



News Frame Patterns: An Evaluation of Newspaper Coverage of Boko Haram Attacks in Nigeria

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Abstract: This study investigates the newspaper coverage of Boko Haram attacks in Nigeria, with a view to identifying the patterns of frames in the stories published. A total of 120 editions of four selected newspapers were analyzed. Findings show that The Nation newspaper published more than other titles - Daily Trust, The Guardian and ThisDay - across all genres. Straight news was predominant. The ineffective response of the government, in terms of its uncompromising behavior and inability to contain the insurgency, was widely reported. Findings also show that the newspapers dwelt so much inflammatorily on the impact of attacks by the sect and de-emphasized messages that could help end the violence. Nigerian newspapers should do more in terms of investigating and interpreting issues in a crisis instead of straight news reporting that lacks control. If they agree with this recommendation, framing patterns that bring solution to the problem, rather than stoke it, become easier to create.

Key Words: Boko Haram, terrorism, framing, news frames, newspaper coverage

Introduction

Studies (Gadarian, 2010; James & Waldman, 2003; Okoro & Chukwuma, 2012; Ekwueme &

Obayi, 2012) have shown that media coverage affects how the public learns, understands or thinks about an issue. Gadarian's study has

shown that the reaction of people to terrorist attacks is influenced by the tone of coverage of those attacks. Gadarian (2010, p.8) concludes that the emotional content, not simply the factual information in media reports, has a sizeable and statistically significant influence on attitudes. Subjects exposed to media reports with emotional content were more likely to support the use of military force, support spending on foreign policy, and approve of specific counter terrorist and foreign policies.

Studies in media framing (Nacos, 2007; Powell, 2011; Bruken, 2006; Chong & Druckman 2007; Nelson, Clawson & Oxley, 1997) continue to support the opinion that the media draw the public attention to certain topics and decide what people think about. These studies argue that the way in which news is presented, and the attributes used in the presentation, is a deliberate choice made by journalists. Boystun, Gross & Resnik (2004, p.2) argue that the way media organize and media gatekeepers systematize and present the events and the issues they cover, and the way audiences interpret what they are provided with, are products of media framing. Okoro & Odoemelam (2013, p.86) add that the act of framing shape perception of key events. Framing is a key concept in the study of press performance and regular assessment of this performance is necessary in

order to determine its ramifications (Omojola, 2007, p. 70).

Research as conducted by Chong & Druckman (2007), Entman (1993), Hanggli (2012) Jacoby (2000), amongst others; establish that media framing has effect on the society. This is evident in media's presentation of an issue from one perspective at the exclusion of alternative perspectives. For example, the classic study by Nelson, Clawson & Oxley (1997) shows how people's policy attitudes toward a proposed Ku Klux Klan (KKK) rally differ depending on whether news coverage discusses the rally as an issue of free speech or as an issue of public safety.

In a world of 24 – hour news coverage and instant information, Massangri & Howard (201, p.179) note that the phenomenon of framing may play an increasingly important role in terrorism as media sources try to find a way to cut through the clutter and get their stories heard. The essence of framing as seen by Entman (1991, p.9) is to magnify or shrink the elements of the depicted reality in order to make them more or less salient. In 1991, Entman decided to test the concept of framing within the media. Through a content analysis of magazine coverage of the Korean Air Lines (KAL) and the Iran Air attacks of the 1980s, Entman as McHale (2011, p.2) recalls, concluded that framing does

exist in media coverage and that it significantly impacts the way that the public perceives a particular incident. While the facts surrounding the KAL and Iran Air disasters were similar, American media presented the events in vastly different ways: the media demonized the Soviet for the KAL incident, fostering sympathy for the American victims, while justifying Reagan's actions in the Iran Air incident as necessary and appropriate. For example, while the Newsweek cover headline after KAL was "Murder in the Air", the headline after Iran Air attacks read: "The Gulf War Tragedy: why it Happened." Public opinion polls conducted during each incident reflected this difference of perceptions, as the public was far more supportive of the Iran Air incident than the KAL event.

In Schaefer's study of the media coverage of the 1998 U.S. Embassy bombings in Kenya and Tanzania, and the 9/11 attacks in New York and Washington, DC, respectively, comparing the reports by the major national newspaper in the cities, the study established that physical proximity and the 'local angle' influenced media framing, especially in terms of the prominence and amount of

coverage, although less in nature of coverage.

