

NEWSPAPER COVERAGE OF TERRORIST ACTIVITIES IN NIGERIA: MAY 2015 – 2017

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ABSTRACT

The issue of terrorism has posed a continuous threat to Nigeria and Nigerians. Researchers have been devoting time to examining the dynamics of media ownership in influencing press coverage of important issues like pandemics, terrorism, insurgency, war, civil unrest, etc., as it is believed to be the dominant force influencing news decisions and policy. This study, which makes use of the social responsibility theory, looks at how the ownership factor affects coverage of terrorism in Nigeria during the two years under the former president Muhammadu Buhari, from May 29, 2015, to May 29, 2017, when terrorist activity was highly prevalent in the country. Quantitative Content Analysis was employed as the research method, and three newspapers (The Guardian, The Punch, and The Nation) were purposefully selected based on wide circulation, reach, wide readership, and online presence. Simple frequency counts and percentages were used to analyse the quantitative data. Findings show that minimal coverage was given to the issue of terrorism by selected newspapers. Hence, this has implications for national security in Nigeria. The study concludes that Nigerian media must be socially responsible to the public in its news dissemination regardless of their political, religious, or ownership affiliations, and in doing so, news coverage should be done in ways that the ownership interest would not be mortgaged for national security.

Keywords: *Newspaper, framing, coverage, social responsibility, press, terrorism, and national security.*

Introduction

The world at large as of today is confronted with different complexities—social, political, economic, and cultural. Regrettably, the problem of insecurity brought on by the rise in terrorism is one of the complexities and challenges that are sweeping the globe. Terrorism has happened in numerous nations and circumstances, according to Lutz and Lutz (2011:1), who were referenced by Adamu (2013:68). Sadly, terrorism has spread like wildfire throughout contemporary society, destroying both lives and property. World leaders have had to convene multiple times to discuss strategies for preventing acts of terrorism, given that the number of deaths worldwide attributed to terrorism is increasing daily. On the global scene, international terrorism has become an established feature in world politics (Nwolise, 2005). It has also evolved into a weapon that state agents and rebels use to pursue military and political objectives that are typically unattainable on a traditional battlefield or in a political forum.

According to the 2015 Global Terrorism Index (GTI), the report shows that 2014 witnessed an increase in terrorism-related deaths by 80 per cent from the previous year, with 78 per cent of all deaths concentrated in Iraq, Nigeria, Afghanistan, Pakistan, and Syria (Institute for Economic and Peace, 2015). According to the report, Boko Haram, which primarily operates in Nigeria, has surpassed ISIL (also known as the Islamic State) to become the world's most dreadful terrorist group, with Nigeria ranking as the world's most terrorised country.

Since Nigeria was merged by the British colonial overlords in 1914, the country's population has been expanding quickly. Currently, over 180 million people are living in an expressly growing population of at least 250 distinct ethnic groups and 500 different languages. Since that period till after independence in 1960, Nigeria has had to face the herculean task of trying to fuse a varied and diverse group into one unified entity. Its foundation has been threatened by ongoing experiences with persistence and violent conflicts. One of which culminated in the first civil war fought from 1967-1970 (Udama, 2013). Following the civil war, ethnic tensions and civil conflicts persisted and are rapidly becoming commonplace. Culture, or the norms of society. In opposition to the centrifugal forces that could cause Nigeria to disintegrate, the centripetal forces holding the conglomeration together are rapidly waning. The United States' prediction that Nigeria will disintegrate in 2015 demonstrates how serious the problem is. While terrorism is not a new phenomenon in Nigerian history, it has gained popularity as a means of spreading fear and inciting violence against the populace (Udama, 2013).

Ever since the inception of democracy in Nigeria, people have been expressing divergent views on its benefits. Some see it as a threat to their lives and property, while key policymakers see it as appropriate for the country. Knowing the importance of peace for the citizens, studies on insurgency have attracted experts' attention, whose literature has been of help to policymakers, both governmental and nongovernmental, to make plans against Boko Haram. Terrorist organisations, while frightening, do not pose as significant a threat to national and international security as governments, the news media, and politicians claim. To prevent such attacks, the majority of governments worldwide have stepped up security and dedicated significant financial and scientific resources to the cause. Moving forward, the only thing that needs to be done is to keep an eye on and train security personnel, rather than allocating more funds for national security.

