MASS MEDIA AS WEAPONS IN CONTENDING TERRORISM IN NIGERIA

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ABSTRACT

Terrorism has been of global concern in recent times. The problem is not only a great challenge and a threat to the security and stability of a nation; it hampers overall growth and development. In spite of government’s counter-terrorism interventions and responses, as well as interventions from other nations and bodies, the issue of terrorism in Nigeria appears to be rising, which calls for more holistic approaches in tackling the menace. This study is an attempt to contribute to the ongoing interventions to combat the current challenge of terrorism, particularly the Boko Haram insurgency in Nigeria. The paper, therefore, attempts to expose and explore various ways the media can be used to instigate a radical transformation towards curtailing terrorism and achieving a terrorism-free state. The study adopts the action research method as a research methodology. It is also predicated on the Agenda-setting theory as well as the cultivation theory. Findings from this study reveal that the aim of terrorists is to create insecurity, destabilise the country to make it ungovernable. This study thus in examining the power of the mass media in the curtailing of terrorism concludes that the mass media are lethal weapons for contending terrorism.

KEYWORDS: Mass Media, Weapons, Nigeria, Insurgency, Terrorism

INTRODUCTION

The prevalence of terrorist attacks across the world in recent times has become a cause for serious concern. Their activities came into limelight with the bombing of the World Trade Centre in New York City, United States of America (USA) on Tuesday September 11, 2001 (Umuerri and Galadima 1). Since then, they have become prominent in other parts of the world. Sub-Saharan Africa has suffered greatly under the increase of Islamist militant attacks. The number of incidents rose from 317 in 2013 to 1,549 for the period April 2017 to April 2018, according to Control Risks’ report (Changing patterns in the terrorist threat to business). In West Africa, where 36% of the incidents were reported, Nigeria suffered most (220 incidents), followed by Mali (194) and Cameroon (96), (Parker, “Boko Haram Continues To Drive Terrorism Threat In... ”).

The effects are debilitating and profound. Brahms (10) on the US September 11 attacks says “As Americans, we have not been the same since September 11. Our sense of security, feelings of invulnerability and confidence were shaken to the core by the terrorist attacks” (Brahms 10). Even, the killing of Osama Bin Laden, the Leader of the terrorist group who claimed responsibility for the US September 11 attack in May 2011 brought some kind of temporary relief, but a few days later, the group announced the appointment of a new leader to take over the
operations of the terrorist organisation (Umuerr and Galadima 2). In recent years, there have been more attacks from the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) and other terrorist organisations across the world. Governments, organisations, individuals, and various bodies are working tirelessly to curtail this situation, but the problem lingers on. With the increase of the problem in Nigeria; the quest for effective counter-terrorism approaches continues; this calls for new approaches to curtail the phenomenon; which brings into focus the Mass Media. The media are potent tools for creating awareness; they are capable of setting high on their agenda particular issues, thus bringing about transformation. It is against this backdrop that this paper seeks to examine and proffer ways that the media can be used to tackle terrorism in Nigeria.

LITERATURE REVIEW/THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Theoretical Framework

This study is anchored on the Agenda Setting Theory and the Cultivation Theory. The Agenda-Setting Theory launched by McCombs and Shaw in 1968 has to do with highlighting issues of salience in the society by the media; the creation of public awareness and concern of salient issues by the mass media. The two basic assumptions of the theory, according to the University of Twente are:

- The media filters and shapes reality instead of simply reflecting it. For example, news stories are not presented chronologically or according to the number of people affected by them, but rather in an order that a producer or editor determines to be the most “sensational,” or most appealing to audiences.

- The more attention the media gives to certain issues, the more likely the public will be to label those issues as vital ones. In other words, agenda setting doesn’t necessarily tell people how they should think or feel about certain issues, but rather what issues they should think about (“Mass Media: Agenda Setting Theory”).