Stressing the essence of framing, Entman (1993, p.86) argues that when media highlight an issue in the news, they raise the salience of that issue. Bullock (2001, p.20) notes that framing has the ability to affect how a story is told and what implication such a story holds. And since people rely on media for information and decision-making, they can be easily influenced by framing; as Auerbach and Block – Elkon (2005) observe:

When the media place stories in specific frames, they lend a different meaning to the news. The media increase or decrease the salience of issues, which allows the public to remember and make judgments on such issues. Framing assumes that subtle changes in the wording of the description of a situation might affect how audience members think about the situation. (p.13)

Though studies looked at in this study made good attempts at explaining the role the mass media played in reporting Boko Haram activities with emphasis on frequency and volume and how the audience perceived the functions of the mass media in this regard; no study has been able to clearly present the frames used by the newspapers and the attendant implications of the frames. This

research, therefore, fills the gap by offering the different ways the newspapers selected and laid emphasis on certain words and phrases about Boko Haram.

Statement of the Problem

Substantial literature exists on terrorism and attacks around the world but there seems to be dearth of literature on the Boko Haram activities in Nigeria; particularly with regards to how the media framed the sect and its activities. Available studies such as the one conducted by Okoro & Chukwuma (2012) focused more on audience's opinion about the way the media reported Boko Haram without regard to the frames employed by the media in the coverage. Others like that of Alao & Uwom (2012) compared how the newspapers reported the stories on Boko Haram, looking at North/South dichotomy of news presentation. Okoro & Odoemelam (2013) however, identified the dominant frame used by the newspapers.

Since investigation is visible enough on the pattern of frames employed by the newspapers in their coverage of Boko Haram attacks, it is of interest to this study to evaluate these patterns in the quality of frequency of reports they present on the attacks by the sect;

prominence given to the reports; and the types of frames used by the newspapers. Hence, the major question: How did the selected national newspapers cover Boko Haram activities during the period under study?

Research Questions

The foregoing poser is broken into the following research questions to guide the study:

1. What sizing techniques did the selected Nigerian newspapers employ in the reportage of Boko Haram attacks between April 2011 and March 2013?
2. What was the nature of the reports on Boko Haram attacks by the selected Nigerian newspapers during the period under study?
3. What were the patterns of news frames of Boko Haram activities in the selected Nigerian Newspapers?

Scope of the Study

This study is delimited to the coverage of Boko Haram terrorist attacks in

Northern Nigeria, including Abuja, the capital of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, between April 2011 and March 2013 by selected national newspapers in Nigeria. This period is considered ideal because it marked the height of tension as a result of endless bombings and gun attacks that became the hallmarks of

Boko Haram's campaign of death and destruction. The study is specifically concerned with the coverage of these attacks by Nigerian newspapers in terms of framing. The newspapers selected for this study include Daily Trust, ThisDay, The Guardian and The Nation

Literature Review

Understanding Framing

Framing is a central concept in political communication and a powerful political tool. The definition of framing has been slippery. The most widely employed definition among current researchers in political communication is provided by Robert Entman. According to Entman (1993, p.52) framing essentially involves selection and salience. To frame is to select some aspects of a perceived reality and make them salient in a communicating text, in such a way as to promote a particular problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation, and/or treatment recommendation for the item described.

According to Epkins (2011, p.19), Framing describes the process of content selection and exclusion, highlighting certain aspects over others to communicate a particular point of view. In many ways, a frame facilitates the nature of an

argument.

Specifically, communicating a certain bent, context, or angle of an issue that, in itself, lends an interpretive meaning of the communication. As Jameson & Waldman (2003, p.1) put it, "journalists deliver the world to citizens in a comprehension form". Some scholars as Bowen (2008, p.339) argue that framing "tells us how to interpret communication."

To Gamson & Modigliani (1987, p.143) a frame is a "central organizing idea or story line" that serves to contextualize issue or debate. Reese (2001, p.49) sees frames as organizing principles that are socially shared and persistent over time that work symbolically to meaningfully structure the social world.

To Gitlin (1980, p.389), news frames represent persistent patterns of selection, emphasis, and exclusion that furnish a coherent interpretation and evaluation of events. Norris, Kern & Just (2003, p.2) go on to say decisions and common practices in newsgathering - determining what and how stories are covered do contribute toward these frames. Out of the myriad ways of describing events in the world, journalists rely upon familiar news frames, and upon the credible sources, to convey dominant meanings, to make sense of the

facts, to focus the headlines, and to structure the story line. Norris, Kern & Just further note that the way journalists observe and report each event is shaped by how similar events have been covered in the past and by the reporter's most trusted sources of information. 'conventional frames' which become mainstream in the news media, provide contextual curves, giving meaning and order to complex problems, actions, and events, by slotting the new into familiar categories or story line 'pegs'.