Nigeria has remained a beleaguered nation fifty years after independence. The nation has been afflicted by an unprecedented series of insecurity, intercommunal and inter-ethnic clashes, civil strife, religious conflicts, armed robbery, assassination, murder, economic sabotage, gender-based violence, abuse of public office, bomb expulsion, and massive corruption. While communities and groups engaged each other in communal conflicts, state agents have been accused of involvement in the perpetration of violence and destruction, as reflected in ZakiBiam and Odi in the Benue and Bayelsa conflict (Ibrahim, 2002). Communal and religious conflicts tend to reenact, partly due to the failure of leaders and relevant security and civil institutions to act proactively to deal with the causes at the very onset. Similarly, during the 1980s and 2000s, several ethnoreligious crises emerged in different cities; these have surely been connected to the actions of foreign nationals who have connections to foreign sponsors (Mbaya, 2011). The Maitatsine phenomenon in the 1980s, Kaduna (1987 and in the following decade), Katsina (1991), Maiduguri (1982-2007), Yola (1984); Bauchi (1991, 2000, 2002, 2009); Kafanchan (1987), Gombe (1985), Tafawa-Balewa (1991); Zaria (1992), Zango-Kataf (1992), Funtua (1993), Potiskum (1994), Nassarawa (2005), Taraba (2006), Shagamu in Ogun (1999), Lagos (1999-2000), Jos (2001 till today).

In Nigeria today, there are ethno-cultural agitations, including those fighting for autonomy and resource control. There are also violent activities of ethnic militia groups such as the Oodua People Congress (OPC), the movement for the actualisation of the sovereign state of Biafra (MASSOB), as enunciated with the establishment of a clandestine Radio Biafra that propagates hatred against citizens from other parts of the country, and the Ijaw National Congress (INC), the Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta (MEND), and the Niger Delta Peoples Volunteer Force (NDPVF). The recent wave of

kidnappings of foreign oil workers in the Niger Delta, the bombings in Port Harcourt and Warri, and the attacks on oil installations and pipelines highlight Nigeria's susceptibility to acts of terrorism sparked by global terrorism. The fact that kidnappers' headquarters have shifted from south-south to south-west Nigeria is horrifying.

In Nigeria, terrorism has destroyed lives and property, posed a threat to Western interests, and polarised religious communities. Due to acts of international crimes like money laundering, advanced free fraud, drug trafficking, and human trafficking—some of which are linked to terrorism—Nigeria's reputation has suffered greatly on the global stage. The government's efforts to rebuild Nigeria's reputation abroad may have contributed to the country's gradual improvement in image between 2003 and 2006, but the level of criminal activity did not change much. Furthermore, media reports on threats of ethnoreligious crisis, armed robberies, cultism and militia gangs, political upheavals, unemployment, and corruption as reported both locally and internationally could have negative consequences on Nigeria's image abroad and would exacerbate and trigger terrorist attacks in Nigeria. According to Adekanye (1998), in such a scenario, Nigeria might be classified as insecure, embassies might close, and foreign investors and visitors might be prohibited.

Unquestionably, the coverage provided by print and electronic media can positively or negatively impact a country. This implies that mass media coverage of an event, most especially terrorism-related, has implications for the security of any society (Asemah, 2013). Fairness and objectivity are required of the mass media when reporting stories. It is also expected that the media institution will not prepare news that may jeopardise the stability, security, and unity of the country. Although it is their professional duty to report news with objectivity, Nigerian media outlets should exercise caution when using language, expressions, and biases when covering crises, acts of violence, or terrorist attacks. It is also expected that media ownership and political affiliation do not influence accurate and balanced coverage of issues and events. This study therefore investigates Newspaper coverage of terrorist activities in Nigeria: May 2015-2017. We looked at the most common editorial formats and the importance given to terrorism-related issues.

More so, the representation of terrorist activities and the influence of media ownership on coverage of terrorist activities were explored.

