

**EXPOSURE TO “ABRAHAMIC MISSION” TELEVISION PROGRAM AND ITS
INFLUENCE ON PEOPLES’ ATTITUDE TOWARDS RELIGIOUS TOLERANCE IN
NIGERIA**

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ABSTRACT: *Drawing from series of literature on ethno-religious crisis and use of media in managing or encouraging ethno-religious and political crises in Nigeria, this study ventured into exposing the Nigerian citizens’ reaction to media attempt into inculcating religious tolerance as the attitude for a better Nigeria. The study which was based on an inter-religious tolerance media program adopted the use of survey and interview in studying 300 respondents sampled across the three religious groups in Anambra State using voluntary and purposive sampling techniques. The study was based on the social responsibility and social exchange theories of mass communication. Among the specific objectives of the study are to ascertain the respondents frequency of exposure, their perception of the program and whether their exposure to the program encouraged them to tolerate all other religions in the country. Findings revealed that the program does not command attitudinal change among the citizens because political leaders’ mode of power and resource distribution does not suggest that Nigeria is one. It was concluded that until the mass media learn to hold the government accountable, the country will forever remain in ethno-religious and political crises because of height of inequality of different magnitudes. The study therefore, recommended that there must be a sincere paradigm shift from the capitalist order of winner takes all to a liberal order embedded in true federalism anchored on ‘exclusive’ fairness to all irrespective of region or ethnic origin.*

KEY WORDS: capitalist order, Abrahamic mission, ethno-religious, perception, extremism, liberal order

INTRODUCTION

Nigeria is a nation-state which has been known around the world for her multi-religious and ethno-political crises. From available literature, all crises in Nigeria begin from religious intolerance or

culminate in it anytime it originates from another factor either political or ethnic. This very reason makes religion the center of all disagreement, political and ethnic crises in the state. As an instrument of public awareness creation and opinion formation, the mass media serve as a means through which different religious group air their views and make their points on any new religious-cum political crisis to secure support from other nations' views. This act places the media on the verge with ethno-religious and political crisis on the rampage.

Historically, the far northern states of Nigeria are overwhelmingly Muslim faithful where the southeast and south-south are mostly Christian faithful. Similarly, the north central and southwest states of the federation were religiously mixed. According to Paden, (2015) the regions that were religiously mixed are also politically mixed. With this mixture of faiths in the country, Nigeria became the largest country in the world where religious identities are evenly divided between Muslims and Christians (Paden, 2015). This raises the issue of religious relationship identities and tolerance pattern between the two most populous religious groups in terms of power sharing and tussle, their leadership pattern and the rest socio-cultural and political life of the people in Nigeria.

As the prevailing force of connectivity and major means of clinching to different levels and positions of power and authorities, Nigeria and Nigerians have grown more conscious of their religion to the extent that religion determines who gets what at all points in time irrespective of the standard qualifications as may be required for such position. This situation fuels prejudice and antagonism thereby hindering efforts aimed at promoting respect for diversity, peaceful coexistence, and cooperative endeavors in local, national, and global settings (American Academy of Religion, 2010). This view was captured more succinctly in Ojonemi, Enojoh, Omisore, and Enejoh, (2014) where they confirmed that religion influences laws, thoughts and attitudes. The authors further argued that religion plays significant roles in formulation and implementation of policies and major public programmes because of the importance attached to it by Nigerians.

In the event of the above situation, religious fanaticism has crept into all aspects of life of Nigerians leading to greed, undue protection of religious team and malicious denial of rights and privileges to others who do not belong to the religious group or share the same faith with the fanatics. With all these, trust is lost unless one is a member of a given religious faith with the person in-charge of collective resources. Different religion breeds different lifestyle among believers and people of different doctrines which in turn poses hardship in religious tolerance among Nigerians. In this regard, the religious diversity of the country had been a source of problem to its general well being and development. This was in line with the view expressed in Onuegbu, (2012) who concludes that religion has become a key index that carpenters the socio-economic, cultural and political structures either for good or for bad.

In the case of Nigeria, religion shapes our society in bad direction. The reality in the present day Nigeria is that religion functions as a double-edged sword, making contribution to nation-building and at the same time with a strong potential for imparting negative and disintegrative values to good governance, national security and economic growth (WFDD, 2018). In these regards, religious actors in Nigeria become significant in virtually every development challenges facing

Nigeria, from good governance, leadership structures to gender relations, regional balance to community resilience, hence making religious crisis inevitable in the country any time.

Religious crisis have been experienced in different parts of the country at different points in time and all of these crises claim lives of the people at different magnitude (Eniola 2010, Teehan 2010; Armstrong 2014; Sulaiman, 2015). Some of the crises are intra and other are inter religious crises. At the outbreak of any religious crisis in Nigeria, the media appear at the center as source of information gathering and distribution. The pattern of distribution of information then varies from one media channel to another all in the interest of the religious belief of the controller of the media channel. The more these crises continue to take place, the more the media are exposed to danger of disseminating either tolerance encouraging or discouraging information which makes it very hard for some media users to accept to deal with people of other religions doctrine in their life again. Having changed religion from being a means of communicating or establishing spiritual relationship with God or Allah to means of getting political powers, authorities and favors, it has become very hard for people to tolerate others who proclaim different faith even within the same religious group. That is why the Shiites in Nigeria are fighting against the government despite being worshipers and followers of Prophet Mohammed. The Roman Catholic faithful have not seen anything good with the Anglican Communion and other Pentecostal and Presbyterian churches around the country even when they all believe in the same Jesus Christ.

Generally, this led to persistent religious crisis which is giving all meaningful Nigerians a cause for deep concern in recent times (Sulaiman, 2016). Many of the citizens wonder why religion which used to be the cohesive core factor of national unity, peaceful co-existence and national development has changed to become a tool for political manipulation, violence, destruction of lives and property in contemporary Nigeria. From the situation painted above, it becomes obvious that the way the citizens of the country see one another religiously is breeding more problem in the country than what they think to have been their problem over the years. At this point, what could be done to save the situation in the country becomes very necessary. So as an instrument of cohesion and social harmony in a democratic society, the media cannot keep mute and watch the society plunge into a mission of abrupt destruction. To play the intermediary role of coming into the system through effective persuasive manners to foster religious tolerance among different religious group in the country, the mass media cannot be fair to Nigeria and Nigerians if they fail to make a move towards handling the challenge to national unity usually occasioned by religious prejudice in the country.