Understanding mass communication through the concept of framing has become increasingly common, whether in the fields of social psychology, public opinion, or media studies. The idea of 'news frames' refers to interpretive structures that journalists use to set particular events within their broader context. News frames bundle key concepts, stock phrases, and iconic images to reinforce certain common ways of interpreting developments. The essence of framing is selection to prioritize some facts, images, or developments over others, thereby unconsciously promoting one particular interpretation of events.

Frames serve multiple functions for different actions. Political leaders can respond to events and communicate policy priorities simply and effectively by adopting

predominant cultural frames to streamline and simplify their message. Reporters can also 'tell it like it is' within 60 seconds, or within brief newspaper headlines, rapidly sorting key events from surrounding trivia, by drawing on reservoirs of familiar stories to cue reader. The public can use frame to sort out and make sense of complex and unfamiliar events, people, and leaders. Through frames, apparently scattered and diverse events are understood within regular patterns.

In general, Reese & Levis (2009) argue that journalists socially construct meaning for their audiences merely by the selection and omission of components making up a news story. The mass media have a strong impact by constructing social reality, that is, by framing images of reality in a consistent pattern, thereby creating adjacency between the concept of social constructionism and framing.

Journalistic Framing Practices

Journalistic framing practices describe what journalists do when they produce media texts that include certain frames and neglect others. Journalistic framing practices lie on a continuum between frame setting and frame sending. The terms are inspired by Semetko & Canel (1997, p.7) who distinguish between "agenda setters" and "agenda-senders" with regard to the practices of two Spanish TV stations. This

distinction according to Blumler & Gurevitch (1995, p.87) refers to the journalistic practice of actively setting the agenda of media coverage rather than sending the agenda provided by political actors. The authors note further that journalists do not only influence the media agenda - they do not just write about given topics. Often, they also define what is at issue.

Both journalistic agenda-setting and frame setting can be viewed as instances of strong media interventionism, understood as the different ways in which journalists – deliberately, or not – shape news content (Stromback & Esser 2009). The kind of journalistic intervention may vary, so does the degree of intervention. One may, therefore, distinguish two extreme types of journalistic framing practice: frame setting implies that journalists mostly frame their coverage in line with their personal interpretations of what is at issue. Frame sending denotes the practice of merely relaying the frames as presented by different public actors

The fact that journalists quote sources that provide statements with certain frames is not a sufficient condition for frame sending. Hagen (1993) believes that sources might be instrumentally used by the journalist as opportune witnesses who provide quotes representing his or her personal world view. By

contrast, the prominent presence of frames in media content that are not in line with journalists' personal interpretations is a strong indicator of frame sending. For the distinction between frame setting and frame sending it does not matter whether framing is provided directly in statements made by the author of an article or indirectly via quotes made by external actors. The key question is whether or not the frames provided within a news story predominantly conflict or are in line with the journalist's personal interpretations of what the issue is.

Newspaper Coverage of Boko Haram Acts

The group known as Boko Haram today as reported by Onuoha (2012) started operating in 1995 in Maiduguri, Borno state under the name Ahlulsunna Wal'jama'ah hijra or Shabaab, Muslim Youth Organisation with Mallam Abubakar Lawan as the leader. When Lawan left to continue his education, Mohammed Yusuf took over leadership of the group. The group actually flourished as a non-violent movement until when Yusuf assumed leadership of the sect in 2002.

The group conducted its operations more or less peacefully during the first seven years of its existence. But that changed in 2009 when the Nigeria government launched an investigation into the group's

activities following reports that its members were arming themselves. Prior to that, the government reportedly repeatedly ignored warnings about the increasingly militant character of the organization.

Acts common to Boko Haram, like other terrorist groups, are the threat or use of murder, injury or destruction to coerce the government or other target groups into conceding the terrorists' demands. It is because the terrorists seek to demonstrate the credibility of their threats by spectacular acts of destruction or atrocity that the media reporting of these acts is often held in some sense to have 'caused' the terrorism. But in reality, the media only report the happenings. The role of the media is to report what happened, probably help to identify the people involved, the cause and how to prevent future occurrence.

