



Media and Terrorism: Interrogating the Role of News Coverage of Boko Haram Insurgency in Nigeria

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Abstract: *The relationship between media and terrorism has long been debated, with scholars emphasising that while the media provides essential information about terrorist activities, it simultaneously offers publicity that sustains terror networks. This study interrogates the role of Nigerian news coverage in shaping public understanding of the Boko Haram insurgency. Drawing on agenda-setting theory, the paper examines how the media have represented Boko Haram's activities, motivations, and impacts on society. It investigates whether such portrayals contribute to public fear, legitimize government counter-terrorism measures, or inadvertently amplify the insurgents' propaganda. Using the secondary data from the existing literature, the study highlights the complexities of reporting terrorism in a conflict-ridden environment. The findings reveal patterns of sensationalism, the dominance of government perspectives, and limited contextualization of the socio-economic drivers of terrorism. This study has demonstrated that the relationship between media and terrorism, particularly in the Nigerian context, is both complex and consequential. News coverage of the Boko Haram insurgency reveals not only the challenges of reporting in a volatile security environment but also the power of the media in framing public perceptions of terrorism. The paper concludes that by fostering a more responsible media practice, the Nigerian press can play a transformative role in countering extremist ideologies, promoting national cohesion, and contributing to long-term peacebuilding efforts in regions affected by terrorism.*

Keywords: *Boko Haram, Insurgency, Media, News Coverage and Terrorism*

I. Introduction

In modern times, the concept of terrorism has received serious attention from different scholarly perspectives. Some of them described terrorism as a mode of warfare, they examined its unique characteristics by comparing this method of struggle to other forms of violent conflicts. Terrorism is a global phenomenon and an integral part of the social reality in today's world. Thus, terrorists' activities are sources of threat to peaceful existence not only in developing countries but also in the world's richer and developed countries. According to Becketts (2016, p.4), "Terrorism is a brutal and violent practice, but it is also a media phenomenon. Terror is vital news: a dramatic, important story that the public needs to know about and understand. But terrorism also relies on such publicity to disrupt society, provoke fear, and demonstrate power". These scholars concluded that the mode of struggle adopted by terrorists is dictated by circumstances rather than by choice (Granville, 2020).

Terrorism is unlawful to use or threat of violence against persons and/or property in furtherance of political or social objectives with the intentions to intimidate or coerce a government, individuals or groups to alter their behaviour or policies. These authors captured terrorism within the context of three common elements namely: the use of violence, political objectives, and the intention of sowing fear in a target population. According to Ganor (2002), 'a correct and objective definition of terrorism can be based upon accepted international laws and principles regarding what behaviour are permitted in conventional wars between nations

as set out in the Geneva and Hague Conventions, which in turn are based upon the basic principle that the deliberate harming of soldiers during wartime is a necessary evil, and thus permissible. Whereas, the deliberate targeting of the civilian population is forbidden (Ganor, 2002).

However, these authors looked at the subject matter of terrorism through the lens of interstate attacks, without much emphasis on the activities of actors within states. In another vein, some scholars considered terrorism from a relativist approach to what it means to the terrorist vis-à-vis the broad description of the concept. Here, there is this belief that an objective and internationally accepted definition of terrorism can never be agreed upon. This is a result of the notion that 'one man's terrorist is another man's freedom fighter (Granville, 2020). The question of who a terrorist according to this school of thought, depends entirely on the subjective outlook of the definer. Thus, while terrorists and their activities are being branded as being harmful to the society, to terrorists themselves such actions are necessary for their survival and in the pursuit of certain well-guarded ideologies.

Driving the above analyses home, Ogunrotifa (2013) used an interesting but rather neglected theoretical discussion of Karl Marx's historical Materialism to shed light on the discourse of terrorism that pervades the contemporary global society and presents a class theory of terrorism based on the study of Boko Haram insurgency in Nigeria. This theory states that terrorism is an expression of an unending class struggle implicit in the hidden structures of oppression and structured contradictions of the global capitalist system. Through this perspective, Granville (2020) argued that the discursive frame of terrorism cannot be analysed in isolation of its class nature and the socio-economic conditions that gave rise to it and that investigating terrorism must be limited to a specific context and society that is crucial to the explication of the action that will be required to transform that context. He concluded that as long as the endemic socio-economic problems caused by global capitalism remain, the use of individual terrorism will inevitably become a recurrent event or normal social response to the state of affairs.