In an attempt to contribute their quota towards the sustenance of national unity, NTAi came up with a program titled "*Abrahamic mission*" to take care of multi-ethno religious views of the Supreme Being with a view to preaching religious tolerance in Nigeria and ensure that religious crisis is brought under control. This study therefore, examined "*Abrahamic mission*" as a catalyst for achieving national security of both lives and property by enhancing religious tolerance in Nigeria. The main objective of the study is to investigate the influence program on citizens' resolve to change their original attitude to religion in Nigeria by accepting to allow for national unity and security through acceptance of one another's religion at all level. Among the specific objectives of the study are to ascertain the respondents frequency of exposure to the program, their perception

of the program and whether their exposure to it has encouraged them to tolerate other religions in the country. With “*Abrahamic*” mission television program, NTAi seek to draw attention of various religious groups to the need for tolerance as the only means of sustaining the country’s unity and development. It was against this background that this chapter examined through empirical survey the between relationship people’s exposure to program and the influence of the program to their understanding of religion.

Statement of problem

The issue of religious diversity is not new in the country’s historical and political evolution. There have been calls from up and down the regions of the country requesting for restructuring of the Nigerian political landscape as a panacea for protecting the country’s unity. Unfortunately, many a number of citizens do not to understand that any move towards the security of the country’s democracy and unity that does not first achieve religious tolerance must fail. This is true considering the level of hatred and displeasure that religious intolerance breeds among Nigerians of different faith. Available literature Paden, (2015); Onuegbu, (2012); Tajudeen and Adebayo (2013) have revealed that the major problem hindering the growth and development of this country is religious prejudice and its attending crisis. To handle this challenge and get the country working again, religious and social re-orientation ideologies of different magnitude has to be initiated. The “*Abrahamic mission*” is a platform for religious re-orientation. Studies have examined religious crisis/violence (Sulaiman, 2016; Ushe, 2015; Ojonemi, *et al*, 2014) the causes of such crisis and how media either mitigate or encourage religious violence with little or nothing done on the masses response to media efforts towards saving the country from crisis of religious differences. Since the introduction of this program by NTAi, Nigerians have been watching the live show on the station but whether they have internalized and accepted to buy the idea that are being preached in the program is yet unknown. Against this background, this study investigated the respondents’ reaction towards religious tolerance in Nigeria having been exposed to the NTAi’s religious tolerance program titled “*Abrahamic mission*”

Conceptual discourse

In this study, it is imperative to provide readers with meaning and definitions of some of the key terminologies used in the chapter and as well acquaint them with their various connections to the entire work. Among these concepts that require clarifications is ethnicity. In the present day Nigeria, ethnicity is not new though its definition is relative and dependent on the scholar’s major disposition at the time of definition. Ethnicity means the place of origin of a citizen and organization, their traditions, language, views etc which have been believed to drastically influence the reasoning of every human being. This concept has natural attachment to religious bigotry or fanaticism just like culture and identity. Religious bigotry means the great love that one has for his religion which blindfolds one from seeing the aspect of one’s own behavior and views of live that does not correspond to and or accommodate another in national or group matters. This behavior is rampant among Africans and more pronounced in Nigeria where religion has caused a lot of challenges to national growth and development. Believe in ethnicity and religious bigotry has dealt a big blow to national unity in the country. Nigeria is torn apart today by religious bigotry sustained by ethnic rivalry which is the mother of greater percent of major crisis and sustainer of virtually all social disorder originating from other sectors in the country. Religious crisis encourages

stagnation and retrogression of the socio-economic constructions of any society once it sets in. It at the same time encourages rancor and hatred amongst the inhabitants of such society. On the bases of these negative consequences of the impact of religious crisis, earlier Development Communication scholars (Charles 2009; Bright 2010; Kane 2010) have contended that no development agenda of political, economic, social, or otherwise can thrive in the face of crisis. The scholars further aver that crisis dethrones developmental initiatives and further impoverishes the people.

Religious difference is often linked to ethnic or regional rivalry (Nolte, Danjibo and Oladeji, 2009). Public assertions of the ethnic or religious identity of the media practitioners or their organizations for the above reasons have often been viewed with suspicion by the people once a given crisis erupts. This act subjects the mass media at all level to public scrutiny and assessment. This suspicion created an opportunity for countless accusations of the media in different occasions. The mass media have in several studies (Kamyang, 2010; Umaru, 2011; Okoli, 2011; Aka, 2011) been accused of inciting religious crisis or reporting same in different varying ways simply because they report trending issues on existing crisis which their users describe as being in line with the religious inclination of the reporter or the management of the media organization(s). This draws attention to the ethnic and religious identity of the media organization or its reporters who covers the stories on the outbreak of any event in the country. By ethnic or religious identity of the media personnel or media organization, the public and critics of the media are interested in religion and or ethnic origin of the reporter or his organization which by all standard have been viewed to influence the contents of their reports on existing crisis. This view was captured more vividly in the words of that the kind of information the media disseminates, how it does it, why it does it, and who its target audience is, to a large extent, is significantly influenced by its environment. This will lead to the discussion of the concept of media environment. Media environment means the prevailing leadership style of the government in power which controls the contents and scrutinizes what is being published by the media. Across the world, different media environment exist and dictate the operation of the media in the area. If the media environment is unfriendly, it will affect the operations of the practitioners in the state.

The mass media in their quest to manage the country's peace and religious differences were left with no option than to engage in a war against religious intolerance which from all indications has proved to be the mainstay of the seemingly unending religious crisis in the country. In keeping with their responsibility as partners in development process (Adeyanju, 2013) NTAi has made a move in the right direction by introducing a program for the sake of religious tolerance which if adopted will reduce the rate of religious disagreement and crisis in the country. It is therefore, the view of the researcher in this chapter, that the experts and the public alike are more interested in blaming the media for escalating crisis without listening to media appeal for change of attitude for the better which "*Abrahamic mission*" television program of the NTAi has come to effect among Nigerian if only they can pay attention to media messages. It is pertinent to state that it is not enough to be preaching attitudinal change in a society. It is important for the audience who forms the target of the media messages to have the zeal accepting that which is communicated to them.