Supporting this fact, Wilkinson (1997) believes that:

“for as long as the mass media exist, terrorist will hunger for what former British prime Minister, Margaret Thatcher, called ‘the oxygen of publicity’. And for as long as terrorists commit acts of violence the mass media will continue to scramble to cover them in order to satisfy the desire of their audience for dramatic stories in which there is inevitably huge public curiosity

about both the victimizers and their victims (p. 52).

From the foregoing, it is clear that the media have the duty of letting the society know what happens around them. Cases of conflict or crisis prove to be ‘hot’ stories to report.

Recent history, specifically the past decade, has provided plenty of examples of the mutually beneficial relationship between terrorist organizations and the media. As some remarkable terrorist attacks in history indicate, whether it is in the United States, Europe, or the Middle East, it is by and large the case that the architects of terrorism exploit the media for the benefit of their operational efficiency, information gathering, recruitment, fund raising, and propaganda schemes (Nacos, 2006, as quoted by Bilgen, 2012). In the words of Nacos (2002), again cited in Bilgen, (2012), whether it is the relatively inconsequential arson by an amateurish environmental group or mass destruction by network of terrorists, the perpetrators' media-related goals are the same attention, recognition, and perhaps even a degree of respectability and legitimacy in their various publics – Nacos (1994, p.8) quickly, adds that “getting the attention of the mass media, the public, and decision makers is the *raison d'être* behind

modern terrorism's increasingly shocking violence.

In the words of Laqueur (1976, p.104), quoted by Farnen (1990, p.108), "the media are the terrorist's best friend... the terrorists' act by itself is nothing, publicity is all." The media, in return, receive the attention of the public that is vital for its existence and benefits from record sales and huge audiences. To put it briefly, just as terrorism has to be communicated to have effect, the media have to cover the incidents in such a way to benefit from the public's eagerness to obtain information about terrorist attacks. How the media cover these attacks or report conflicting issues is of great concern to this thesis. Are the media guided by ethical and social responsibilities rather than by economic, sectarian, racial, nationalistic and other sentimental considerations in their reportage?

The mass media are social institutions charged with the responsibility of informing, educating, socializing and mobilizing the general public. These functions, it is believed, will bring about positive change, which also include the benefits of conflict management.

To some extent, one can say that the media contribute to the continuation of crisis or peaceful resolution of that crisis. That is to say that communication through the media

can play both casual and remedial roles in conflict resolution. It is believed that the interest of the media should be that of bringing an end to the issues that create crises. That is why former British Prime Minister, Margaret Thatcher, as quoted by Picard (1991, p.50), stated that, "democracies must find ways to starve the terrorists and hijackers of the oxygen of publicity on which they depend."

This point made by Margaret Thatcher makes it clear that the mass media are considered to be very important in conflict management as conduits or carriers of various shades and colors of information. In times of conflicts or crises or even wars, Nwosu (2005, p.15) says adequate on inadequate management of information is considered to be critical factor in the emergence, escalation or reduction of tension points at various levels, tensions which depend on how they are managed, can determine the end or continuation of the conflicts. This overwhelming influence of the mass media is felt most in those conflicts or crises that get to the level of wars, ethnic, sectional or communal and religious conflicts or crises that result in blood-letting.

All these explain why Sankore (2001, p.13) cited in Nwosu (2004) notes that:

Nothing defines the character of mass media establishment more sharply than any crisis that pitches nation against nation or one section of society against another. In times of crisis, the responsibility of the mass media is magnified ten folds by society's demand for more news, information and analysis, and therefore, its increased capacity to influence debate and shape public opinion. Every word written or spoken, by the media is a potential matchet, bullet or bomb in the minds and hands of victims and perpetrators.

The above observation by Sankore projects the agenda setting role of the media in conflict reporting. Since the members of the public always look up to the media to get updates on conflicts or terrorist attacks, the media take the advantage to set the tone of discussion with the goal of influencing public opinion. The public therefore believe whatever interpretation the media offer concerning the conflicts. Thus, the central role of the agenda-setting system as seen by Folarin (1998) is that the media give the audience what to think about but do not necessarily think for the audience.

Theoretical Framework News Framing Theory

The framing idea, according to McQuail (2010: 350) has been attributed to Erving Goffman as the originator. According to Goffman

(1974) as cited in McQuail (2010, p.350), a frame is needed to organize otherwise fragmentary items of experience or information. The idea of a 'frame' in relation to news has been widely and loosely used in place of terms such as 'frame of reference', 'context', 'theme', or even 'news angle'. In a journalistic context, stories are given meaning by reference to some particular 'news value' that connects one event with other similar ones.