Literature Review Terrorist Activities in Nigeria

Since 1999, when Nigeria transitioned to democracy after many years of military governance, the country's security problems have continued to degenerate. According to Osabiya (2015), today, Nigeria is bedevilled with so

many security challenges: ethno-religious crises, socio-economic agitations, indigenes/settlers conflicts, ethnic militias, poverty, illiteracy, poor infrastructure, poor health conditions, unemployment, ethnic and religious conflicts, corruption, illegal oil bunkering, cross-border illegal business activities, illegal drug-related activities, 419 scams, crime and criminality, political assassinations, boundary disputes, cultism, armed robbery, kidnapping, and presently terrorism. Osabuya believes that part of the reason for this ongoing rise is the government's inability to provide the people with basic services. Nigeria is now viewed by the international community as a nation where insecurity flourishes due to the frequency with which conflicts and political violence have broken out in different parts of the country (Osabiya, 2015).

Specifically, Boko Haram, initially known as Jama'atu Ahlis Sunna Lidda'awati Wal-Jihad, a radical Islamic fundamentalist organisation, has brought terror and fear into Nigeria. Onoh (2012) noted that Jama'atu Ahlis Sunna Lidda'awati Wal-Jihad, the terrorist group's original byline in Arabic, means 'People committed to the propagation of the Prophet's teachings and Jihad'. When translated loosely in Arabic, it means 'Western education is a sin'. This group is fighting for Islamic rule to be imposed in the northern states of Nigeria, where Sharia law has already been implemented, and they believe that they can achieve their version of Islamic rule by overthrowing the government. Boko Haram activities have caused the destruction of lives and property in the north, thereby paralysing economic activities in the region despite its natural endowment in agricultural productivity. The gang has been successful in instilling terror and fear, which has reduced people's productivity. Furthermore, the actions of this group have crippled economic activity, particularly in the country's northern regions, where these incidents are common.

Media framing of terrorism

Nigerian newspapers are situated across locations, and the ownership could be private or public. Nigerian newspapers have come a long way. From its humble beginning in 1859 (Akinfeleye, 1985), it has metamorphosed into one of the most vibrant subsets of the Nigerian media scene. Kperoogi (2011) claims that throughout history, Nigerian newspapers have served as a veritable forum for the forceful expression, ventilation, and circulation of transformation and politically significant national discourse, as well as for the instigation of significant social changes. While insurgents actively rely on the media for their stardom, the media also get some benefits from reporting terror campaigns. Media understands that their audience prefers one particular kind of news over the other. For example, the Pew Research Centre for the People and the Press

survey in 1996 asked, ‘What kinds of news do people want to read about?’ It found out that crime topped the list (Hachten, 2004). Because of this, "bleeding" stories are always anticipated by the media. Terrorism, which is a mixture of crime, drama, and human-interest stories, fits this description very well. Terrorism offers the media gripping stories with an interesting plot; it gives them new worthy and interesting information—drama that involves human lives; a basis for political commentary; and human-interest stories on the victims and their families. All these in turn lead to increased ratings and high circulation figures for the media (Ganor, 2011).

Alexander (1972) argues that terrorist groups have three purposes to interact with the media, namely attention, recognition, and legitimacy. Bandura (1998) notes that the media is used for moral justification, arousal of sympathy, and intimidation of the public. However, some scholars have picked on the choice of words used by media in reporting terrorism. According to the framework, how terrorism is reported can have an impact on how people view and react to terrorist activity. Azeez (2010) states that the media tend to use evaluative language in defining or labelling terrorists for priming and constructing a version of reality. People are likely to form certain, enduring perceptions about particular social groups as a result of these word choices. From this perspective:

The media ought to know that words have power... Still (partly through the use of words), the press has convinced both itself and the public that only ‘Muslims’ are ‘terrorists’ Strangely, there are no ‘Christian’ or ‘Jewish’ terrorists! The Catholic Irish Republican Army, which has carried out attacks against Irish and English Protestants, was never called an organisation of ‘Christian terrorists’ nor is the protestant Ulster Defence Association so termed, though it too carried out acts of terror against Catholics (Hussain & Rosenbaum, 2004:178).