Abrahamic Mission: A Brief Overview

Abrahamic mission is a network program of the NTAi international television. It is usually aired on the network hour of the station when all the branch stations are hooked up for the program. The program feature representatives from the two major religious groups in Nigeria and some of the times their spokesperson that are live on air with the program presenters. The program always looks at issues of national concern and how the integration of Nigeria can be fostered through the use of religious tolerance. The program which comes up every Thursday evening lasts for an hour on air with some interested viewers calling for life suggestions on ways out of the religious conflict that had over the years been bane on the nation's unity and development. This program was named after the two most vibrant religious groups in Nigeria *Abrahamic* to cover Abraham and Mohamed which represent Christian and Moslems. The program is considered very apt and worthy of investigating owing to the fact that it comprises of the teachers of different religion who came to the station from time to time to share their experiences and teaching with others who have not been exposed to their believe and worship patterns. These guests are all knowledgeable in their various faiths and concern about the Supreme Being and as well air the same view while on the screen. Then what is the problem causing the challenge and ethno-religious crisis in Nigeria?

Abrahamic mission: A panacea for social conflict resolution

Social conflict can be attributed to the ideas of Karl Marx whose major proposition is that the since people come together to stay under one force, there must be clash of interest. In the views of the proponents of the concept of social conflicts, social life is a competition which is mainly driven by the desire for one to get control of the collectively owned resources that are limited and scarce. Given the diverse nature of the make-up or constituents of different society, there is bound to be crisis of interest to satisfy different needs which can give rise to social inequality and as well conflict between divergent views and believes among the people in a heterogeneous society like Nigeria. It is imperative to state that the basic issue in majority of societies with divergent ethnic and religious background is the struggle for power and resource control which usually lead to conflict between factions.

Generally, conflicts occur or are most likely to occur once two or more interest groups with incompatible goals meet together in a social interaction struggle to attain scarce goals while preventing their opponents from coming closer to the throne of power. This is the situation in Nigeria embedded mostly in the ethno-religious divide of the country which was linked to the political landscape causing several crises of different magnitude and calls for self-government by some ethnic groups who have felt being much marginalized. This gave rise for the need for understanding that the all religious leads to God which the *Abrahamic mission* is set to tell Nigerians. It is the believe of the program designers that the basic way to solve the problem facing Nigeria is to inculcate the idea of religious tolerance and make the people to see the reason that being from a different religious group is not enough to hate one another.

On the other hand, it is the duty of the government of the state to protect her citizens as demanded by social contract but that is not enough too. Religious leaders and actors play more significant roles in the lives of their followers, as they have the potential to influence the behavior of those who follow them and share their beliefs. Drawing from the fact that religion has been misused to

justify incitement to different kinds of violence of different magnitude, it is important that religious leaders from all faiths and denominations showcase their leadership skill in this matter (UN, 2017). The possible dissemination of peace building plans of any none governmental organizations cannot be perfectly executed without the presence of the mass media. This makes this study very apt and timely given its connection with the mass media effort to curb the rising challenge of religious intolerance in Nigeria.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The study is based on the ideas of the proponents of social exchange theory. This theory can be traced to the early sociological scholar Homans (1958) who published a work "*Social Behavior as Exchange*". According to the sociologist, social exchange is the exchange of activity(s) tangible or intangible, more or less rewarding or costly, between at least two persons. In this regard, the theory applies where two or more persons are contact and interdependence on one another. The work concentrates on the individual behavior of actors in interaction with one another in a social setting. The social Exchange theory posits that every human being considers the cost and the benefit of any offer by the media or their agents before deciding to participate and adopt the attitude presented as the best professional or moral attitude by the media agent (Njoki, 2013). Further the theory also indicates that to arrive at a decision, a certain media content consumer weighs the value provided by the media and compares this to what other competing attitudes in the society offer before choosing adopt the communicated attitude or reject it.

Social exchange theory is a social psychological and sociological perspective theory that explains social change and stability as a process of *negotiated* exchanges between interdependent parties. Social exchange theory posits that human relationships are formed by the use of a subjective cost benefit analysis and the comparison of alternatives. The theory has roots in economics, psychology and sociology. Social exchange theory features many of the main assumptions found in rational choice theory and structuralism. It is also used quite frequently in the business world to imply a two-sided, mutually contingent and rewarding process involving transactions or simply exchange.

The citizens and various ethno-religious groups in the country therefore, are expected to consider the costs of their behavior –monetary gains and future impacts that can follow up an action taken as a result of media message adoption and acceptance. If actually, Nigerians can buy this idea to engage in an action to tolerate one another's religion and ethnic origin while appreciating the fact that Nigeria is one, what are the benefits that this attitude will provide in both short and long term bases? An answer to this question will provide a template for the understanding of why this theory was considered more apt for this study.

Actually, while dishing out the rhetoric of religious tolerance by the NTAi, they have their target audience at heart. The people who they want to sell their ideas to and the people who will serve the secondary audience to influence others into accepting what is communicated. The position of this theory is that people accept to act in a particular manner if they consider the benefits of engaging in the action or the new cultivated behaviour to outweigh the costs of embarking on such behavior. Will there be any different if Nigerians should desire to do away with religious bigotry

and ethnic sentiment or will be it be more better to continue the ways that they do even after being exposed to this program designed to make them see things differently?

Moreover, this theory shares the same aspiration with the uses and gratifications theory which presupposes that the world have transcended from what the media contents do to the audience to what the people do with the media contents (Agbanu, 2013, p. 176; Nwabueze, 2014, p. 47; Nwodu, 2017, p. 141). It is pertinent to also state that the theory shares the same view with the theory of reasoned action which according to Glynn, (2004) cited in Agbanu (2014), opines that the that humans are rational beings and as a result, calculate the cost and benefits of their actions and inactions before taken decision on media messages. What could be the possible outcome of accepting religious tolerance as preached in *Abrahamic Mission* by NTAi?

Relating this theory to this current study, the message of marginalization and hatred meted against the Igbos as portrayed in the rhetoric of radio Biafra have been received by the respondents but whether they are to buy the idea and act in the direction of the message is by this theory seen as a matter of exchange controlled by observed cost/benefit analysis.

