A Comparative Analysis of the Framing of Boko Haram Insurgency by Two Nigerian Newspapers

Almansur Ado Sani

Department of Mass Communication,
Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria-Nigeria

Abstract
Nigerian news media is allegedly divided along ethnic, religious and political lines between the north and the south. Thus, quite often, bias is manifested while covering the issues related to one region by the other. This study, in comparative terms, examined how news reports on the activities of the insurgent group of Boko Haram in the north are framed. The study content analysed two leading newspapers; Daily Trust from the north and The Guardian from the south were selected. 194 units of news were analysed. The study revealed that there is no significant variation of the frames used in the coverage of Boko Haram insurgency by the sampled newspapers. The study also found that The Guardian used more negative tone than Daily Trust in the said reportage. It concluded that the framing of Boko Haram in The Guardian and Daily Trust newspapers is associated with relative bias. It therefore recommended that ethnic, religious and political ties must not be given a chance to supersede competence and expertise while discharging professional mandate.

Keywords: *Framing, Boko Haram, Insurgency, Analysis, Newspapers.*

Introduction

The role news media play regarding terrorism attracts several scholarly views. The complex interaction between terrorists and media stems from the desire byterroristsо indirectly use the media to achieve maximum publicity that createspsychological effect on the non-combatants as a means of sending message to the prime target. A terrorist group has three aims to achieve frominteraction with the media, and these are attention, recognition and legitimacy.

Modern news media represent a powerful instrument during a conflict through agenda setting, priming and framing, using

metaphors, language, subjects, and sources. Mass media are the creators and distributors of ideology primarily through framing. Ryan (1991, p. 53) sees framing as "how news stories are made, i.e. how piecesof information are selected and organized to produce stories that make sense to their audience". Most of the time, news media content, the theme or topic is not what is regarded as dangerous or inciting, but rather, the selection, emphasis, and tone of presentation. A notable example was given by Entman (1991), on the differential framing in the US media of two comparable air disasters caused by the Soviet and the US action. He describes US media framing of the similar incidences as the consequence of military actions that resulted in the death of large numbers of civilians. Both events were reported pretty differently. The way these events were reported in words, tone and problematizing have constituted different frames to shape and influence public's interpretations of the events. This means that one event can be framed in several ways with a profound impact on events meaning where every version may represent different frame or, in other words, each frame has a unique definition of the issue.

However, Nigerian print media framing can generate support for Boko Haram if itframesthe group as 'brave,' 'just,' 'good,' or 'kind'. In a violence situation, Nigerian news media is expected to disseminate information and facilitate greater understanding of the violence by providing audience with valuable contextual information and analysis without bias as a result of polarity. When particular news frames are used to dominate news coverage of Boko Haram, the mass audience begins to shape their thinking and interpretations of the event around the frames that may possibly limit and alter perceptions. The significant impact that news framing can have on the audience is largely dependenton the amount of prior knowledge, direct personal experience and relative salience of the issue at stake.

To understand the media's skilful portrayal of Boko Haram, one should explore the channels that news media adopt in the reportage. The news media generally useagenda setting and framingto support

or create enmity around an issue or a group by conferring status on certain issues and make them more salient than others to shift people's attitude and influence interpretation (Bilgen, 2012). As a consequence, the public see Boko Haram through the lens of media. Most of their perceptions about the group are second-hand reality or even hyper-reality created by the Nigerian print media in many unexampled ways. Hence, the public's pictures of Boko Haram are shaped and refined in the way the media frametheir stories. In this light, this study selected *The Guardian*and *Daily Trust*newspapers and analysed how news on Boko Haram is framedas a result of the divide along ethnic, religious and political lines between the southern Nigeria Christians-dominated press and the northern Nigeria Muslims-dominated press (Sule, 2015; Ezeakolam & Omowale, 2017).