Thus, the Agenda Setting Theory stems from the assumption that the media predetermine what issues are regarded as important and worthy of public attention at any given time in a given society. The theory also argues that though the media may not change a person’s point of view on a particular issue, it may change a person’s perception of what is important (Agbo and Ukozor, cited by Acholonu 73).

The Cultivation Theory based on Gerbner’s ‘cultivation hypotheses’ also explains how the media can be used in contending terrorism. The theory holds that the more people are exposed to the mass media, the more they will come to believe that the real world is like the one they observe. This theory of media effects views the media as moulders of society and argues that the message of the media is deviant from reality on several key points, yet persistent exposure to it leads to its adoption as a consensual view of society (McQuail, “Mass Communication Theory: An
Introduction”). Despite the fact that some researchers have questioned the validity of this theory, citing weakness of the hypothetical relationship, several studies by Gerbner and his colleagues have consistently found empirical support for the cultivation hypothesis (Gerbner et al, “The Mainstreaming of America: Violence Profile”); so has research by Tan and his associates (1986, 1988). Following his study of strategies for elaborating the cultivation hypothesis, Potter concludes that “this study provides evidence that cultivation effects do exist” (930-939). Writing about the validity theory, McQuail defines the main evidence for the cultivation theory comes from systematic content analysis of television, carried out over several years (“Mass Communication Theory: An Introduction”). The second main source of evidence in support of the theory comes from surveys of opinion and attitude which seem to support the view that higher exposure to television goes with the sort of worldview found in the message of television.

In their study of media use and image of nations, Nwueli et al. explain that “perception of social reality will correspond closely to the mass media ‘realities’ because the images of the world portrayed in the media will be internalised and accepted as accurate representations of reality by media audiences” (37). Thus the mass media can be used as tools for deconstruction and reconstruction of mindsets as well as reorientation in the fight against terrorism.

OVERVIEW OF TERRORISM

The United Nations General Assembly as cited by Ekhareafo and Olley define terrorism as “criminal acts intended or calculated to provoke a state of terror in the general public, a group of persons or particular persons for political purposes…whatever the considerations of a political, philosophical, ideological, racial, ethnic, religious or other nature that may be invoked to justify them (82). Indridason defines it as the “use of violence for political reasons. He adds that terrorism influences domestic politics, such as altering priorities of voters and politicians (32). It has broader political consequences than simply putting national security on the political agenda. Francis is of the opinion that terrorism is the use of violence in the pursuit of incompatible and particular interests and goals which pose considerable dangers to the human race (20).

Awake as cited by Apooyin defines the term as “the unlawful use or threatened use of force or violence by a person or an organised group against people or property with the intention of intimidating or coercing societies or governments, often, often for ideological or political reasons” (95). However, the term in a functional approach suggests the organised use of terror or any form of cohesion for the purpose of attaining some political, religious or socio-cultural group interest.

Terrorism thus simply put is the use of violence for political and other aims to force a government to act. It is also the use of violence in the pursuit of incompatible and particular interests and goals which pose considerable dangers to the human race. The most common causes or roots of terrorism include civilisations or culture clashes, globalisation, religion, Israeli-Palestinian conflict, or the Russian invasion of Afghanistan. More personal or individual-based reasons for terrorism are frustration, deprivation, negative identity, narcissistic rage, and/or moral disengagement. Terrorists themselves seem to see their actions as a legal pursuit of their goals. In most societies like Nigeria, religious and ethnic differences, as well as political and ideological differences, result in terrorism. Abuse of differences in faith, culture, politics and ideology by some
extremists also breed terrorism (Acholonu 72). Terrorism can also stem from historical, psychological, sociological, philosophical factors, social Learning and personality development, denial of fundamental human rights, lack of adequate education, economic policies that are not favourable to all, injustice and peer pressure. Furthermore, terrorism has been categorised into transnational and domestic terrorism. A terrorist incident is transnational if the incident involves perpetrators, targets, institutions, citizens or governments of a country other than the country where the incident occurs. Domestic terrorism, on the other hand, involves only actors of the country where the incident takes place. Nevertheless, both transnational and domestic terrorism are likely to breed a sense of insecurity among citizens and demand for a governmental response even if the capacity of government to deal with the two types of terrorism may differ (Enders and Sandler, as cited by Acholonu 71).