In another development, this study was also based on the social responsibility theory of mass communication. The basic tenet of social responsibility theory of the press is that the press in any democratic system is expected to regulate and direct its practices voluntarily without external coercion and without compromising their social obligations to the public (Middleton, 2009). It means that the press is to be objective and free from bias. It is the views of the founders of social responsibility theory that the media (of any type) like some other sectors should not destroy, but encourage and promote an enabling environment and a sound socio-cultural background in relation to the economy development and peaceful co-existence citizens of the society where it operates (Adeyanju, 2013). The socio-cultural background in the above sentence covers the ethno-religious lifestyle of the people especially when it is the determinant of their political lifestyle as is the case with Nigeria. Social responsibility is built on the moral values that direct any professional action, be it in media or other organizations that put an obligation towards atmosphere, the social order, traditions and economy. This theory according to Nwabueze (2014) was formally brought into the academic network by Siebert, Peterson and Schramm in 1956 seven years after the US commission on freedom of press. It encourages total freedom to press and with little or no censorship.

By way of origin, social responsibility is a product of the inventive minds of Political free thinkers, proponents of libertarian voices and those who fostered a democratic spirit like John Milton. By this, it is not out of place to state that the social responsibility is an evolution from the libertarian ideology (Nwabueze, 2014; Agbanu, 2013). However, it extends further than "*objective*" coverage to "*interpretive*" exposure of issues and events in the society. At the evolution of the responsibility theory, media scholars have argued that honest and absolute account of the news reports are not automatically enough in modern society (Nwabueze, 2014; Agbanu, 2013). It is no longer enough to report the fact truthfully. It is now crucial to expose the people to the truth about the fact. The probable public desire to get the pure truth in the modern society of today usually demand strict analysis, exclusive explanation, and ground-rooted interpretation of issues and events around the world from the press (Robert (2018; Nwabueze, 2012). This is where the need for some programs

became imperative in the media in order to help the media push into the society some needed attitudinal change and behaviors that can encourage the development of a society. *Abrahamic mission* is one of a kind in such programs designed to save the country of these rising secession demand that have been increasing by the day in the country.

It is the emergence of the social responsibility theory that marked the subtle consideration of journalism and media practices as being a profession. The social responsibility theory of mass media had changed the style of news dissemination from objective reporting to interpretative news dissemination. The reason here is given by Robert (2018) when he stated that it is important for mass media contents designers or producers to understand and present contents that will sensitively stimulate potential participants given that emotional stimulation compels attention, which in turn compels learning and conscious behavior among the people. It is the believe of the author of this paper that the media attention to the need for religious tolerance among Nigerians as cultivated by the contents of *Abrahamic mission* is in line with their social responsibility role as partners in development and progress of the nation that gave them the freedom to operate in it.

Abrahamic mission and unification of Religious Differences in Nigeria

The African Traditional Religion is the only religion practiced by Nigerians before the emergence of Islam and the Christian missionaries (Aluko, 2017). Unfortunately, majority of Nigerians welcomed and adopted these two imported religions as their faith and use same for the actualization of the personal gains and interest which finally placed Nigerians at war(s) against themselves. The adoption of these religions became very dangerous because they eroded all already existing Nigerian norms and values by replacing same with their different faiths, beliefs and practices (Mbiti, 2014). These practices and beliefs are against each other in some areas and similar in others (Aluko, 2017). This is in a bid to protect their own faith and religion. The north and the south were never on the same page in Nigeria and that breeds the lasting disagreement between the two right from the days of the colonial masters.

The effort by the Nigerian government to handle the secular and indirect rule that were both enthroned by the colonial masters is the beginning of the present day crisis in Nigeria. So after independent, the south accepted the circular government regime which was ironically abhorred by their northern counterpart who wanted the indirect rule system. This paradox has remained a herculean task to the Nigeria's corporate existence, as northern Islamists have consistently sought the establishment of an Islamic state to replace the extant secular regime. Their area of differences supersedes those of similarities and therefore, causes the major problem that controls the country's political culture and behavior. Going by the dictates of the Bible and the provisions of Quran, it is expected that there wouldn't be any need for any rancor but in practice, the reverse is the case in Nigeria. Drawing from Aluko (2017), a cursory look at the three major religions in Nigeria show that there are remarkable differences which lead to intolerance among faithful of these religions. The high level of intolerance and discrimination is more observable in Christian religion where faithful even breed and nurture divisions among themselves. The Anglican faithful are not in good terms with the Catholic doctrine while the Pentecostal churches are on their own, yet serving and calling the same Jesus Christ. To put together all these factions and minimize the level of discrimination among different religions in Nigeria, the media have to come in for a strong value

reorientation and rehabilitative communication that can sink down the nerves of Nigerians for a better society. Can this *Abrahamic mission* program effectively hold this strong campaign and actualize the desired goal? empirical data will prove.

Mass media in ethno-religious cum political conflicts in Nigeria: Evidences from extant literatures

The mass media have been adjudged very important in the dissemination of information in the society with different features being attributed to their modes of performing the function. While some scholars encourage the mass media for their duty of making the citizens aware of the events happening around them, others blame the mass media for blowing issues, especially ethno-religious political crisis out of proportion (Chiluwa, 2005; Nebojša, 2015). While reporting some particular events where others are left untouched, the mass media secure enough space and opportunity to influence the public views, opinions, and perceptions of events in the society. The implication of this scholarly agreed position on the media was based on their ability to frame issues and events the way that is pleasing to the reporter of the media organization (Nwbueze, 2014; Agbanu, 2014; Azlan, 2012). This accounted for the reason why every sets of people that are involved in a given state contest or crisis be it workers on strike demonstration, religious groups on demonstration, self-government agitators and pro-democratic groups always struggle to hook-up with the media in order to help them win the people's pity. This fact makes the mass media the center of everything that concerns the struggle for state power and all kinds of political, ethnic and religious crisis arising from that.

It will be unfair, to conclude that the mass media are instrument of ethno-religious and political conflict in Nigeria. Many scholars that have condemned the media for escalating crisis failed to take into consideration the facts that the contents that they analyzed that gave them the views expressed as being instrumental to crisis were based on the information from the people that make up the society. In other words, the mass media did not manufacture the stories but got them through their sources most of which were interviews of prominent characters in the affected areas (Agudosy and Ikegbunam, 2019). The reports could have been a different thing if the people complained that they were quoted out context in the reports. Usually, when an event happened, some people within the area of the event are interviewed. If in the course of the interview, the interviewee drags the event and links same to religion, the media would not keep quiet on that. It must be reported and even more investigations on the nature of the event will be triggered.