Gitlin (1980:7) defines frames as "persistent patterns of cognition, interpretation, and presentation, of selection, emphasis and exclusion by which symbol – handlers routinely organize discourse. Norris, Kern & Just (2003, p.4) support Gitlin by saying framing theory offers an opportunity to explore the intricacies of the news production process because the theory provides a window into the patterns mentioned by Gitlin which furnish a coherent interpretation and evaluation of events. Fairhurst & Star (1996, p.2) assert that "a frame refers to the way media and media gatekeepers organize and present the events and issues they cover, and the way audience interprets what they are provided." McQuail (2010, p. 380) adds that framing is a way of giving some overall interpretation to isolated items of fact.

According to Entman (1993, p.52) frames in the news can be examined and identified by “the presence or absence of certain keywords, stock phrases, stereotyped images, sources of information and sentences that provide thematically reinforcing clusters of facts or judgments.” Along these lines, Gamson and Modigliani (1989, p.10) identify ‘framing devices’ that

- a. Headlines
- b. Subheads
- c. Photos
- d. Photo captions
- e. Leads
- f. Source selection

Similarly, Semetko & Valkenburg (2000, p. 95-96) considered some measures that could be used to analyze framing by media people, especially in crisis reporting. These include:

- a) Response frame
- b) Powerless frame
- c) Political frame
- d) Human interest
- e) Conspiracy frame

In sum, scholars within the empirical approach to measuring frames agree that frames are specific textual and visual elements or ‘framing devices’. These elements are essentially different from the remaining news story which may be considered core news facts.

This theory is similar to the agenda – setting theory, in fact, McCombs, Shaw & Weaver (1997) suggested that, not only are agenda setting and

condense information and offer a ‘media package’ of an issue. They include: (a) Metaphors (b) Exemplars (c) Catch – phrases (d) depictions, and (e) visual images.

The most comprehensive empirical approach is offered by Tankard (2001, p.101) who suggests a list of 11 framing mechanisms or focal points for identifying and measuring new frames:

- g. Quotes selection
- h. Pull quotes
- i. Logos
- j. Statistics and charts, and
- k. Concluding statements

- f) Attribution of responsibility
- g) Ethnicity frame
- h) Religious frame
- i) Economic frame
- j) Labeling frame

framing effects related, framing is in fact, an extension of agenda setting. They used the term second – level agenda setting to describe the impact of the salience of characteristics of media coverage on audiences’ interpretation of these news stories. But while agenda setting describes which issues will enter the public domain and how they may later influence political judgment, Terkidsen & Schnell (1997, p.57) believe that the theory

of framing holds that issues, in and of themselves, can be arranged or presented in multiple fashions and as such influence citizens' ensuring issue considerations and level of policy support.

Relating this theory to this study, we can say that the way and manner the Nigerian Newspapers frame words in their reportage of the Boko Haram attacks impact seriously on how the issue is viewed by all, thus contributes to its resolution or not.

Methodology

This study adopted the content analysis method for the purpose of generating the primary data from the manifest and latent content on Boko Haram acts from selected newspapers in Nigeria. Both quantitative and qualitative methods were applied. The quantitative method was to help estimate the volume of the manifest content on Boko Haram attacks in the newspapers, while the qualitative method was to help determine the framing of the Boko Haram attacks by the various newspapers. The population of this study was 2,920 editions of Daily Trust, The Nation, The Guardian and ThisDay published between April 2011 and March 2013

The sample size for this study was determined by multi-stage sampling procedure. In the first stage, the researcher sampled newspaper titles. This was purposively done by selecting four newspapers from the population. In the second stage, monthly samples were taken. Six samples of each newspaper were drawn during the period under study, in fixed intervals. This was systematically done. In the third stage, edition dates were sampled. That is, thirty (30) issues of each newspaper were selected during the period. In the fourth stage, content categories were purposively sampled. They were made up of straight news stories, features, editorials, cartoons, photographs and columns.

Data Presentation

A total number of one hundred and seventy one (171) stories were coded and analysed in this study from the sample size of one hundred and twenty (120) issues obtained from the four selected national newspapers in Nigeria between April 2011 and March 2013. The analysis here presented is based on the newspaper reports on Boko Haram during the study period.

Table 1: Publication of Boko Haram stories among newspapers during the period under study.