As Hoffman (2006) writes, “Only by spreading the terror and outrage to a larger audience, do the terrorists gain the leverage they need to effect fundamental political change.” Therefore, since the most gruesome and deadly incidents receive the greatest volume of reporting, media critics have charged that terrorists’ resort to progressively bloodier violence to satisfy the media’s appetite for shocking news” (Nacos, 2000). Terrorists want not only to be recognised by the public but also to attempt to use the media to spread their

message. When terrorists strike, the audience may ask itself why people would do such things. Hence, to get people to know the cause they carry out attacks for would be a logical next step for them (Archetti, 2013). Insurgents are treated by the media as accepted, and legitimate by comparing their leadership with the world leaders, giving them a similar status. Obtaining personal airtime through interviews, prerecorded videos, or messages is the primary method used to accomplish this. Framing is very important in this. If terrorists succeed in having the media frame their leader much like a “regular” leader would be framed, the audience may get the impression that the two are comparable (ISSCM’s WP4 Report, 2008 in Idowu, 2014).

The coverage of terrorist activities in Nigeria has been the subject of numerous studies. For example, Suraj (2013), in his study, “Analysis of Newspaper Coverage of Boko Haram Crisis in Nigeria: April to June 2102,” observed that there were variations in the coverage of Boko Haram-related issues due to ownership and political affiliations. In addition, results show that the selected newspapers (The Guardian, the Punch, and the Nation) predominantly reported and portrayed the Boko Haram crisis as being political and religious. Also, Shehu (2013), in his study, “Press coverage of the Boko Haram Insurgency and its implications for conflict-sensitive journalism in Nigeria (2013/2014),” observed that Nigerian journalists are not fully adopting conflict-sensitive journalism in their reportage.

According to the study, Nigerian newspapers' coverage of Boko Haram is dramatic, biased towards war, and falls short of solution-driven strategies.

As a result, the empirical studies mentioned above imply that researchers have attempted to look into different media narratives or reporting styles about terrorism. Within the framework that the language adopted in reporting terrorism can affect people's perception of terrorism and may have important consequences for public policy support regarding actions and reactions in response to violence, some scholars have also focused on how the public perceives and responds to terrorism based on what they are exposed to in the media. To better understand the impact on national security of media ownership and how terrorism news was framed in a few Nigerian newspapers during President Muhammadu Buhari's first two years in office, this study looks at these issues.

Theoretical Framework Social Responsibility Theory

The Hutchins Commission, which was established in the USA in 1947 to re-examine press freedom under the libertarian system, gave rise to this theory. This was the result of the supposedly "free marketplace of ideas" failing to uphold press freedom and produce the anticipated positive effects on society. The British Royal Commission's 1949 investigation into the necessity of an oversight body or organ to keep an eye on, prevent, and oversee professional abuse and negligence had an impact on the development of the social responsibility theory. According to McQuail (2005:56), cited by Adaja (2013:9), social responsibility theory refers to "the unwritten obligations implicit in the freedom of publication as well as general ethical and moral principles relating to truth and justice." According to the press's social responsibility theory, the media must serve the public while remaining free of outside influences. This theory has its major premise in the fact that the freedom of the press carries an equal obligation, an obligation to be responsible to the public. Thus, while Nigerian newspapers have a social duty to inform the public about the actual nature of terrorist activity, they also must foster brave attitudes towards crises. For instance, Ekwueme & Obayi (2012:6), cited by Suraj (2013), think that instead of reporting the death rate in Boko Haram attacks, the number of people who survived might be worth reporting. Similarly, the media would be better served by focussing more on praising the government's efforts to combat terrorism rather than exaggerating the terrorist organisation's actions.

Research Method

The study adopted content analysis. The study population consisted of Nigerian daily newspapers that were in circulation during the research period. However, three newspapers were purposefully selected for this study. These newspapers were selected because of their wide circulation, reach, readership, and online presence. In addition, these newspapers represent the different cultural backgrounds of each newspaper owner. These selected newspapers include Punch, Guardian, and The Nation newspapers. Furthermore, the study spans two years (May 29, 2015-May 29, 2017), during which terrorist activities were prevalent in Nigeria. To determine the sample size from the three selected newspapers, the researcher used systematic random sampling to select the days of the week. Therefore, each newspaper was analysed based on a day's interval starting from May 29th, 2015. Consequent to the systematic random sampling by two-day intervals, the total study sample is shown in the table. Over two years, a total of 1,092 (364×3) newspaper samples were quantitatively analysed using pre-defined content categories.