On the other hand, media scholars have over the years accepted that repeated communication of a particular issue in the media will make the issue salient among the people and in turn influence the people's perception of realities on the said media issue (Nwodu, 2017; Agbanu, 2013; Nwabueze, 2014), it is important then to investigate how the people feel about the matter being communicated to them through *Abrahamic mission*. According to Nwabueze, (2011), the use of the media's vocal points in publishing a particular media message will make the people to accept the issue as being very important to the society. This means that the use of network hour by NTAi in airing the program can be significant in encouraging religious tolerance which is the best desired attitude expected of Nigerians for a peaceful country. Doing this puts the mass media at the right track towards the protection of the Nigerian democracy and unity. The above view was captured more

clearly in Nebojša (2015) who argue that it is principally journalistic or news media that is considered to have the most powerful impact on how people perceive politics and conflict. If this is true, the effort of the NTAi station(s) on encouraging religious tolerance among Nigerians through *Abrahamic mission* stands to be appreciated.

Empirical literature

Several other scholars in mass communication and other social science disciplines have examined the challenge of national unity from the angle of religious tolerance, yet more needed to be done to expose the people's response to identified media effort towards handling and containing the challenges of the problem in the country. Below are some available and accessible studies done by previous scholars and their similarities with the current study.

Religion crises had over the years been among the world most pressing challenge and in that same vein had attracted serious research attention on how such problems could be managed. Pew Research Center (2016) reports that in 27 percent of the world's countries are assessed to have 'high' or 'very high' social hostilities relating to religion and or its belief. The situation of religious crises in Nigeria between Christians and Muslims have always has attracted particular attention.

Aluko (2017) examined various religious differences that permeate the lives of Nigerians which he see as the major base of all social unrest in Nigeria and found that tolerance among religious faiths is a major factor in achieving national security in the country. The researcher concluded that no religion should see itself as being superior to another. This study opened a space for the current one by stating that tolerance can solve the problem. Who will preach the tolerance if not the mass media? Can these preaching survive if the people do not see them as a better alternative to security and national unity?

Chia (2015) has a different view of what could be done to set the country free from religious crises. To him, the best thing for the country is to change their social studies curriculum to inculcate the understanding of the country's diversity in the children even before they grew up. This suggestion is good but what could be the family training that these children get from their various homes that are usually taught to them by their family members? The family as the smallest unit of the society and socialization got a lot of roles to play in the understanding of the need for national unity and security in the country. Some efforts have been made by Nigerian government to reduce the rate of ethnic hatred in Nigeria but religion hardly allows them to survive.

Adetoye and Omilusi, (2015) through interrogative and analytical discourse engaged in the search for the causes of ethno-religious conflicts in the country and concludes that the failure of the Nigerian political elite to establish good governance, forge national unity and promote economic development is at the base of communal, ethnic and religious conflicts in the country. The study predicts that the country might suffer disintegration if this trend persists. These scholars have exposed Nigerians to the possible end result of persistence ethno-religious crisis in the country which was embedded in absolute lack of good governance by the political stage directors but failed to look into the media efforts into attracting the said leaders to do the needful to save the nation from the impending danger of absolute collapse as predicted. It is unfortunate that the leaders and

the led were blind to the fact that much reliance on ethno-religious bargain is gradually eating up the long sought Nigerian independent. This current study is pertinent at this very point in time because of the political terrain that the country is about to venture come 2023 when their religious sentimentality is most likely to disintegrate their already cracked nationhood.

Yusuf (2013) became interested in means of promoting peaceful co-existence and religious tolerance through literacy in Basic Education. In the views of the author, including titles that highlights peaceful co-existence in reading materials for English Language Curriculum among Nigerians can go a long way in inculcating religious tolerance among them. In this regard, the author recommended that that schools should adopt a holistic and integral approach in promoting peaceful co-existence and religious tolerance by encouraging students to engage in meaningful activities such as dramatization, miming, singing, poetry, projects and exchanges to heighten local, national and global awareness of individual, cultural and religious differences. If exposure to education can help Nigerians grow to tolerate one another's religion(s), ordinary exposure to other countries like India and America could have been sound enough to teach them practical experience of what they ought to do to make the country a better place for the citizens. However, this study is related to the current one in the sense that it centers on religious tolerance but differs in the approach which is formal education. What will happen to those who never wanted to go school or had lost the opportunity to have been in school?

Obayi and Edogor (2016) looked at audience perception of the Pentecostal churches' ownership of satellite television channels using survey research method and uses and gratifications theory. They draw a total of 300 respondents using multi-stage sampling techniques who were studied through the use of questionnaire. The study found that exposure to these miracles that happens in the channels draw the people closer to God. This study is a prove that the television programs exert influence on their viewers and make them to adopt a particular attitudinal change as communicated. Now that the country is in need of change of attitude from religious intolerance to love for one another, it is pertinent for an empirical of this nature to consider how the audiences of *Abrahamic mission* perceived the contents of the programs. It is for the media to advice the people on the best way to see religion and what to do to save the nation but it is left for the people to whom the message were sent to decide what to do.

Ugorji, (2016) analyzed the drivers, dynamics and sources of ethno-religious conflict in Nigeria using the medico-diagnostic method of inquiry with a view to providing various ways out of the religious challenge. This study diagnosed that the basic cause of different religious crisis in the country are exclusion from the decision making processes, self-government, constitution, independence, and recognition of the minorities, economic opportunities; and political representation. The study concluded that since the religious crisis in the country have refused all measures of conflict available settlement, it means that those conflict management measures have failed and a new paradigm shift *from retributive policy to restorative justice, and coercive policy to mediation and dialogue* were advocated. These paradigm shifts can only survive the test of time through media effort in it execution and monitoring at all time. However, it is imperative to state that with religious tolerance and love for one another among Nigerians, there wouldn't have been

denials and exclusion from benefits of power. This very fact underscores the very important of religious tolerance among Nigerians which *Abrahamic mission* is here to inculcate in the citizens.