Newspapers	No. of Stories	Percentage
Daily Trust	48	28.07
The Nation	56	32.75
The Guardian	33	19.30
ThisDay	34	19.88
Total	171	100

Table 2: Treatment Genre of Boko Haram Stories

Content Format	Newspapers				Total	%
	Daily Trust	The Nation	The Guardian	ThisDay		
News story	45	41	28	26	140	81.87
Editorial	00	02	03	01	006	3.51
Cartoon	00	05	00	00	005	2.92
Photograph	01	04	01	02	008	4.68
Feature	00	00	00	01	001	0.58
Column	02	04	01	04	011	6.43
Total	48	56	33	34	171	99.99

Table 3: Display of the subjects of stories on Boko Haram.

Theme/Subjects	Newspapers				Total	%
	Daily Trust	The Nation	The Guardian	ThisDay		
1. Impact of Attacks	13	17	7	15	52	30.41
2. Arrest of Terrorists	7	4	02	02	15	8.77
3. Attacks by Boko Haram	00	02	00	00	02	1.17
4. Conflicts generated	08	08	05	07	28	16.37
5. Government Response	12	05	06	02	25	14.62
6. Security agencies' Efforts	02	04	03	03	12	7.02
7. Religious leaders' Reactions	01	01	02	00	04	2.34
9. Emergency rule	00	01	01	00	02	1.17
10. Peace talk	04	10	05	02	21	21.28
11. Amnesty	01	04	02	03	10	5.85
Total	48	56	33	34	171	100

Table 4: Display of Prominence given to stories on Boko Haram among the selected newspapers.

Position	Newspapers				Total	%
	Daily Trust	The Nation	The Guardian	ThisDay		
Front Page lead	14	18	05	04	41	23.98
Front Page	04	03	04	05	16	9.36
Inside Page	28	32	24	24	108	63.16
Back Page	02	03	00	01	06	3.51
Total	48	56	33	34	171	100.01

Table 5: Space allocated to the different messages on Boko Haram among newspapers.

Measurement	Newspapers				Total	%
	Daily Trust	The Nation	The Guardian	This Day		
Short story (0–5cm)	08	10	06	09	33	19.30
Medium story (26-51cm)	32	31	19	14	96	56.14
Long story (52cm and above)	08	15	28	11	42	24.56
Total	48	56	33	34	171	100

Table 6: Tonal direction of newspaper editorials, columns and features among newspaper.

Direction	Newspapers				Total	%
	Daily Trust	The Nation	The Guardian	ThisDay		
Condemning the Act	00	01	01	01	03	16.67
Blaming Government	01	03	02	03	09	50.00
Neutral	01	02	01	02	06	33.33
Total	02	06	04	06	18	100

Table 7: Display of the type of news headline used by the selected newspapers

Headlines	Newspapers				Total	%
	Daily Trust	The Nation	The Guardian	This Day		
Banner or Streamer	01	03	00	01	05	3.57
Cross or barline	00	01	00	00	01	0.71
Flush right	00	01	00	00	01	0.71
Flush left	25	04	17	10	56	40.00
Centred headline	13	16	9	10	48	34.29
Rider	06	16	02	05	29	20.71
Total	45	41	28	26	140	100

Table 8: Display of Patterns of News Frames by the Selected Newspapers.

Patterns of Frames	Newspapers				Total	%
	Daily Trust	The Nation	The Guardian	This Day		
Response frame	12	05	06	02	25	17.86
Powerless frame	02	04	01	04	11	7.86
Political frame	03	07	05	05	20	14.29
Human interest	12	8	03	05	28	20.00
Conspiracy frame	01	02	01	01	05	3.57
Attribution of responsibility	02	04	02	03	11	7.86
Ethnicity frame	02	02	04	01	09	6.43
Religious frame	01	01	00	01	03	2.14
Economic frame	02	04	01	02	09	6.43
Labeling frame	08	04	05	02	19	13.57
Total	45	41	28	26	140	100

Table 9: Language of News Stories

Language of News Stories	Newspapers				Total	%
	Daily Trust	The Nation	The Guardian	This Day		
Therapeutic Language	05	08	07	13	33	23.57
Inflammatory Language	19	07	10	13	49	35.00
Neutral	17	13	09	19	58	41.43
Total	41	28	26	45	140	100

Table 10: Display of Rhetorical Techniques

Rhetorical Techniques	Newspapers				Total	%
	Daily Trust	The Nation	The Guardian	This Day		
Metaphoric terms	18	18	12	08	56	32.75
High sounding terms	07	11	06	02	26	15.20
Declaratory terms	23	27	15	24	89	52.05
Total	48	56	33	34	171	100