Table 1: Study samples

| YEAR | DURATION | INTERVAL | SAMPLES |
|--------------------|-----------------|-----------------|--------------------|
| May 2015- May 2016 | 12 Months | Two days | 182 samples |
| May 2016- May 2017 | 12 Months | Two days | 182 samples |
| TOTAL | | | 364 samples |

A coding sheet was the tool used to collect data for this investigation. The coding sheet contained clear and precise categories that are equivalent to news frames. The coding sheet also contained relevant units of analysis and content categories. The content categories are editorial format (news, editorials, feature stories, opinions, cartoons/photos, speeches/interviews); prominence (front page, inside page, back page, editorial page, inside cover, and opinion page); and language (positive, negative, or neutral). The unit of analysis includes news, editorials, headlines, features, cartoons, and columns. The editorial format, story length, prominence, and language tones were coded in the coding sheet designed for data collection. The data generated from content analysis was analysed through simple frequency counts and percentages.

Analysis and Discussion of Findings

Research Question One: What are the dominant editorial formats used in reporting terrorist activities by the selected newspaper?

Table 4: Editorial Formats Used in Reporting Terrorist Activities

| | | <i>The Guardian</i> | <i>The Punch</i> | <i>The Nation</i> | <i>TOTAL</i> |
|----------------|--------------------|---------------------|------------------|-------------------|--------------|
| | | Frequency (%) | Frequency (%) | Frequency (%) | Total |
| Valid | Headline | 44 (19.0%) | 49 (17.3%) | 54 (24.4%) | 147 |
| | | 13(58.2%) | | | 437 |
| | News Story | | 177 (62.5%) | 125 (56.6%) | 23 |
| | Feature story | 12 (5.2%) | 2 (.7%) | 9 (4.1%) | 24 |
| | | | | | 28 |
| | Editorial | 8 (3.4%) | 14 (4.9%) | 2 (.9%) | 8 |
| | Opinion | 9 (3.9%) | 9 (3.2%) | 10 (4.5%) | 33 |
| | | | | | 24 |
| | Cartoon | 1 (.4%) | 4 (1.4%) | 3 (1.4%) | 12 |
| | Photograph | 9(3.9%) | 13 (4.6%) | 11 (5.0%) | |
| | Responses/Letters | 12(5.2%) | 9 (3.2%) | 3 (1.4%) | |
| | Interview/Speeches | 2 (.9%) | 6 (2.1%) | 4 (1.8%) | |
| Total | | 232 | 283 | 221 | 736 |
| Missing System | | 1 | 0 | 0 | |
| Total | | 233 | 283 | 221 | |

The findings show that all of the sampled newspapers reported the stories mostly as straight news stories, with a total of 437 publications, followed by headlines of 147 reports, as shown in Table 4.1. Though there were editorial comments (24), opinion articles (28) and feature stories (23); they were of low consideration. However, *The Punch* (4.9%) and *The Guardian* (3.4%) newspapers tend to be more vocal in their editorial comments despite their reportage of the terrorist crisis as news stories. It is also worth noting that the sampled newspapers significantly underplayed photographs and cartoons depicting terrorism. The analysis above thus showed variations in ownership interest and pattern. For example, The Nation newspaper, considering its political outlook, probably avoided editorials and then devoted little coverage to opinion on terrorism issues to prevent public scrutiny, but rather decided to report the conflict using evocative images in the form of photographs and other graphics, while The Punch (4.9%) and The Guardian Newspapers (3.4%) probably freely published editorials to make their stand on terrorism known. The Guardian, on the other hand, made its voice clear in news analysis and features, which probably suggests an indirect editorial. From the data, it can also be deduced that the less use of photographs and cartoons by the sampled media generally reflects a socially responsible press. Ekwueme and Obayi (2012) believe that evocative images are more easily remembered and, if given enough publicity, could help spread the terrorists' message of fear. The selected newspapers showed that there has been a proper use of the philosophy of social responsibility, especially in the coverage of issues that tend to be highly sensitive to national stability. Normally, it is expected that the press ought to be socially responsible, not taking sides on any critical issue irrespective of the ownership, political, and religious influences. The media must also be objective and mindful of its social responsibility, particularly when reporting on issues critical to national stability.

Research Question Two: What is the level of prominence given to issues of terrorism in the selected newspapers?