Again, Eastern Kentucky University has identified five types of terrorism. They are:

**State-Sponsored terrorism**, which consists of terrorist acts on a state or government by a state or government.

**Dissent terrorism**, which are terrorist groups which have rebelled against their government.

**Terrorists and the Left and Right**, which are groups rooted in political ideology.

**Religious terrorism**, which are terrorist groups which are extremely religiously motivated and

**Criminal terrorism**, which are terrorist acts used to aid in crime and criminal profit.

**TERRORISTS’ ACTIVITIES IN NIGERIA**

Terrorism is currently Nigeria’s greatest security challenge. The State has been experiencing sporadic waves of terrorism that have caused great havoc to the polity. So many lives have been lost, properties lost; “communities have been truncated, families displaced, relaxation areas abandoned” and so on (Acholonu, 73). Different terrorist groups have evolved over the years, but the group with the most devastating impact is the Boko Haram sect. Other groups are Niger Delta Militants and the Fulani Herdsmen.

The problem in Niger Delta is centred on the issue of exploitation and neglect of the region that produces the major capital used in the development of the entire nation. The problem in Plateau State is centred on the issue of indigene/non-indigene as well as ethno-religious differences. The Boko Haram is hinging its cause on the basis of seeking to replace an existing political order based on their own purely religious lines and feeling contempt and hatred for those who do not share its views. It seriously rejects Western education and wants the enforcement of Sharia in the Northern states. The IPOB group agitates for the creation of Biafra (Gbilekaa).

The current upsurge of Boko Haram activities is intimately related to the spread of radical Islamist ideologies in the form of Tablighi clerics from Pakistan and Wahhabist missionaries from Saudi Arabia (Adesoji, 101). The emergence of the terrorist group significantly changed the country’s security scene. From a quiet religious study group in the early 2000s, the group has risen to become one of the world’s deadliest terrorist groups (Eji, 198).

The phrase ‘Boko Haram’ is derived from the Hausa word for “book” – ‘boko’ – and the Arabic word for forbidden – ‘haram’. Literally, then, Boko Haram means the ‘book is forbidden’.
In this context, however, it means Western education is sinful and therefore forbidden (Adesoji, 100). The Islamist sect is said to have been established by Muslim cleric Mohammed Yusuf in Maiduguri in North Eastern Nigeria in 2002 (Farouk, as cited by Parker, “Boko Haram Continues to Drive Terrorism Threat In...”). However, various analysts have noted that the movement may have been around for much longer – for up to fifteen years under various other names including 

Al Sunna Wal Jamma (Islamists Raise the Stakes…, 1).

Despite all efforts from the Nigerian government, and support by surrounding states, Boko Haram in northern Nigeria is far from defeated. This is demonstrated by the continued attacks from the sect. “Military efforts to prevent further Boko Haram attacks in the coming months are hugely challenged by the sheer size of the territory in which the group operates and its continued ability to launch attacks” (Parker, “Boko Haram Continues To Drive Terrorism Threat In... ”).

Islamic State (IS) in August 2016 described Abu Musab al-Barnawi as its “governor” for West Africa, apparently contesting Shekau’s leadership of Boko Haram. Although Al-Barnawi’s faction has been relatively inactive in recent months, this does not indicate a decline in the group’s capability or intent, or the success of military operations. Al-Barnawi’s tactics of attempting to win local community support will further complicate government efforts to defeat the group over the coming years as Boko Haram becomes more entrenched within local communities” (Parker, “Boko Haram Continues To Drive Terrorism Threat In... ”).