The Growth of Boko Haram

The famous name *Boko Haram* was originally derived from Hausa and Arabic words. In Hausa, *Boko* means *illusion. At* the time when colonialists introduced a new system of education, the word was deliberately used to describe western education as something that seems to be education although it is really not. At the passage of time, the word *Boko* mainly refers to *western education*. *Haram* on the one hand means forbidden. Thus, Boko Haram means *western education is forbidden*; however, this name was given to the group by Maiduguri residents as a fair reflection of the group's ideology. The formal name which the group approves to be called byis *Jama'atu Ahlisunnah Lidda'awati Wal Jihad*, which translates as *The Group committed to the propagation of the Prophet Muhammad's teaching and Jihad*. The group is often referred as the Taliban of Nigeria (Ekwueme &Akpan, 2011), and it is widely speculated that it has a link with the Al-Qaida network (Onuoha, 2010).

Boko Haram was formed in 2001 by the Late Muhammad Yusuf in Yobe, a state in the Northeastern Nigeria. Yusuf was a secondary school dropout and he travelled to Chad and Niger Republics in

quest for Islamic knowledge where he was said to have developed radical views against westernization and modernization (Danjinbo &Abubakar, 2007). The movement's ideology constitutes denying western culture and lifestyle and establishing norms and values exactlyas they were in the prophet's lifetime. It also objects to secularism and attempts to resist it. In the year 2004, some tertiary students who have roots in Borno and Yobe States abandoned their studies and joined the group wishing to be martyred for their faith (Onuoha, 2010). The members significantly vary according to the social background. The overwhelming majority are apparently underprivileged which is quite similar to Maitatsine followers who were struck by poverty (Adesoji, 2010). The former Governor of Central Bank of Nigeria at Pan African Conference, Oxford University, stressed that, 'a lot of time when talking about problem of Africa whether it is ethnic issue or religious issue … bottom line is economics, is our people not having a way-out of poverty and not having a hope in the system' (Sunusi, 2012).

The group attacks and kills people whom it considers detrimental to its ideology including the political class and religious clerics and even their families. In the year 2009, the tension heightened that resulted in a brutal killing of the group leader Muhammad Yusuf on 30th July, 2009 by the Nigerian Police force after he was captured and handed over to them alive by the Nigerian army. Hundreds of others were killed during the massive crackdown (Sahara Reporters, 2014). His execution by the police was viewed 'by many Nigerians among which are lawyers, human rights activists and some Muslim scholars as extrajudicial execution' (Ibrahim, 2009).

Notwithstanding, the killing of Muhammad Yusuf intensified the Boko Haram bloodsheds. Abubakar Shekau, who was described as 'fearless, loner, a complex, paradoxical man, part intellectual, part gangster, quietest and perhaps the most radical among the group members including the late Yusuf' (BBC Africa, 2014), became Yusuf's predecessor. Since he took over the affairs of Boko Haram, the group became more radical and launched more deadly attacks including the worst attack so far, the killing of at least 180 people in

Kano, northern Nigeria's largest city. Shekau is the Nigerian most wanted person and on 21st June, 2012, Shekau was specially designated by the US Department of State as a global terrorist under Executive Order 13224 (Reward for Justice, 2013). He was declared wanted and also $7 million bounty was placed on his head for any vital information that may lead to his capture (The News, 2014).

However, it is worthy to note the growing suspicions among Nigerians notably Muslims about the real identity and the underpinning goals of the insurgence became a topic for discussionin every nook and cranny ofthe north. Most Muslims see it as a predetermined plot to tarnish the image of Islam, transport turmoil to the religion and scuttle the peaceful atmosphere of the North (Ojibo, 2013; Shehu, 2014).

Research Issue and Approach

Due to the ethnic, religious and sectional differences among the Nigerian press, the purpose of this study is to compare and analyse whether or not biases are manifested in either or both newspapers' coverage of Boko Haram activities. This study has carefully monitored news pages of two newspapers published in Nigeria. The reason for choosing news reports as item of the research material is adopted from Toker (2004, p.3) who says that "news isgenerally seen as an aspect of everyday life in a specific culture", but mostly portion of the media consumers in the society do not seem to be aware of the media content, particularly news, from prism of framing. However, the news stories are written and disseminated with considerable amount of bias and subjectivity that in subtlety informsthe study.