Table 5: Prominence of Terrorist Activities in Nigeria Based on Story Length

| Newspapers | | <i>The Guardian</i> | | <i>The Punch</i> | | <i>The Nation</i> | |
|------------|-------------------|---------------------|--|------------------|--|-------------------|-------|
| | | Frequency (%) | | Frequency (%) | | Frequency (%) | Total |
| Valid | Full page | 12 (5.3%) | | 15 (5.3%) | | 11 (5.1%) | 38 |
| | Half page | 34 (15.0%) | | 74 (26.1%) | | 25 (11.7%) | 133 |
| | Quarter page | 92 (40.5%) | | 104 (36.7%) | | 86 (40.2%) | 282 |
| | Less than quarter | 89 (39.2%) | | 90 (31.8%) | | 92 (43.0%) | 271 |
| | Total | 227 | | 283 | | 214 | 724 |
| Missing | System | 6 | | 0 | | 7 | |
| Total | | 233 | | 283 | | 221 | |

Findings show that in terms of story length, both The Punch and The Guardian provide quarter-page reports, whereas The Nation's highest report is "less than a quarter-page." It can be seen that the sampled papers generally gave minimal coverage to terrorism issues. On average, The Punch newspaper gave the most

coverage (26.1% on half page and above) of terrorism compared to The Nation (11.7%) and The Guardian (15.0%) newspapers.

The Prominence of Terrorist Activities in Nigeria Based on Story Placement.

| | The Guardian | | The Punch | | The Nation | |
|-----------------|---------------------|--------------|------------------|--------------|-------------------|--------------|
| | Frequency | Per cent | Frequency | Per cent | Frequency | Per cent |
| Valid Frontpage | 39 | 16.7% | 58 | 20.5% | 41 | 18.6% |
| Inside page | 165 | 70.8% | 187 | 66.1% | 162 | 73.3% |
| Back page | 3 | 1.3% | 1 | .4% | 2 | .9% |
| Editorial page | 10 | 4.3% | 20 | 7.1% | 2 | .9% |
| Inside cover | 11 | 4.7% | 9 | 3.2% | 8 | 3.6% |
| Opinion page | 5 | 2.1% | 8 | 2.8% | 6 | 2.7% |
| Total | 233 | 100.0 | 283 | 100.0 | 221 | 100.0 |

From the analysis, the sampled newspapers appeared to give less prominence (in terms of the position of the story) to the terrorism issue. More stories about terrorism appeared on the inside pages rather than the front page, back page, inside cover, editorial page, and opinion page. The findings revealed that all of the sampled newspapers gave minimal prominence to terrorism reporting in terms of length of the story, with 282 publications appearing on the quarter page, closely followed by 271 publications appearing on the quarter page or less, mostly within the newspaper pages.

This may be interpreted as a conscious attempt on the part of the sampled newspapers to downplay the impact of terrorism. Various scholars like Hoffman (2006) and Nacos (2007) believe that the mass media and terrorism

appear to enjoy a mutual relationship, and this often makes the terrorists achieve publicity through the media to their advantage. However, since the media have always been known to flourish more in crisis reportage, they respond to terrorist attacks with undisguised zeal. Schlesinger (1983) provided additional insight into the mutually beneficial relationship between the media and the terrorists. He explained that the media is drawn to terrorist acts because they present an opportunity for a positive story, and they will cover terrorist attacks, hijackings, kidnappings, and assassinations. However, it appears that the sampled newspapers took an exception. The sampled newspapers appear to be socially conscious in their reporting, placing less emphasis on terrorism-related issues—possibly to lessen the impact of the terrorist group's violent crimes on the general public.

Undoubtedly, even though the chosen newspaper covered the crises, they refrained from giving them undue attention, which would have exacerbated the conflict by bringing the crises to light too much. This would have happened if they had covered more stories on a full or half page. Alexander (1972) argues that terrorist groups have three purposes to interact with the media, namely attention, recognition, and legitimacy; however, Nacos (2000:13) explains this relationship thus: “Without massive news coverage, the terrorist act would resemble the proverbial tree falling in the forest: if no one learnt of an incident, it would be as if it had not occurred.” This means that the terrorist acts would not receive the attention, acknowledgement, and legitimacy they so desperately sought, and their effects would likely go unutilised.

Research Question Three: What tone was adopted by the selected Newspaper in the reportage of terrorist activities?