Isaac (2014) draws his views from the existing relationship between the state and religion in Nigeria while paying attention to the impact of the later on the former. The study maintained that the Muslim North had since independent bent on establishing an Islamic state where their Sharia law will reign supreme. This study therefore, provided a legal boundary to establish a defined terms and condition for the nurturing the relationship between religion and the state and recommended circular regime at all cost. This recommendation is not well placed because it goes completely against the interest of the majority north who are Muslims. It is not well placed because it negates the idea of mediation but encourages coercion. Finding a common ground could have made a better recommendation. Can the use of attitudinal change campaign fulfill this requirement and give both parties the settlement that can help the country stay together. The reactions of those to whom the messages were targeted will provide an answer to this.

Abdulkader (2018) argues that the roles on those religious teachers in the various places of worships should be carefully examined with a view to the acceptable standard. At this point, what the preachers of different religion say in their churches and mosques becomes the primary source of information to the followers who are more in number and ready to participate in the execution of the preaching as given out to them by the representatives of their faith. To what extent can the people see as good the contents of *Abrahamic mission* after being exposed to some kinds of contents in their various churches and mosque?

Ibrahim, (2013) looked at the Nigerian political landscape paying attention to the roles played by religion and found that religion has taken the center stage and is today seen by many as a determinant of political office in the country. The author holds that in order to hold firm to political offices, different religions at different level struggle to keep their people in high leadership positions at all cost. This to him has bred hatred and religious intolerance threatening the country's peaceful co-existence as the year goes by. The author therefore, set to address the issue of religious commitment and doctrinal orthodoxy to political tolerance and how significant the religion is as a determinant of political tolerance in the Nigerian state. The study found that religious actors have been very active in hindering good governance in Nigeria through their parochial views of political offices in the country. This study opened a gap for value reorientation among the various religious leaders which the mass media is expected to champion in order to save the nation's unity. From this finding, it is very important for the religious leaders to adopt change of attitude and place national interest above religious interests.

Yagboyaju (2017) considers cultural and religious corruption as a major factor of underdevelopment in Nigeria. Using an interpretative and descriptive methodology for its analysis and argued that corruption in Nigeria, especially in the country's multi-ethnic and multi-religious status, must be conceived as a phenomenon transcending legal, political and economic boundaries. The researcher found that Nigerians hide under culture and religion to perpetrate crimes of different magnitude to the society and go unpunished for religious protections provided to them by their religious groups in leadership positions. Again, this study call for value reorientation

among Nigerians and their religious leaders at all level to do away with placing religious values above national interest.

Nthontho (2018) while investigating whether it is possible to be accommodative of other religions as a school principal found that the principals' previous experience and insufficient training play significant role in influencing their decisions towards tolerating other religions in their schools. The study recommended that leadership training programmes that will liberate principals' minds from fear of the unknown should be carried out to enable them act beyond political peripheries. Can the Muslim north accommodate other religions in their schools in the present day Nigeria? This recommendation seems very fair but inadequate because of the already adopted behaviors of the northern Muslims who have been trained never to accommodate other religions in their environment.

Sule (2015) this followed the line of the criticism against the mass media that they incite religious crisis in the country. To establish this criticism, the scholar examined the extent to which the mass media serves as instrument of escalation, generation and de-escalation of religious-related conflicts in the Northern part of Nigeria while paying attention to the consequent effects of the role of the mass media in the development of the northern region and the nation as a whole. The study adopted the content analysis of manifest media contents on ethno-religious crisis within the period and found that the mass media are very active in encouraging the escalation of the religious crisis in Nigeria. worse among the findings was that the media were found to be tilting their reports towards religious crisis even when the remote cause of such crisis were not related to religion all in the interest of serving their paymasters. The study on this ground recommended a paradigm shift in the mode of event reportage among media organizations. This study opened a gap for this current one which is interested in looking at the effort of the media to encourage religious tolerance in the Nigerian and how the audience members of the country perceived the said media move to save the nation from future religious crisis.

According to Paden, (2015) reports, the religious divides in the country manifested in the 2011 and 2015 presidential campaign and political activities where the two major political parties were confident that they will win their various zones of high religious concentration. This simply implies that choice of the political candidates in the country is more of religious based than issue based. This is why the country will continue to suffer from lack of good governance. Any political manifesto has nothing to do once it does not come from ones religious follower. This was captured in Nwosu (1996) who concluded that the reason for religious intolerance was rooted in the height of suspicion existing between Christians and Muslims which has weakened national unity and affected the citizens' perception of government and governance.

Generally, drawing from the studies that have been explored in this paper, it have been observed that frantic efforts have been made through research aimed at setting the country free from religious crises which always shield all political issues in the country. Unfortunately, none of the above studies have looked at the peoples' attitude towards media attempt to controlling the challenge of ethno-religious conflicts in Nigeria. Against this background, this study centered on investigating the people of Nigeria across different religion with a view to understanding if they

are ready to adopt a change of attitude from the original ones NTAi's nationwide inter-religious program called *Abrahamic Mission*.

METHOD OF STUDY

Even the best craftsman, can get his works wrong using the guideline. In this study, the survey research method was adopted to study a multifaceted respondents cutting across the three major religious groups in Nigeria. The study sampled respondents from the Muslim Community in Awka, Christian participants and as well the African traditional religionists in the state. The participants were selected using the voluntary and purposive sampling techniques. The essence of adopting these techniques was to ensure that those selected are well disposed to respond to the questions as may be asked. The researcher equally adopted covert research observation method to examine the behaviors of few participants to understand whether they actually practice what is being preached in the media on religious tolerance. Given the diverse nature of the population of these respondents, the researcher discretionally selected 100 participants from each of the three religious groups to make a total of 300 respondents. The researcher also conducted interview with six other participants of two from each group comprising a priest and elderly follower of each of the three faiths. It is pertinent to state that these participants were all conversant with the program under study. The questionnaire and the interview guide were constructed and used for data collection in the study.

Data Presentation

Of the 300 respondents sampled for the study, 300 copies of the questionnaire were distributed by the researcher through one-on-one hand-delivery and collected using the same means. At the point of data analysis, 12 copies of the questionnaire were not well attended to and were therefore, not valid for the study. With this, the researcher is left with 288 copies upon which the analyses were based.

