NEWSPAPER COVERAGE OF TERRORISM CASES IN NIGERIA: A CONTENT ANALYSIS OF FOUR NATIONAL DAILIES IN NIGERIA

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ABSTRACT

This study sought to examine newspaper coverage of terrorism in Nigeria with the aim of finding out if Nigerian newspapers set agenda on the menace of terrorism considering how important security is to the development of any country. The study adopted content analysis as its research method. The selected newspapers were four national dailies namely: Punch, The Sun, Daily Trust and Nigerian Tribune which were purposively selected and studied for a period of three months (October 2023 to February, 2024). Using simple random sampling techniques, the study arrived at 368 editions of the newspaper to be studied. The Pearson correlational statistical technique was used to calculate the inter-coder reliability. The study found that 45.8% of the news stories were reported on the front pages of the selected newspapers indicating high prominence given to the issue of terrorism in the country. Results indicated that 57.0% of the news stories reported on the pages of the selected newspapers were negatively reported, meaning that Nigerian newspapers condemned the act of terrorism as perpetuated by the terrorists in the country. Further analysis also indicated that 28.7% of the news stories published were reported within the space of 6-10 inches of the selected newspapers, which is a moderate reportage of terrorism in "volume-estimate". The study concluded that newspaper coverage of terrorism in the country has been impressive. It was however, recommended that the media should improve on its investigative journalistic role to see if it would be possible to monitor the activities of these terrorists, in order to help government curb their actions.

Keywords: Terrorism, Security, Nigerian Newspapers, Coverage, Responsible Journalism.

1.0 Introduction

Over the years, terrorism has continued to assume more complex and worrisome dimension, not only in Nigeria but across the globe. This trend has posed serious threat to the security of lives and properties. Acholonu (2018) argues that the prevalence of terrorism across the globe

is an indicator of globe danger. The incidences of terrorism indicate that the world today is growing more insecure for humans.

Ekhareafo and Olley (2018) describe terrorism as activities that involve the use of violent acts with the intention to create fear (terror) in the society. It is perpetrated to achieve a religious, political or ideological goal or objective. The use of violence to create fear is usually targeted at non-combat or military personnel, who are civilians and mostly affected by terrorism. Throughout human history, there have been countless threats to the security of human lives. In recent time, these threats have continued to lead to destruction of human life and properties, while the society incures devastating loss. Seman (2016) opines that terrorism has continued to claim the lives of millions and destroys property worth billions.

In spite of widespread of terrorism incidences across the globe, the mass media which include newspapers have been described as effective in carrying out campaigns and public awareness to assist members of the society to confront problems which affect their societal life and existence. Anam (2019) avers that newspapers as an arm of the mass media play indispensable roles in the society in this direction as it serves as agent of tremendous change with strong influence on human activities. The influence of newspapers cut across economics, politics, health and education.

Udoudo & Diriyai (2017) argue that through newspaper reports on acts of terrorism, members of the society have been kept abreast of the activities of the terrorists. In the *Guardian* newspaper report of March 8, 2022, the news story on pg.5, titled: Why insurgency may not end soon, by Fayose, is a good example to illustrate how newspaper reports on acts of terrorism, provide information on terrorism to the audience.

It is expedient to establish the occurrences of terrorism in Nigeria. Some news stories on terrorism act in Nigeria as recorded by the print media included the report of Odeniyi (2024) with the headline" No gree for terrorists in 2024 DHQ urges Nigerians". Adam (2024) reported how Nigerian Army killed ten terrorists in Zamfara State and Olanrewaju (2004) reported how Nigerians who turned to civilian guards fought Boko- Haram terrorists in Yobe just to mention a few occurrences of terrorist acts and activities around terrorism in Nigeria. Acholonu (2018) observes that while terrorism is becoming a common occurrence across the globe, mass media channels, such as the newspapers, are responsible for bringing the activities and objectives of terrorists to the attention of members of the society. Newspapers serve the role of watchdogs in the society and are considered major stakeholders in bringing about positive change and value re-orientation among the members of the society. Newspaper reports also transmit information and ideas which counter the objectives of terrorists in the society as the roles of the newspaper in the society include formation of conscience, advocacy and mobilisation.

Information disseminated through newspaper reports have the capacity to foster social change and can help further the agenda of those who share similar goals with it. Tejumaiye (2011) argues that newspapers are relevant to the society in the sense that they inform the public by supplying facts, opinions, statistics, photos and illustrations on issues, events or phenomenon that affect the society.