Table 11: Display of Description of the Group

Description of the Group	Newspapers				Total	%
	Daily Trust	The Nation	The Guardian	This Day		
Insurgent	00	00	10	08	18	10.53
Militant group	00	00	00	00	00	0.00
Terrorist group	00	00	00	00	00	0.00
Islamist extremist/ fundamentalist	15	22	10	10	57	33.33
Boko Haram	33	34	13	16	96	56.14
Anti-government	00	00	00	00	00	0.00
Total	48	56	33	34	171	100

Table12: Display of Acts by Boko Haram

Description of Acts	Newspapers					
	Daily Trust	The Nation	The Guardian	This Day	Total	%
Acts of wickedness	01	04	03	00	08	10.39
Acts of violence	00	03	01	03	07	9.09
Barbaric acts	03	07	04	02	16	20.78
Inhuman acts	03	01	03	04	11	14.29
Un-Islamic acts	01	01	04	02	08	10.39
Condemnable acts	11	07	02	07	27	35.06
Total	20	23	17	17	77	100

Table 13: Display of the State of Crisis

Presentation of the State of Crisis	Newspapers					
	Daily Trust	The Nation	The Guardian	This Day	Total	%
Boko Haram winning	09	13	08	07	37	21.64
Government in control	09	05	05	05	24	14.04
Helpless situation	20	22	13	14	69	40.35
Inadequacy of the security agencies	07	11	06	05	29	16.96
End of the crisis in sight	03	05	01	03	12	7.02
Total	48	56	33	34	171	100.01

Discussion of Findings

This study was conducted to determine the pattern of news frames used by selected newspapers in the coverage of Boko Haram attacks in Nigeria. With a sample size of 171 reports on Boko Haram from 120 editions of four newspapers, spread evenly over a period of two years, the study

sought to find out whether the selected newspapers gave adequate coverage to the Boko Haram attacks; determine the nature of reports on Boko Haram attacks in the selected newspapers; and identify the pattern of frames used by these newspapers.

The study found that the selected newspapers did very well in their

surveillance function, since they gave a very good coverage to the attacks by the Boko Haram activities. Findings showed that nearly all the news stories published were attributed to official sources, which gave such reports credence and showed their push for professionalism.

The study found that the percentage of editorials and opinions on Boko Haram compared to the straight news stories is negligible. This did not allow the newspaper organizations to make known their positions on the issue adequately and allow individuals to also contribute what they think about the issue. Much effort was not put into investigative reporting to know the exact reasons for the attacks by the sect and the brains behind them.

A major finding of this study is that for the period of study, terrorism occupied a very big space in newspapers' reporting as placement shows that most of the stories on Boko Haram on front pages took the lead position. Reason for always having issues of terrorism on the front page could be likened to the saying that, as long as there are still lice in the hair, the finger nails can never be free of blood. Thus, the newspapers were left with no option than to revisit the issue of Boko Haram so often.

Despite the fact that the newspapers were committed to reporting

terrorism over and above other topics, the prominence given to it on a general note on the mind of the readers seemed to be down played since the stories that appeared on the front and back pages of the newspapers put together, formed just a little above half of the stories buried in the inside pages of the newspapers.

The spread of the subjects of stories on Boko Haram by the newspapers is reflective of their efforts in covering all angles of that agenda. This, however, showed that the impact of attacks staged by Boko Haram operatives was the most reported (30.41%). This is not surprising because the unusual usually makes more news. Considering the fact that the period of study was seen as the peak of the attacks by Boko Haram, most of the reports were about attacks with very high casualties that could move everyone to tears.

Reports on Government responses, followed by the efforts made by the security agencies in discovering the sect's hideout and bomb factories were heartwarming and capable of increasing readers' belief that the crisis would end soon.

This point was also reflected on Table 8, where the response frame came immediately after the frame on Human interest in terms of volume. Most of the responses were from government officials. This

showed that the media, particularly newspapers reflect the interest of the government of the day. Their views and efforts at halting the activities of Boko Haram operatives were what the newspapers wanted the readers to know and not the frantic efforts made by the reporters to unravel the happenings and best ways to curtail them.

The major findings, especially from the few editorials and columns showed that the newspapers were not committed to digging facts on their own but relied on the statements made by others which did not carry weight enough to move the government to take action or even give the terrorists room to reconsider their acts, and the citizens, of course the hope for tomorrow.