Respondents' frequency of exposure to the *Abrahamic Mission* NTAi program

Variable	Frequency	Percentage
Frequently exposed	62	21.5
Not frequently exposed	147	51
Exposed	79	27.4
Total	288	100

Researcher's field survey, 2019

Table one revealed the respondents' degree of exposure to the program. Apart from the fact that the respondents must be conversant with the program and what it is all about, majority of them admitted not being frequently exposed to the program. This means that they will not be fully acquainted with the contents as to be influenced by the program.

Respondents' perception of *Abrahamic Mission* NTAi program

Variables	Frequency	Percentage
Optimistic that the program can enhance religious tolerance	86	29.8
Indifference on the capacity of the program to deliver	94	32.6
Pessimistic that the program cannot solve Nigeria's problem	108	37.5
Total	288	100

Researcher's field survey, 2019

On the perception of the program, the table data presented above from the respondents response demonstrated that the program is not enough to force Nigerians to religious tolerance which have been seen as the means of reducing exclusion from leadership and decision making which forms the bases of the suspicion among different religions in Nigeria. given the number of respondents who admitted being very pessimistic on the program, it is very clear that the Nigerian citizens have no hope that anything could make them return from religious extremism to religious tolerance. The above data implies that there is general negative perception of the program following the inability of the program to exert the required influence to make the people change their attitude for the better. This is largely based on the already acquired knowledge and ethno-religious orientation of those who control the affairs of the followers. What is preached in the television screen is quite different from what is preached at the individual churches and mosque by priests and imams.

Does respondents' exposure to NTAi *Abrahamic Mission* program encouraged them to tolerate all other religions in the country

Variables	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	48	16.6
No	186	64.5
Can't say	54	18.7
Total	288	100

Researcher's field survey, 2019

This table revealed that the respondents exposure to *Abrahamic mission* television program does not encourage the required change for the required attitude of religious tolerance as advocated in the media. This implies that there is a difference between what is communicated and what the people wants to accept and adopt as their attitude. The media however, can initiate and carry out a program, but id left for the people to consider the message and take decision on whether to adopt the communicated attitude or not. It does not mean that the mass media did not perform their social responsibility role in peace building in the society, rather, the citizens have refused to buy the idea that were adjudged by the media to save the ugly situation.

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

On the first research objective that looked at the degree of respondents' exposure to the program, empirical date from table revealed that the people had poor exposure level with greater percent of the respondents admitting not being frequently exposed to the program. Given the fact that the

respondents are exposed to the program, it is clear that the mass media have played their social responsibility role to the nations by airing the program to foster religious tolerance. This is in line with the provision of social responsibility theory which makes the mass media grossly responsible for the nation building and good governance as partners in developmental efforts and progress (Adeyanju, 2013). While probing further to know the reason for the low level of exposure as recorded in the raw data, the researcher found that the Nigerian people lost confidence in the views of those religious leaders who appear on screen to preach tolerance. Among the reasons adduced for this loss of confidence include the inability of the religious leaders and priests to condemn unjust actions of the government or its agencies in strong terms and follow such condemnation to a logical conclusion. In the views of the interviewees, many religious leaders condemn some ungodly actions of the political leaders in their lips while encouraging them in their respective churches and mosques. This points more to the suspicion that exist among religious groups. Drawing from the above finding, it could be concluded that NTAi international met the wrong target in designing the program. Their program would have made more impact if it looks at the height of imbalance in the power structure which had been revealed to be the major cause of religious intolerance among Nigerians. A committed press will at all point in time look at the happenings in government and as well pay attention to the accountability of the powers that be in a state. At this point, it is the view of the researcher that the station's ownership by the federal government may have influenced they designation of the program to divert attention from the inequality and exclusive leadership which hits hard on the country's political culture causing hatred among different religious groups.

Looking at the second research objective that investigated the respondents' perception of the program, the researcher found that the majority of the respondents are pessimistic on the strength of the program to effect the required attitudinal change expected for a better Nigeria. This study corroborated the finding made in Agudosy and Ikegbunam (2019) where it was concluded that the media drops the message while the people choose what to accept and what to act. In other words, agenda setting is quite different from agenda acting (Ikegbunam, Raji and Ekewonu, 2019). While probing further on this perception through the interview, it was gathered that the attitudinal change that were preached by those religious leaders on television are not same way preached at their various specific churches and mosques. The interview report reveals that many Nigerians have had their religious attitude cultivated over time and cannot be easily changed with ordinary media campaign. The researcher's covert observation of the religious preaching of some religious leaders revealed that even priests encourage religious extremism among their followers by making them see nothing good from other religions. These kinds of statements and preaching control the people's emotions and reflect in their attitudes to different issues. Their perceptions have been shaped long ago and the ongoing issues and actions from the government since independents have at every point in time confirmed the earlier orientation that they have about each others' religion. Until this physical actions and attitudes of leadership of the country are changed, no amount of preaching through the media can make the people see themselves as the same people (Ikegbunam, Raji and Ekewonu 2019).

On the last research objective that investigated whether exposure to the program encouraged the respondents to adopt the communicated message for a better Nigeria, empirical data demonstrated

that exposure is different from acceptance and adoption of attitude communicated in the media. Actually, they are exposed but it has been in their blood stream never to do anything for the better. This finding disagrees with the position of the views of agenda and media framing scholars (Azlan, 2012; Nebojša, 2015) on the power of the media in shaping the people's perception. In this study, data have shown that the media can take the horse to the river but cannot force it to drink the water. This finding was corroborated by the interview reports which revealed that those in the leadership positions are the key players that can change the views of the citizens which can only be done through good governance and all inclusive leadership.

On how this category of people can change the already existing attitude, interview reports revealed that they can do that through equitable distribution of leadership positions and resources across different religious and ethnic groups in the country ranging from political appointments. The interview report revealed that without balancing the power structures across ethno-religious groups in Nigeria, there must be rancor and hatred which in turn breeds intolerance. No one is happy with any person or group of persons that denies him or her, the basic right and position that can improve on his life due to him. Even in family settings. This finding corroborated the views of the proponent of social exchange theory which in the words of Njoki, (2013) looks at the gains and loss of accepting a communicated attitude before admitting or participating in it. The interpretation here is that the respondents in this study had confirmed that after weighing the media messages on *Abrahamic mission*, there is no need to adopt change of attitude because the root cause have not been addressed.