1.1 Statement of the Problem

A one-time president of America (Thomas Jefferson) briefly shows the power of the newspapers on people's perception about issues when he submitted that "Were it left for me to decide whether we should have a government without newspaper or newspapers without a government, I should not hesitate for a moment to prefer the latter." The above classical statement by Jefferson situates the print media and, inferentially, the mass media generally, in the society as a leading vehicle to give light in perceiving issues. Being the oldest in the mass media category, newspapers exert some influence in the society that people look on to them not only for the news of the day, but informed opinions on topical issues (Anaeto & Anaeto 2009).

Researchers and experienced journalists have spent time suggesting how the media might shift from war to peace in covering conflicts. Key contributors in this regard include Galtung (1998), McGoldrick and Lynch (2000), Howard (2003), Kempt (2003) and El-Nawawy and Powers (2008).

In the same vein Ibrahim (2012) noted that Nigeria as a country has suffered a lot from numerous ethno-religious crises since independence. Most times, the coverage of such crisis by the Nigerian press has been described as partisan and further promotes the polarisation of the country along regional lines as well as unethical reporting. A study conducted suggests further studies on newspaper reportage of terrorism and its influence on people perception about the whole issue of terrorism in Nigeria, such studies should focus on greater numbers of newspapers in the country with a nationalistic outlook (Senam, 2016). Therefore, the study sought to know the level of agenda set by Nigerian newspapers in their reportage of terrorism cases in order to know if the coverage aggravated tension in the polity through the direction, prominence, and depth of coverage.

1.2 Objectives of the Study

The specific objective of the study is to:

- 1) Investigate the direction of newspaper coverage of terrorism in Nigeria
- 2) Examine the level of prominence given to the news stories on terrorism in the country
- 3) Ascertain the depth of newspaper coverage of the issues of terrorism in Nigeria

1.3 Review of Relevant Literature/Empirical Studies

Terrorism

Terrorism has been defined by different scholars from different perspectives (Beckett, 2016; Greene, 2017;Iqbal, 2015; Falkheimer & Olsson 2014). However, UNESCO(2022) opines that "what defines terrorism is the act, the target (civilians or non-combatants), the seriousness of the violence in terms of what the Universal Declaration of Human Rights terms "the right to life, liberty and security of person", and the objective sought, not the nature of the perpetrator. At a definitional level, it differs theoretically from violence perpetrated within warfare under the Geneva Conventions or national liberation resistance. In practice, it is the case that, although the focus is usually on terrorist incidents outside of war or national resistance struggle, terrorism can indeed also occur within these contexts in a departure from their rationales and justifications."

Terrorism has taken different forms over the years and (UNESCO, 2022) affirms three types of terrorism for easy understanding of the complex nature of the menace.

Gang terrorism: This term, which refers to the intertwining of crime and terrorism, nowadays applies mainly to violent extremists who have been involved in crime and to the phenomenon of hybridisation between criminal activities (trafficking in arms, drugs, human beings, money laundering) and terrorist acts driven by ideological or other beliefs.

Narco-terrorism: This term may refer to the direct cooperation between criminal groups involved in drug trafficking and armed groups (guerrillas), which entail acts of a terrorist nature committed in pursuit of their objectives.

Cyber-terrorism: There are many definitions, some of which are vague and open to loose use. The Council of Europe applies this term to all online practices of terrorist groups, including propaganda or recruitment. Others might prefer to see these acts as supporting terrorism, rather than constituting terrorism as such. In either case, it is necessary to assess in advance which entity is considered a terrorist group by the UN, and to decide whether an act of violence constitutes terrorism even though committed by actors who have not (yet) been formally labeled as such.

1.4 Overview of Nigerian Media Coverage of Terrorism Related Issues

The Nigerian media landscape plays a pivotal role in shaping public perception and understanding of terrorism-related issues within the country (Abubakar 2020). With the emergence of insurgent groups like Boko Haram and the Islamic State West Africa Province (ISWAP), the media's coverage becomes instrumental in informing citizens, policymakers, and the international community about the evolving security situation in Nigeria.

Nigerian media outlets utilise diverse approaches when covering terrorism-related issues (Ekhareafo & Olley 2012). Firstly, news reports often highlight the activities of terrorist groups, including attacks, casualties, and statements from group leaders. According to Beckett (2016), these reports aim to inform the public about the security threats posed by these organizations. Secondly, media platforms frequently host debates, interviews, and panel discussions featuring experts, government officials, and affected communities to analyze the root causes of terrorism and explore potential solutions. Additionally, opinion pieces and editorials offer critical perspectives on counterterrorism strategies, government responses, and the socio-political context surrounding terrorism in Nigeria.