Statistics, according to the Human Rights Watch reveal that, between July 2009, and January 2012, more than 935 people were killed and thousands wounded in 164 attacks. During this period, the targets of the attacks also widened from churches and shops to politicians and the state security apparatus to the United Nations itself (Farouk, as cited by Parker, “Boko Haram Continues To Drive Terrorism Threat In... ”). Mosques are also being attacked in some of the Northern states.

Some other notable attacks by terrorists that have been witnessed in the country include the bombing during the swearing-in ceremony of President Goodluck Ebele Jonathan, May 29, 2011; the bombing of the Nigerian Police Force Headquarters in Abuja, June 2011; June 17, 2018 attack when at least 31 people were killed in explosions in the Damboa local government area (LGA) of Borno state.

The Consequences of terrorism in Nigeria have been huge. Besides the loss of lives and properties, the Nigerian government is spending so much on fighting terrorism. So much is also being spent on security, restoring peace and stability in the affected areas. There have been disruption of schools, disruption of farming activities, insecurity of lives and properties, insecurity on the Nigerian roads, loss of jobs, unemployment, displacement of people who have been moved into IDP Camps, disruption of commerce and trading activities and discouragement of foreign investors and visitors. Also, felt is the discouragement of foreigners from visiting and people living in constant fear. There is also the high presence of police and other law enforcement agencies trying to arrest terrorist activities (Acholonu 72). This could be intimidating and disturbing to citizens.
COUNTER-TERRORISM APPROACHES USED IN NIGERIA

A lot of resources have been diverted towards efforts in curtailing terrorism activities in Nigeria, particularly the Boko Haram insurgency. Nigeria’s state governors in December 2017 approved the withdrawal of $1 billion from the excess crude account to combat Boko Haram through the purchase of equipment, training of military personnel and provision of logistical support (Boko Haram Continues to Drive terrorism…).

In response to previous terrorist atrocities on the part of Boko Haram, on 22 February 2011, the Jonathan administration adopted an anti-terrorism bill to deal with contingencies such as those created by Boko Haram (Omede 99). In June 2011 President Jonathan set up a special military task force in Maiduguri consisting of the Army, Navy, Air Force, Department of State Security and the Nigerian Police Force (‘Nigeria: Human Rights Agenda 30).

The government has also established checkpoints around the federal capital territory, Abuja following two terrorist attacks on the capital, whilst a state of emergency was declared in areas of Borno, Niger, Plateau and Yobe states (Economist, ‘Nigeria's New Government: One and a Half Cheers…” 56).

Curfews were also imposed in some of the affected states. Altogether, 30,000 persons comprising of army, police and state security personnel were deployed to enforce the state of emergency and curfew in Adamawa state (Omede 98). The government also closed the borders between northern Nigeria and neighbouring states Baldauf to prevent the perpetrators of terrorist atrocities from escaping into neighbouring countries as well as trying to prevent Boko Haram from receiving reinforcements of foreign elements in the region (1).

The Buhari led administration has also deployed a lot of efforts toward curtailing the menace, but the problem continues. The Nigerian government seems to be having difficulty in stemming the situation. This is because, sometimes they report “Boko Haram has been defeated,” "Shekau has been killed,” but the activities of the sect linger on. Other times they report “Boko Haram has been decapitated” but, their impact is still felt. They have adopted guerrilla tactics – they hit and run and do not engage in pitch battles (Gbilekaa).

Counter-terrorism efforts are also crippled by the incapacity of the Nigerian Police Force to gather intelligence and undertake forensic investigations. According to Amnesty International, most police stations do not document their work; there is no database for fingerprints, no systematic forensic investigation methodology, only two forensic laboratory facilities, few trained forensic staff and insufficient budgets for investigations (8).