For the purpose of this analytical study, two Nigerian daily newspapers were chosen for comparison.*The Guardian Newspaper* represents the southern Christian press because of its elitist and respectable status and wide readership among Christians as well, while *Daily Trust* newspaper represents the northern Muslim-dominated press due to its position of wide circulation and reputable

standing in the North. The study selected seven attacks that attracted wide coverage by both national and international media organizations. These attacks are as follow:

i. August, 26 2011 Abuja United Nations House bombing

ii. December, 25 2011 Madalla church bombing

iii. January, 20 2012 Kano multiple bomb blasts

iv. February, 7 2012 Kaduna Army Barracks suicide bombing

v. April, 26 2012 Kaduna *Thisday* newspaper office bomb attack

vi. March 18 2013 Kano motor park bomb blast

vii. December, 2 2013 Maiduguri multiple Military Units bomb attacks

These events are selected due to their significance which resulted in extensive media reports. Such huge reportage gave more data for analysis than drawing data from particular time period where some selected dates may not have news reports published on the cases. To sum up the expectation of this study, the research assessed the Nigerian media milieu within a broad spectrum of religion, ethnicity and sectionalism and eventually provided invaluable input into the situation as the country attained over a century of consociation.

Research Question and Hypothesis

The study has one general research question and onehypothesis.

RQ 1: How does the use of frames differ between*the Guardian* and *Daily Trust* newspapers?

H 1: Both *The Guardian and Daily Trust* newspapers negatively framed the activities of Boko Haram, but *The Guardian* employs more negative tone and style in its presentation.

Framing Boko Haram in the Media

Emmanuel and Ezech (2016) critically analysed foreign media framing of Boko Haram, employing qualitative content analysis on BBC and Aljazeera online coverage. The study reveals that while BBC associates Boko Haram activities with Islam, evidence to the contrary, Aljazeera counteracts and dispels such framing by differentiating good and bad Muslim and dissociates religion with the group. BBC used labels such as Islamist, Jihadist, and militant Islamic group when describing Boko Haram. Eti (2012) examines news media framing of insurgency in the Niger Delta area by three Nigerian newspapers (*The Punch* and *Daily Champion* – south; *New Nigeria* - north). She reveals that the coverage of crisis in the Nigerian press is 'episodic' and gives prominence to 'conflict behavior' such as 'bombing of drilling platforms and oil pipelines, killing and maiming oil workers and state security operatives, kidnapping and hostage taking'. The study also suggests that such framing of the conflict behavior in Nigerian news media is motivated by ethno-political factors, foreign policy implications and the height of drama of the situation. Several scholars suggest that the Nigerian mass media have been repeatedly biased and abused objectivity in their reportage of insurgencies (Ademola &Okeke, 2011; Oputa, 2011; Lawrence, 2011; Rasaq &Mahmud, 2012). Uwazuruike, (2018) examines frames used by *Vanguard* and *Daily Trust* newspapers on the abduction of Chibokgirls.The study reveals that ethnic consideration influences reportage in the Nigerian print mediaat the detriment of responsible journalism. Alao and Ajaegbu (2012) analyse the role of the Nigerian media in the coverage of Boko Haram. The study reveals that southern-based newspapers over publicize Boko Haram terror attacks using overblown headlines and pictures on the front page and erroneously link Boko Haram activities with Islam whereas the northern-based counterpart give adequate coverage to the insurgent group but use few pictures and barely bold head. The study further suggests an obvious difference in the analysis of media reports on Boko Haram in the Nigerian media milieu.

Framing Theory

There has been a growing concernabout how the news information is presented or 'framed' in news media. In this context, Tuchman (1978) traced the origin of the concept of framing back to Goffman (1974). Framing is increasingly regarded as a crucial theoretical approach in analyzing communication text (Brantner et al., 2012). This new paradigm of communication science summarizes its main aspect which involves 'selection' and 'salience'.