The idea of news frames represents persistent patterns of selection, emphasis and exclusion that furnish a coherent interpretation and evaluation of events. As manifest in this study, emphasis on human interest angle of stories occupied the biggest space of all the stories on Boko Haram during the period of study. The language of news stories too was both therapeutic and inflammatory.

The fact that the mass media had not done much in terms of helping to halt the activities of the sect, Mohammed Haruna, one of the columnists in *The Nation*

newspapers lamented the state of the media in reporting Boko Haram terrorism in his article on, “The media, Civil Liberties, Boko Haram and Nigerian media”. He said one would search the Nigerian media almost in vain to read about any serious concern, never mind a sustained one, being raised about these flagrant trampling of the civil liberties of Nigerians. Instead the vast majority of the media have endorsed, and in some cases, even canvassed this high handed approach (by the government) to ending the sect’s terror.

According to Haruna, in covering the Boko Haram insurrection and even the wider ostensibly religious conflicts that have predated Boko Haram, the Nigerian media have been more propagandist than factual and objective, they have behaved more as weapons of mass deception for ideological and commercial reasons, than as weapons of mass education of the people about the complexity that Nigeria is. This remark is in consonance with the assertion of Morah & Omojola (2011, p. 162) and other writers that evidence exists that the media fuel terrorism.

He concludes that the sooner the Nigerian media begin to report the seemingly sectarian and ethnic conflicts in the country with more accuracy, balance and fairness than they have done so far, the better the

chances of a lasting solution to the threats posed by those conflicts. This position is a true reflection of the results of the investigation.

Conclusion

Nigerian newspapers showed commitment to the coverage of Boko Haram activities, but the coverage did not seem to contribute much to the fight against the unending attacks by the sect. Their show of commitment was manifest in the newspapers' reporting trend during the period of study, as the newspapers gave overwhelming attention to Boko Haram on their front pages, with most of them taking the lead position. But most of the newspapers' stories did not go beyond information provision. Much was not done in terms of investigation, interpretation and mobilization.

By relying much on straight news accounts in reporting Boko Haram, newspapers underutilized editorials and features and columns, failing to see the value these messages of newspapers provide in offering background to Boko Haram attacks and the solution to the issue.

The newspapers relied more on government official reports on Boko Haram, which gives the public the impression that it was what the government wanted the public to hear that the newspapers carried in their reports. The implication of this is that there could be official

manipulation to attract sympathy from the people. Though the faceless nature of the Boko Haram sect was a very big challenge to the way the newspapers carried out their reporting, no serious effort was seen in their reports to unveil the group in terms of investigative reporting.

Also manifest in newspaper coverage during the period of study was the fact that the types of news frames used mainly by the newspapers were human interest, response frame and political frame.

The importance of what could be done to promote national security was downplayed by the newspapers, since almost all of them placed little emphasis on remedial messages in their reports. Entman (1991, p.9) notes that aside from the words and images used to depict the event, how much material on the event that is available and how prominently they are displayed speaks loud about framing. He further says the frame of a news portrait can be enlarged so that media reports may penetrate the consciousness of a mass public that is minimally aware of most specific issues and events.

Recommendations

On the basis of the findings and conclusion reached, the study recommends that:

- Newspapers should do more in terms of critically interpreting and investigating issues in a

crisis instead of just relying on straight news reporting. This is what Omojola (2012, p.127) calls “three-dimensional reporting,” stating that journalists should go beyond the “what” of a news story and get to know “what” is driving “what.” Background analysis and possible solutions could come from this angle.

- There should be regular training in the media organizations on how best to cover and report terrorism, since terrorism is a new phenomenon in Nigeria, so that the media do not expose the country’s warfare strategy for the benefit of terrorists.
- Newspaper reports on terrorism should be geared towards minimizing the psychological effects the attacks may have on the audience, thereby raising hope that all is not lost.
- There is need for Nigerian newspapers to move with the

trend of reporting which has gone beyond episodic reporting to more analytic and thematic coverage. They need to connect fragments of news into patterns of continuity and follow-up.

- Since framing has a lot to do with how people perceive risk and danger, the language of messages on the newspapers must be carefully selected. Instead of inflammatory language, more of therapeutic language should be used. This implies that emphasis of reports should not only be on lack of preparedness of government and security agencies and the fact that terrorists are threatening more attacks but also on the areas the security agencies have succeeded in fighting the insurgents and how much they can do to safeguard the lives and property of everyone.

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