Future trends and Recommendation

Based on the findings of this study, it is imperative to state that the mass media herein represented by the NTAi have played their part in the nation building through *Abrahamic mission*, though, their effort was not enough. The political culture of the country is entirely faulty with lots of recycling of the same sets of people in power all in the name of ethno-religious interest which never paved way for the manifestation of national interest. The trends in Nigeria politics of this generation are the concept of internal party zoning arrangement, eight years tenure, and ethno-religious political party line ups. From all ramifications, these trends in the political system of the country have all triggered different kinds of problems at one time or the other. The internal party zoning arrangement had never favored the residents of the south Eastern Nigeria in any of the most sensitive positions in the country and nothing is being done or is getting to be done about that. This form the bases of the preaching that majority of the Christian priests usually preach to their congregations which sink down their minds and nerves creating lasting impression that can hardly be wiped out of their memories. It is very significant to also remember that persistent reign of the northern part of the country in Nigeria confirms the claim that the Muslims never wanted to have the country shared with any other religious groups.

Drawing from the present day political equation, the northerners must forever determine who gets what in the Nigerian political landscape because of their unity and commitment in pursuit of common goal, a situation that will continue to encourage and sustain religious hatred. Unfortunately, the media in Nigeria are not ready to open their web of reporting on the unjust actions and inactions of the political leaders from 1999 till date. The reason is that the media

environment is never friendly for a free media that are committed to good governance. The media end up singing praises to the government once they came into power and forget to serve the public. Since every aspect of the government and the people revolve round the media, it is expected that the mass media will use their time to ensure that the right values and ethics are cultivated in the minds of the leaders for good governance and equity in resources distribution. Until the mass media learn to hold the government accountable, the country will forever have problems of religious crises because of inequality of different magnitudes.

The researcher recommended above all others that the mass media should own up their responsibility of watching the government and demanding justice at all cost. More of these programs should be designed with the people in leadership positions as the major targets rather than the followers as in this program. This study also suggests that the religious leaders should be very much aware that they are part of the problems that face Nigeria by virtue of what they preach to their congregations. The leaders of the nations are not left out because their actions and inactions are the major causes of the crises that were seen as the challenge to the country. They breed hatred that threatens the unity of Nigeria by being intentionally unfair to all. The actions of the Nigerian political office holders most of the times never make an onlooker to believe that the country is one and indivisible entity. Targeting the leaders may make the required result more achievable than persuading the followers to adopt a character that was never inculcated in them by their leaders. Again, the citizens who are used as instrument of these religious extremist-oriented crises should understand that those at the center have none of their sons and daughters as the victims of any of their crises. Finally and most importantly, there must be a sincere paradigm shift from *dirty capitalist order of winner takes all* to *a liberal order embedded in true federalism anchored on 'exclusive' fairness to all* irrespective of region or ethnic origin.

Future study should look at what the priests and imams in Nigeria tell their congregations in their various place of worship concerning other religious groups while paying attention to the reasons why 75 percent of top political office holders in Nigeria are Muslim north. It is equally pertinent for future study to examine the political leaders and their criteria for political appointments in the country. These are some of the physical focal points that discourage religious tolerance and as well question the realities of one Nigeria.

CONCLUSION

This paper examined whether exposure to *Abrahamic mission* program of NTAi television stations encouraged the people of Nigeria to embrace religious tolerance which the program preaches. The study which sampled a total of 300 respondents across the three religious groups in Nigeria domiciled in Anambra state, demonstrated that the citizens are more eager to remain with religious extremism because their leaders' actions in leadership of the country had never made them to see Nigeria as one country that shares everything in common. From the empirical data, the respondents under study made the researcher to understand that the problem with Nigeria is more in the hands of the political leaders whose actions and inactions make the citizens to confirm the views from their ethno-religious orientations. Anything that can erase these ethno-religious orientations of the people is more than a media program. Rather than make the people to have a rethink, the program

is seen by the respondents as a failed mission for targeting the wrong audience instead. From the respondents' reactions to interview questions, the researcher came to conclude that the mass media in Nigeria had over the years kept silence on the major causes of religious differences which are being perpetrated by the actions of those in leadership positions. Designing a program that target the audience without refocusing on issues of exclusions of some ethno-religious groups from the leadership circle of the country will end up a wild goose chase. Therefore, initiating programs are not enough. Ensuring accountability through demanding equity, justice and fairness for all ethno-religious groups may make the mass media more responsible than fashioning out programs to persuade Nigerians to accept one another's religion where the political class has not exemplified that through rational/equitable distribution of both resources and positions.

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KEY TERMS

Capitalist order: The views that winning an election is a business trip from where one can make one's, family and groups' live earning at the expense of the nation. Everything here belongs to the winner with the believe- let another do whatever he wants if he enters after me

Abrahamic mission: The religious integration program that forms the base of this paper

Ethno-religious: Religions embedded in ethnic origin and rivalry.

Perception: Peoples' thoughts, views and believes on an event, issue, program- Abrahamic mission which determines their take on its strength in achieving the desired religious tolerance in Nigeria for good governance.

Extremism: Higher committed zeal to protect and sustain one's religion and their faith through forceful proclamation of such faith.

Liberal order: The understanding of the position of social contract which makes leadership and governance a people-oriented venture. Here, the leader is never at rest till the needs of the citizens are maximally attended to through the state resources

Exposure: The state of being conversant with Abrahamic mission program through media channels of communication. Being aware of the program.

Religious intolerance: Outright rejection of others and negligence of their interest because of their religious believe. Here one is automatically seen as not worth living because of the fact that one believes in another faith other ours.

Religious faithful: Worshipers and believers in different religion that make up the country Nigeria.

Political culture: The politicians demand and constant fight to remain in power even when the masses are tired of their leadership in all ramifications. It also covers the culture of blame games from one government to another blended with the idea of myself and my family in a national position.

Political landscape: The setting of the Nigerian political atmosphere which has been adjudged to be very unfair to some while favorable to others.

Prejudice: Discrimination and denial of supposed rights and responsibilities to one another as a result of their creed, faith race, ethnic background, culture, class or religion.

Antagonism: Opposition to one another's views, missions, demands and progress that exist between two or more interest groups pursuing common owned wealth.

Attitude: The peoples' behaviors that they exhibit which may be normal and accepted or abnormal and required significant modification(s).

Influence: The consequences of being exposed to a given media content herein represented by the NTAi network program called *Abrahamic mission*.

Author's bio

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