> To frame is select some aspects of a perceived reality and make them more salientin a communicating text, in such a way as to promote a particular problem definition, casual interpretation, moral evaluation and/or treatment recommendation for the item described. (Entman, 1993, p. 52)

In accordance with this definition, frames are formed by four essentials which are: define problems, diagnose causes, make moral judgments and suggest remedies. It is obvious that portions of the communication text carry out these functions using certain words and phrases, pictures and/or films and so on (McQuail, 2005). Entman (1993) assets that not every sentence performs all the four functions but a single sentence may accommodate one or more functions, though many sentences may carry none of them.

However, frames are being used in the communication text to highlight certain elements in order to influence the reception of the message. Entman (1993) stresses that 'frames highlightsome bit of information about an item that is the subject of communication, thereby elevating them in salience'. This might be a deliberate action while coding media content to influence audiences' perception of a perceivedreality. Highlighting certain aspects of the text pavesthe way for audience to consider the items to be of crucial importance. Thus, this proves the potentiality of frames to 'predispose the understanding, interpretation and evaluation of the framed information' (Cappella &Jamieson, 1997; Entman, 1993; Scheufele, 2005; Tverskey &Kahneman, 1986).

Method

The data collected for this research was gathered through quantitative content analysis of news stories on seven selected events covered by the chosen newspapers. The study purposively selected two national newspapers, namely *The Guardian* and *Daily Trust*. For each attack, three days' editions were purposively sampled and analysed in comparison starting from a day after the incidence, since newspapers in Nigeria publish stories the next day. Thus, the samples of 42 newspaper copies were used for the analysis. About the general research question, the study adopted deductive approach. The study built a grid containing five different frames composed of conflict frame, human interest frame, economic consequences frame, morality frame and attribution of responsibility frame. The independent coders coded (a) all news stories on the front page and inside, andalso coded (b) all descriptive words and adjectives about the activities of Boko Haram. To ensure reliability in the coding process, the study used Cohen's kappa in calculating the degree of agreement between the independent coders (the researcher and research assistant). The result of the inter-coder reliability test showed 65.2 percent agreement. This research considered a unit of news genre as a unit of analysis. A total of 194 samples met the selection criteria for the framing analysis (n = 118) of the *Daily Trust* Newspaper and (n = 76) of *The Guardian* Newspaper. While analyzing results, the study employed the SPSS Chi-square test to compare the sampled newspapers vis-à-vis their framing.

Data Presentation and Discussion of Findings

The following are the data collected and the discussion of findings:

Research question: How does the use of frames differ between the*Daily Trust* and*The Guardian*?

The research question investigated whether there was significant variation in the use of frames among the southern and northern print media.

Table 1: Distribution of frames in the newspapers

Frames	Daily Trust		The Guardian		Total	
	N	*%*	*N*	*%*	*N*	*%*
Conflict	34	28.8	29	38.2	63	32.5
Att. of Responsibility	27	22.9	20	26.3	47	24.2
Human Interest	32	27.1	21	27.6	53	27.3
Morality	25	21.2	6	7.9	31	16.0
Total	118	60.8	76	39.2	194	100

Comparatively, the chi-square test suggests that there is no significant variation in the useof frames for the news coverage of Boko Haram between the Nigerian print media with (X^2 = 6.583 P<0.08). The result shows that *Daily Trust* used 118 frames whereas *The Guardian* used 76 frames, totaling 194 frames, for the coverage of Boko Haram on the seven selected events. Both newspapers used frames that either framed winner or loser, or reported insurgency as human interest frame with, perhaps, commercial motives, or who is supposed to be held responsible for the cause or solution notably of Boko Haram activities. The Morality frame was not patronized much by*The Guardian* newspaper relative tothe *Daily Trust* which likely plays a pivotal role in bringing the violence to peace talks since it emphasizes the religious tenets and moral prescriptions that the Nigerian society respects.

Hypothesis: Both *The Guardian* and *Daily Trust* press negatively framed the activities of Boko Haram, but*The Guardian* press employs more negative tone and style in the presentation ofits content to the audience.