Contrary to what the Nigerian Government is saying the attacks continue. The use of suicide bombers for attacks—as in the June 17 2018 incident when at least 31 people were killed in explosions in the Damboa local government area (LGA) of Borno state is quite common by the faction of Boko Haram led by Abubakar Shekau, which is largely confined to Borno state and pursues a more indiscriminate campaign of violence.
HOW THE MEDIA CAN HELP

The mass communication media often referred to as the mass media or the media are those organs charged with the responsibilities of disseminating information, ideas and attitudes to heterogeneous populations simultaneously. These are the newspaper, radio, television and the new media. Nwosu, however, defines the mass media as a technical communication concept which refers to the device employed by anyone involved in a mass-mediated communication situation for moving messages across distance or time and they are used for reaching mass audiences which could be large citizens, youths or customers that need to be reached at different places, distances and time (Cited by Apooyin 95). McQuail on the other hand as quoted by Daramola, describes the mass media as the organised means for communicating openly and at a distance to many receivers within a short space of time (Cited by Apooyin 95).

McLeod et al note that “the rapid evolution of media systems and technologies has made media effects potentially stronger and more complicated.” In some ways, the media is aiding and abetting terrorism. News media often find it difficult to ignore coverage of acts of terrorism (123). Bassioni, as reported by Adesina, observes that terrorists are drawn to news media coverage because they desire maximum publicity for their messages and symbolic actions (cited by Apooyin 102). Schlesinger et al also view terrorism as the theatre while the news media, on their part, are seen as being unable to resist the chance of a good story, so they dutifully provide extensive coverage for terrorists’ bombings, hijacks, kidnapping and assassinations (cited by Apooyin 102). The media thus spread the news of attacks and even transmit the messages of terrorist organisations.

Muller, Spajj and Ruitenberg quote former British Prime Minister, Margaret Thatcher, as often referred to media publicity as the oxygen of terrorism (cited by Itek and Oke 347). According to Nacos, getting the attention of the mass media, the public and decision makers is the raison d’etre behind modern terrorism’s increasingly shocking violence (cited by Itek and Oke 347). Laquer, cited by Farnen, states that “the media are terrorists’ friends…the terrorists’ act by itself is nothing, publicity is all” (cited by Itek and Oke 347). Terrorist attacks are carefully orchestrated to attract the attention of the media. After attacks, the media response to these overtures with almost unbridled alacrity, proving unable to ignore what has been accurately described as an even fashioned tactic used specifically for their needs (Hoffman cited by Itek and Oke 347). Gerges describes the use of the media as being so important for Al-Qaeda, that many within the organisation have said that the late Bin Laden was “obsessed” with the international media and that he caught the disease of screens, flashes, fans and applause” (cited by Itek and Oke 347).

In a comprehensive approach, Nacos states that terrorists have four general media dependent objectives when they strike or threaten to commit violence:

- To gain attention and awareness of the audience, and to condition the target population (and government) for intimidation.
- The recognition of the organisation’s motives. They want people to think about why they are carrying out attacks.
- To gain respect and sympathy of those in whose name they claim to attack.
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To gain a quasi-legitimate status and a media treatment similar to that of legitimate political actors (20).

Itek and Oke believe that Nacos’ classification may not be the aim of every terrorist organisation as each has its own objective for using the media. Again, one objective may be more important than the other; and for terrorist organisations, one of the objectives may not be an issue at all. Nevertheless, most of the perceived important objectives fall under Nacos’ division (350).

According to counter-terrorism officials in the United States, Osama Bin Laden placed his views and full text of his various *fatwas* and declarations available on internet sites. The World Islamic Front statement of February 23, 1998, which was released on the web by Bin Laden and four other leaders contained *fatwa* that proved prophetic less than six months later when more than 300 people were killed and 5,000 injured in the bombing of American embassies in Kenya and Tanzania (Nwamnwo, 128). The document which is still online at http://www.fas.org/irp/world/para/docs/980223-fatwa.htm is part of the evidence that links the bin Laden network to the September 11 terrorist attacks on New York and Washington.