Table 3: Portrayal of Terrorism in Nigeria based on the General Tone of Story

| | Tone of the Story | | |
|-------------------|--------------------------|------------------|----------------|
| Newspapers | Government | Terrorist | Neutral |
| | | | |

| | G (%) | D (%) | Total | G (%) | D (%) | Total | Total |
|---------------------|--------------|---------|-------|---------|---------|-------|-------|
| <i>The Guardian</i> | 74(74%) | 26(26%) | 100 | 47(76%) | 15(24%) | 62 | 84 |
| <i>The Punch</i> | G | D | Total | G | D | Total | Total |
| | 99(80%) | 25(20%) | 124 | 42(64%) | 24(36%) | 66 | 119 |
| <i>The Nation</i> | G | D | Total | G | D | Total | Total |
| | 111 (92%) | 9 (8%) | 120 | 30(65%) | 16(35%) | 46 | 77 |

The research indicates that the three sampled newspapers (The Guardian, 76%; The Punch, 64%; and The Nation, 65%) did not provide extensive coverage of the threat and destruction caused by terrorists. As a result, they were cautious to avoid portraying the terrorist group as a merciless entity that could incite fear in the minds of the public who have access to the news. It can be seen that The Guardian, which has the highest, followed by The Punch fairly reported the news that portrayed the terrorist group as more powerful and deadly than The Nation which has a relatively low coverage on this. This further demonstrates how ownership, whether motivated by political allegiance or tribal divisions, is at play here. Despite the ownership influence being played out in the reportage, all the sampled newspapers (The Guardian-84; The Punch-119; The Nation-77) seem to have reported more stories on a neutral level, regardless of the format. This suggests that a large number of the news reports were released exactly as they happened, without any language that either exaggerates or minimises the significance of the story.

Furthermore, it was noted that The Nation, a newspaper owned by President Bola Ahmed Tinubu, a prominent member of the APC, uses kinder language to describe events surrounding terrorism than other newspapers, indicating that it

is more sympathetic to the government in its reporting of the issue. More stories were written on the progress the government is making in their fight against the terrorist group and also other initiatives being done to forestall further happenings as well as further equip the Nigerian army. In contrast to most of their published stories on terrorism during the era of the past administration under the former president, Goodluck Ebele Jonathan, who is a member of the opposition party, the Peoples' Democratic Party (PDP). In addition to being written in a more critical tone, many of the news reports minimised the security measures taken by the previous administration in the fight against terrorism. According to Apuke (2016), while discussing the issues that surround ownership, he, pointed out that "ownership is a critical factor in the regulation of the mass media. Media managers are often faced with the dilemma of balancing the media owner's interest and the public's interest without infringing on the laws of the land or the ethics of the profession. Whether media ownership is private or public, the interest of the owner plays a dominant role in determining what the media managers do or fail to do."

It was inferred from the newspapers that were sampled that deliberate efforts were made to minimise the impact of terrorism by avoiding drawing undue attention to the crisis. This result contradicted the opinions of several academics who maintain that there is a symbiotic relationship between terrorism and the media, which frequently allows terrorists to use the media to gain publicity for their gain. The sampled newspapers were socially responsible in their reportage by giving less prominence to the terrorism issues. The findings also revealed that many of the stories in the selected newspapers tend to have been reported in a way that favours the government, which shows that the government is taking enough measures to fight terrorism. As a result, Nigerian citizens gain confidence. Regardless of any form of affiliation, it could be observed that the selected sampled newspapers prioritised national security and stability in the manner in which they reported terrorism. To maintain neutrality, a higher percentage of the published stories highlighted the government's increasing efforts to combat this threat in the two years since it came to power. Many of the published stories were also written in a straightforward news or feature format without using any language that either emphasises or downplays terrorism.

Conclusion

The results of the study showed that Nigerian newspapers covered terrorism responsibly by downplaying the effects of terrorists' violent crimes on society as a whole and by giving these topics less attention. Despite the ownership influence in their reportage, all the sampled newspapers reported more stories

on a neutral level, regardless of the format. According to the paper, ownership interests should not be pledged as collateral for national security. In addition, media organisations regardless of their ownership, political, or religious affiliations should strictly adhere to professionalism. In conclusion, Nigerian journalists ought to exercise caution when covering stories that may jeopardise the stability and security of their nation.

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