Despite efforts to provide comprehensive coverage, Nigerian media face several challenges in reporting on terrorism related issues. Firstly, there are concerns about accuracy and objectivity, with some outlets accused of sensationalism or bias in their reporting (Abubakar 2020).Additionally, journalists often encounter threats, intimidation, and violence from terrorist groups, hindering their ability to gather information and report objectively. Moreover, government censorship and restrictions on press freedom can limit the media's ability to report independently on sensitive security matters. Finally, the proliferation of fake news and misinformation exacerbates the challenges of discerning fact from fiction in terrorism-related reporting (Iqbal, 2015).

The media's coverage of terrorism-related issues significantly influences public discourse and perceptions in Nigeria. Farwell (2014) submits that extensive media coverage can raise awareness about the severity of the security situation and mobilise public support for counterterrorism efforts. It can also foster dialogue and debate on the underlying causes of terrorism, leading to greater understanding and potential solutions. However, sensationalised or biased reporting may perpetuate fear, stigmatise certain communities, and undermine trust in government institutions. Moreover, the spread of misinformation through social media platforms can exacerbate tensions and contribute to the proliferation of extremist ideologies(Greene,2017).

1.5 Theoretical Framework

Agenda Setting Theory

The agenda setting theory is a theory of mass communication that provides explanation on how the media through its programmes and contents consciously and unconsciously list, plan or outline things, events or issues to be considered. The media according to the postulations of this theory set agenda for the public to follow through their coverage of issues, events or things in the society. The mass media achieve this by focusing attention or highlighting salient issues in the society through their coverage thereby making people to think along that line. The mass media according to the postulations of the theory of agenda setting play their drums and in the process the members of the society begin to dance to the tune of the music played by the media. The mass media in acting as agenda setters to the members of the society, the mass media may not tell the members of the society what to think about but what to think about".

Considering this, Mc Quail (2004), posits that the term "agenda setting" was a coinage of McCombs and Shaw in 1972, in describing a phenomenon which had been noticed and studied in the context to the role the mass media played during electioneering. The main thrust of the theory holds that the news media through its coverage of issues, events and things in the society indicate to the public who are members of the society what the main issues of the day are and as such it is reflected in what the public perceives as the main issues. The assumptions of the theory revolve around how the media play an active role in giving importance to issues which they highlight as important to the society. Nwabueze (2006), added that the media frequent coverage and highlighting or emphasising prominence to issues in the media, members of the society attached importance to those issues the media has given prominence to more than others.

Newspapers reports, or coverage on terrorism outlines and highlight the importance it attached to the issues of terrorism. Governments and Nigerians began to pay serious attentions and attach importance to terrorism as a result of the consistent and sustained coverage of activities of terrorist groups by mass media channels such as the newspapers. Newspapers coverage on issues and events surrounding terrorism indicate to Nigerians what the main issues relating to terrorism areas reflected in pages of the newspaper.

1.6 Methodology

This study adopted content analysis as its research design. The population of this study comprises of all the registered newspaper in Nigeria within the stipulated period under

investigation. The randomly selected newspapers were based on circulation strength, national coverage and geography. They included: *Punch, The Sun, Daily Trust and Nigerian Tribune*. These newspapers were studied for a period of six months (October 2023 to February, 2024). A number of 92 editions per newspaper were picked for the study including weekend publications. Therefore, a total number of 368 editions of published newspapers were selected. Simple random sampling was used to select the months of publication between October 2023 and February 2024. October, November and January were selected. Simple table and percentages were used to analyse the results.

1.7 Data Analysis

Research Question 1: What is the direction of newspaper coverage of terrorism in Nigeria? Table 1: (Master Coder)

Unit of Analysis	News Stories					
Newspapers	Nigerian Tribune	Daily Trust	Punch	The Sun	Total	Frequency
Positive (01)	103	88	101	111	403	28.1%
Negative (02)	212	169	234	202	817	57.0%
Neutral (03)	43	58	64	48	213	14.9%
Total	357	315	397	351	1433	100%

Source: field survey 2024

From the table above which analysed the direction of media coverage of terrorism in Nigeria, it was obvious that 403 news stories amounting to 28.1% of the stories analysed were positively reported, while 817 (57.0%) news stories were negatively reported. However, 213 (14.9%) news stories were neutral as to the direction of coverage. This means that at a reliability coefficient of 1.0, 57.0% of the stories reported on the pages of the selected newspaper were negatively reported.

Research Question 2: What is the level of prominence given to the news stories on terrorism in the country?