If the media are silent, which is, starving them of the desired attention, they would not continue. But with the new media, terrorists on their own establish websites and other social media handles such as Facebook, YouTube and Twitter to get publicity. Instances are the Tuesday, September, 11, 2001 (9/11), Al-Qaeda and the Taliban activities in Afghanistan and Pakistan. When one medium is shut down they establish another. This calls for regulation of what can be posted by the custodians of the media.

Nevertheless, the mass media through their agenda-setting function need to give the issue of terrorism and its menace great attention in their reportage. The media can help contend terrorism by drawing attention to the evils of terrorism. As watchdogs of the society and major stakeholders in bringing about positive changes of values and reorientation of the citizenry, the media's role cannot be undermined towards taking a front role in championing public awareness and security crusades among Nigerians (Acholonu 76). Thus, the media can be used as an instrument for orientation and sinking in messages that will curtail terrorism.

By reporting them, the media are drawing the attention of people to the dangers and insecurity they constitute to individuals and organisations. The media would also be drawing the attention of the citizens to be security conscious and to also draw the attention of government so that the government can live up to their bid by providing security of lives and property. There is also the need for government to draw the attention of security outfits to be up and doing to secure lives and properties. Films can also be used for deconstruction and reconstruction of mindsets as well as reorientation. In some countries such as the US, they have started using films to expose the dangers of terrorism and how they operate. One of such examples is Steven Spielberg’s *Munich*. The Nigerian government can emulate this too as the film medium is a very powerful weapon in the shaping of mindsets.

Again, reportage of their activities makes people become more security conscious but in a way, it is also giving the terrorists the attention they crave which is why there is the need for the mass media to focus on the causes of terrorism and draw attention to address the problems before they escalate to full-blown terrorism.
The media based on their cultivation effects have the ability to shape opinions and set an agenda. By the same token, the media can be used as an instrument for orientation and sinking in messages that will curtail thoughts of terrorism.

CONCLUSION

Security is vital for the growth and development of any nation. The aim of terrorists is to create insecurity, destabilise the country to make it ungovernable. The media have been known to be powerful tools in the correction of wrongs, and it is believed that contending terrorism in Nigeria is a cause that is realisable.

This study examined the power of the mass media in the curtailing of terrorism, and it concludes that the mass media are lethal weapons that can prevent and curtail terrorism. Irrespective of their origins and their causes, the media can be used to prevent any form of terrorism; by tackling the roots of terrorism.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the conclusions from this study, it is suggested that children have to be gainfully engaged to curb bad influences that will lead to terrorism. Again, there is need for adequate education as education brings about development.

The following recommendations are also made:

- Orientation/Reorientation/Proper education. Not just the formalised education, citizens should be taught that the people who are leading terrorism are doing so as a result of individual causes - out of their own selfish needs and not for the good of all.
- The media should draw the attention of the government to the factors that spur terrorism. Particularly, equity and fair play so that people would not feel cheated and resort to violence as well as the need for gainful employment.
- The media needs to work with the organs responsible for the prevention of terrorist activities in the country. The media should enlighten the people on whatever solutions the officers would come up with for the people to understand and comply with.
- The media need to attack religious fanaticism more effectively because the violence stems from some teachers who preach radical Islam and the likes. The media should report these people to enable the government to place them under serious watch. Reporting fanaticism will draw the attention of security agencies.
- By using their gate-keeping functions, the people need to be de-radicalised and should be prevented from being exposed to the circumstances and preaching of radical clerics.
- Government too should work with the media to place under close watch visitors from countries who come into Nigeria to recruit young people into terrorist groups. Countries such as Afghanistan, Pakistan and Ethiopia should be watched in such a way that the Nigerian people are not recruited into those terrorist groups.


• There is the need for using the media as reorientation tools which can come from development communication as well as theatre for development. This can also be achieved through participatory learning action.
• Special programmes on security awareness should be created by the media to raise security and safety awareness among the populace.
• The media should harp more on the causes of terrorism so that the government can give proper attention to them. When the media highlight why people engage in terrorism, this is going to the base, and there would be no need to fight terrorism

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