Table 2: Distribution of tone used in the newspapers

Tone	Daily Trust		The Guardian		Total	
	n	*%*	*N*	*%*	*n*	*%*
Positive	0	0	0	0	0	0
Negative	88	74.6	70	92.1	158	81
Neutral	30	25.4	6	7.9	36	18.6
Total	118	60.8	76	39.2	194	100

The difference between negative and neutral positions of the news coverage of Boko Haram by the *Daily Trust* and *The Guardian* is statistically significant ($X^2 = 9.398$ $P<0.01$); thus, we cannot reject the hypothesis. 74.6% represented negative tone in which *Daily Trust* framed Boko Haram activities whereas *The Guardian* is represented with 91.1% negative tone. Therefore, the result reveals that *The Guardian* negatively framed Boko Haram activities more than the *Daily Trust*. However, in the coverage of Boko Haram by both newspapers, not even a single unit of analysis is recorded as positive.

Summary of Findings

Having completely analyzed 194 units of news carried by the two selected newspapers (*Daily Trust* from the North and *The Guardian* from the South) on the coverage of seven selected events perpetrated by Boko Haram, first, the findings revealed that there was no significant variation by both *The Guardian* and *Daily Trust* on usage of frames. Second, the study suggests thatthere is significant difference between *Daily Trust* and *The Guardian's* position in negative framing of Boko Haram activities where*The Guardian* employed more negative tone than its *Daily Trust*counterpart. Both

newspapers have no positive position on the Boko Haram; of all the units of analysis, not even a single unit scored positive toneon the seven selected event used for the study.

Conclusion and Recommendation

The relationship between news media and society is explained by theories of mass media. Journalists make some elements in the news appear more salient than others by highlighting and framing them to suit a particular purpose. *The Guardian* and *Daily Trust* newspapers are no exception of the manipulation of media messages presented to the audience. This study investigated whether bias is manifested in the coverage of Boko Haram by the *Guardian* and *Daily Trust* who are divided along ethnicity, religion and sectional lines. Framing terrorism in*The Guardian* and *Daily Trust* newspapers is associated with relative biases as it is all over the world. The study comparatively content analyzed news reports on the Boko Haram by the southern Nigeria Christian-dominated press (*The Guardian*) and northern Nigeria Muslim-dominated press (*Daily Trust*) and found that press cultural bias manifested in the media contentwhere The Vanguard appeared more biased. The significant contribution made by this study that is not explored by previous studieswas whether there is variation of the usage of frames among the north and southern press or not.

Consequentuponthe research findings, it is recommended that the Nigerian print media should be firm and hold to the social responsibility tenetsin carrying out its professional mandate despite ethno-political or religious differences. Professional interest should not be mortgagedfor whatever interest at any time particularly at critical times when the country's unity and social fabric are endangered. Ethnic, religious and political ties must not be given a chance to supersede competence and expertise.There is a strong

need for journaliststo play pivotal role in defusing the tension and enhancingprofessional reputation by appreciating the perceived differences.

References

Ademola, H. &Okeke, J.(2011). Media coverage of crisis in Nigeria: An empirical analysis. *Journal of Scientific Research*,9(7), 5-16.

Adesoji, A. (2010). The Boko Haram uprising and Islamic Rievivslism in Nigeria. *AfricanSpectrum*,45(2), 95-108.

Alao, D. &Ajaegbu, O.(2012).Terrorism in Nigeria: An analysis of North/South media coverage of Boko Haram (November 2011 to March 12).*International Review of Business and Social Sciences,*1, 49-62.

BBC Africa. (2014).*Nigerian Boko Haram Abubakar Shekau in profile*. Retrieved from http://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-18020349

Brantner, C., Geise, S. & Lobinger, K. (2012). *Fractured paradigm: Theories, concepts, methodology of visual research: A systematic review*.Annual Conference of the International Communication Association (ICA) - Visual Communication Divisio,. London, UK.