Unit of Analysis	News Stories					
Newspapers	Nigerian Tribune	Daily Trust	Punch	The Sun	Total	Frequency
Front Page (04)	81	56	105	98	340	45.8%
Back Page (05)	28	33	29	44	134	18.1%
Inside Pages (06)	52	44	48	39	183	24.7%
Centre spread (07)	21	26	14	20	85	11.5%
Total	182	159	196	201	742	100%

 Table 2: Coder 1 (Master Coder)

Source: field survey 2024

The table above presents the level of prominence given to news stories on terrorism in Nigerian newspapers. In general, the prominence given to news stories, in the selected editions, amount to 742 for the period under review. The table revealed that 340 stories amounting to 45.8% were placed on the front page of the four newspapers, 134 (18.1%) news

stories were placed on the back pages of the newspapers, 183 (24.7%) news stories were placed on the inside pages of the newspapers, while 85 (11.5%) news stories were placed on the centre spread.

From the aforementioned analysis, it means that at a reliability coefficient of 0.99, 45.8% of the news stories were reported on the front pages of the selected newspapers.

Research Question 3: What is the depth of newspaper coverage of the issues of terrorism in Nigeria?

Unit of Analysis	News Stories					
Newspapers	Nigerian Tribune	Daily Trust	Punch	The Sun	Total	Frequency
1-5 inches (08)	52	31	50	23	156	15.6%
6-10 inches (09)	62	59	102	119	287	28.7%
11-15 inches (010)	35	31	111	98	275	27.5%
16 inches and above (011)	26	40	70	91	282	28.2%
Total	175	161	333	331	1000	100%

Table 3: Coder 1 (Master Coder)

Source: field survey 2024

From the table above, it was observed that the four newspapers made used of 1000 inches in reporting issues on terrorism in Nigeria. From these inches, 156 (15.6%) news stories on terrorism were published in 1-5 inches, 287 (28.7%) news stories were published in 6-10 inches, while 275 (27.5%) news stories were published in 11-15 inches of the newspaper. However, 282 (28.2%) news stories were published in 16 inches and above spaces of the newspapers selected.

This means that 28.7% of the news stories published were reported within the space of 6-10 inches of the selected newspapers. This result was interpreted on the reliability coefficient of 0.99, which invariably is a high reliability.

1.8 Discussion of Findings

The result of the analysis indicates that 57.0% of the news stories reported on the pages of the selected newspapers were negatively reported; meaning that the Nigerian newspapers that were studied condemned the act of terrorism as perpetuated by the terrorists in the country. This finding is in tandem with the assertion of Ekwueme & Akpan (2018), that "like reporting the Nazi's Holocaust, there is nothing to be neutral about in reporting the Boko Haram"s mind boggling bloodletting. Nobody should be neutral when non- combatants are ruthlessly butchered by Boko Haram bombs and bullets. In fact, the reporters should consider it a patriotic duty to report the killings subjectively even if truthfully because of what the terrible consequences of the continued activities of the sect portend for the country."

It was also revealed that 45.8% of the news stories were reported on the front pages of the selected newspapers; indicating high prominence given to the issue of terrorism in the country. This finding corroborated the submission of Temofeh (2017) which avers that the

newspapers also play the role of agenda setting in their coverage of acts of terrorism. This clearly explains that through newspapers coverage on terrorism members of the society can be directed on how to handle the issues relating to terrorism and by publishing most news stories on the front pages, Nigerian newspapers have display high sense of social responsibility.

Further analysis also indicated that 28.7% of the news stories published were reported within the space of 6-10 inches of the selected newspapers, which is a moderate reportage of terrorism in "volume-estimate".

1.9 Conclusion

In conclusion, Nigerian newspapers play a crucial role in shaping public understanding and discourse on terrorism-related issues. While they strive to provide comprehensive coverage, journalists face numerous challenges, including threats from terrorist groups, censorship, and the spread of misinformation. Despite these obstacles, Nigerian newspapers have performed its watchdog role of providing information on the threats to the environment by informing, educating, and engaging the public in addressing the complex security challenges facing the country.

1.10 Recommendations

 The media should improve on its investigative, journalistic role to see if it would be possible to monitor the activities of these terrorists, in order to help government curb their actions.
 The media should have a well planned style for reporting news stories on terrorism in order not to glorify the situation. This well thought out plan would help the reporter fashion out better ways to tackle terrorism stories. This style might be an in-house style for the medium.
 It would be good for government to adopt a pre-emptive approach to the issue of terrorism. That is the major way government can be on top of the situation in the country. A situation where the governments rely on responding quickly to terrorists attack is not enough. Government should strengthen its agencies and armed forces, through further training and financial benefits, to keep them a step ahead of every terrorists attack in the country.

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