; Demarest et al., 2020; Ette & Joe, 2018). In Rivers State, repeated emphasis on confrontation and institutional failure may increase awareness of risk, but it may also generalise danger beyond the locations directly affected.

The significant result for report tone shows that viewers distinguish between balanced presentation and alarming narration. Respondents associated balanced tone with greater confidence about safety. This supports cultivation-based explanations that repeated patterns contribute gradually to perceived social reality. Kort-Butler and Habecker (2018) found that media use interacts with victimisation and social networks in shaping crime attitudes, while Makkonen et al. (2020) showed that terrorism news produces different fear responses across national and individual contexts. Tone should therefore be understood as a conditional influence. It can increase informed caution when it is factual and proportionate, or intensify anxiety when it relies on speculation, graphic repetition, and emotionally loaded language.

Visual and presentational choices are also relevant. Ojebuyi and Salawu (2018) demonstrate that ethical restraint in the use of terror photographs can limit graphic intensity. Arbaoui et al. (2020) show that sensationalism is partly shaped by television-system structures, while Wong and Harraway (2020) associate fear-related story features with greater prominence in homicide coverage. Local stations operate under pressures of speed, competition, and audience attention, yet these pressures do not remove their responsibility to protect accuracy, dignity, and proportionality.

The fourth hypothesis produced a statistically significant but comparatively weak result. Respondents were almost divided on whether local television reports provided useful safety advice. This suggests that stations occasionally include guidance but do not provide it consistently. The finding aligns with solutions-journalism research, which shows that response information can improve audience reactions without concealing the seriousness of social problems (McIntyre, 2019). Systematic reviews indicate reliable emotional benefits from constructive and solutions reporting, although evidence for behavioural effects remains developing (Lough & McIntyre, 2023; McIntyre & Lough, 2023). Local insecurity reports should therefore include verified emergency contacts, safe-movement information, follow-up developments, institutional responsibilities, and evidence-based responses.

5.0 Conclusion and Recommendations

5.1 Conclusion

The study concludes that the framing of insecurity by local television stations contributes to how residents of Port Harcourt Metropolis understand danger and public safety. Viewers identified conflict, responsibility, human-interest, economic-consequence, and solution-based frames, but conflict and responsibility received greater emphasis. The chi-square tests showed significant audience exposure, a significant perceived influence of framing on safety judgments, a significant perceived effect of report tone on confidence, and significant agreement that reports provided practical safety advice. The safety-advice result was considerably weaker than the other results, indicating that useful guidance remains inconsistent.

Local TV stations must ensure they remain objective and informative whilst maintaining sensitivity to prevent the public perception of danger from appearing ubiquitous, or that the issue is irreparable and beyond citizen response. Such can help promote informed vigilance rather than needless anxiety, and defend public confidence in television newscasts.

5.2 Recommendations

1. The local television stations should embrace thematic and solution-based framing; for example, exploring possible solutions, reporting on the causes of danger, explaining relevant authorities' responsibilities and effectiveness of interventions and demonstrating evidence.
2. The media should avoid alarmist language, conjecture, sensationalized portrayals, or the excessive use of visuals which could induce unnecessary stress without providing adequate and sufficient information or relevantcontext.
3. Stations should ensure follow-up reporting; that subsequent reports must confirm information, report on court proceedings, explain security successes, and publicize corrections.
4. Apart from official sources alone, the media ought to quote sources such as community leaders, security personnel, authorities in civil society organizations as well as security analysts in their coverage of security issues in order to provide balance.
5. Clearly and accurately provide validated data in terms of emergency contact persons, emergency response channels and public services.

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