Cappella, J. N. &Jamieson, K. H. (1997). *Spiral of cynicism: The press and the public ood*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Dajinbo, N. D. &Abubakar, O. (2007). Vote buying in Nigeria: Assessment of the 2007 General Elections.*Journal of African Elections*, 6(2), 180-200.

Emmanuel, S., & Czech, G. (2016). Foreign media framing of Boko Haram insurgency: A critical analysis of BBC and Aljazeera online coverage. *International Journal of Advance Scientific Research and Management*, 1(10), 30-44.

Ekwueme, C. & Akpan, C. (2011). Mass media and Boko Haram insurgency: A call for reportorial paradigm shifts. In O. Omojola (Ed.*), Media terrorism and political communication in a multi-cultural environment.ACCE Conference Proceedings*(pp. 40-49). Ota, Nigeria.

Entman, R. M. (1991). Framing US coverage of the international news: Contrast in narratives of the KAL and Iran air incidents.*Journal of Communication*,41(4), 6-27.

Entman, R. M. (1993). Faming: Towards clarification of a fractured paradigm.*Journal of Communication*,43(4), 51-58.

Eti, I. (2012). Deconstructing the reporting of hostage taking in the NigerDelta.*Global Media Journal*,6(1), 23-42.

Ezeakolam, A. &Omowale, A. (2017). Mass media and ethno-religious crises in Nigeria. *International Journal of Economics, Business and Management Research*, 1(3), 56-66.

Goffman, E. (1974). *Frame analysis: An essay on the organization of experience.* New York: Harper and Row.

Ibrahim, J. (2009). *Extrajudicial execution of Muhammad Yusuf and legality of Boko Haram*.Retrieved fromhttp://www.gamji.com/articles8000/NEWS8754.htm

Lawrence, O. (2011). Nigerian media coverage of the Boko Haram crisis. *Journal of Journalism and Crisis Studies*, 12(10), 90-100.

McQuail, D. (2005). *Mass communication theory* (5thed.). London: Sage.

Ojibo, D. (2013). *Maitatsine, Boko Haram, and CAN: The bitter truth.* Benue, Nigeria.

Onuoha, F. C.(2010). Islamist challenge: Nigeria Boko Haram crisis explained.*African Security Review*,19(2), 56-57.

Oputa, I. L. (2011). The factor of objectivity in media coverage of the Niger-Delta crisis. *Journal of Media and Conflict Research,* 7 (4), 58-69.

Reward for Justice.(2013). *Stop a terrorist, save lives.*Retreived from http://www.rewardsforjustice.net/english/abubakar shekau.html

Ryan, C. (1991). *Prime time activism: Media strategies for grassroot organizing.* Boston, MA: South End.

Sahara Reporters (2014). *Profiles of Nigeria's Boko Haram leader Abubakar Shekau*.Retrieved from http://saharareporters.tumblr.com/post/23669727971/profile-of-nigerias-boko-haram-abubakar-shekau

Scheufele, B. (2005). Framing-effect approach: A theoretical and methodological critique.*The European Journal of Communication Research,* 29(4), 401-428.

Sule, R. N. (2015). *Ethno-religious conflicts, mass media and national development: The Northern Nigeria experience*. Doctoral thesis, University of Jos, Jos, Nigeria.

Sunusi, S. L. (2012). *Sufficiently uncontroversial is beyound political rhetoric: Investing in youth as economic strategy*. Paper presented at Pan Africa Conference, Oxford, England.

Toker, H. (2004). *Two countries: One pattern: A comparative study of gender representation in the news of Norwegian and Turkish newspapers*. Master's thesis, University of Oslo, Norway.

Tuchman, G. (1978). *Making news: A study in the contruction of reality.* New York: Free.

Tverskey, A. &Kahneman, D. (1986). Rational choice and the framing of decision.*The Journal of Bussiness,*59(4), 251-278.

Uwazuruike, C. (2018). Reporting Boko Haram: Framing the Chibok schoolgirls' abuduction in

the Nigerian press. *African Journalism Studies,* 1, 1-19.