Despite these developments, terrorism and terrorist organisations have been condemned by many authorities in the international system. Rogers (2011) avers that many actors in the international system have embarked on several active means to declare and win wars against terrorist groups, especially since the 11 September 2001 attacks in the United States. Effective policy and efforts in combating the evolving threats of terrorism since the opening decade of the twenty-first century have been adopting a global strategy that is being led by the United States. This has entrenched the idea of protection of national and international security through committed individual and collaborative states' efforts in waging anti-terrorists 'wars (Abbott, Rogers & Sloboda, 2006). They argue that even in the environment of increasing wars against terrorists, their activities have kept on emerging and escalating in many parts of the world as a result of the divergence of interest of states and non-states actors in certain critical issues of concern. In all, it becomes difficult to have a consensus on what and who a terrorist is.

II. Review of Literatures

a. Theoretical Framework

Agenda-setting theory, developed by McCombs and Shaw (1993), posits that the media may not always tell people what to think, but it significantly influences what they think about. By giving prominence to certain issues through frequency, placement, and emphasis, the

media shapes the salience of topics in public discourse. In the context of terrorism, this theoretical framework helps explain how news outlets draw public attention to violent events, political responses, and the broader social consequences of insurgency. Terrorist groups, aware of this media power, often design attacks to capture attention and achieve visibility, knowing that the media's agenda-setting role ensures widespread coverage.

Applied to the Boko Haram insurgency, agenda-setting theory reveals how the media contribute to framing terrorism as a central public concern. By prioritising reports of bombings, kidnappings, and government counter-attacks, the media amplifies the salience of insecurity in national consciousness. However, such coverage often sidelines the underlying socio-economic, political, and ideological factors that sustain the insurgency. The predominance of violent imagery and government responses, therefore, not only shapes public perceptions but also reinforces narratives of fear and urgency. In this way, agenda-setting becomes a double-edged sword: while it raises awareness of security threats, it may also inadvertently serve the insurgents' objective of instilling terror (Onyejelem et al., 2025).

The relevance of agenda-setting theory to this study lies in its capacity to interrogate how media priorities align with or diverge from public needs for balanced information. If media disproportionately highlight sensational aspects of Boko Haram activities, they risk narrowing the public discourse to fear-driven reactions rather than encouraging deeper understanding of the conflict's roots. Conversely, a more responsible agenda-setting function could emphasise the human costs of terrorism, the resilience of affected communities, and the role of governance in fostering long-term security. By critically analysing the agenda-setting power of Nigerian media, this study underscores the potential for journalism to either reinforce or challenge the narratives that sustain terrorism and its consequences.

III. Results and Discussion

3.1 Terrorism in Nigeria: A Historical Perspective

Granville (2020) is of the view that violent crime in Nigeria began between 1960 and 1970. This he said, was a result of the British imposition of a federal system of government shortly before Nigeria's independence in 1960, which was alien to the concept of federalism as propagated by Wheare in the 1963, who said, 'federalism is made up of different branches of government, separate from each other, with their distinct authority toward a common goal'. The military intervention into politics and the establishment of military rule and command structure was the beginning of the assault on true federalism.

Clamour for restructuring the current quasi-federal government system by different ethnic groups in Nigeria has been very loud recently. These agitations led to several ethno-religious conflicts and uprisings by different groups in Nigeria and have been a great test and created strains on the security and unity of the nation (Ewetan & Urhie, 2014). Adamu (2005) argued that Nigeria's questionable federalism is only a recipe for conflict, a strain on national unity, a threat to national cohesion and peace, and an inevitable all-out war. The inroad of the military into the government facilitated the massive importation of arms and ammunition into the country which was used to prosecute the Nigerian civil war. Weapon proliferation in the aftermath of the civil war put arms in the hands of the wrong people which led to armed robberies and other gun-related violence like the Maitasine.

Crises began to emerge in the Niger Delta region, which according to Arong and Egberere (2013), grew from mere demands for reparation and agitations for fair treatment by

the indigenes in the 1980s-1990s to confrontations, riots, demonstrations, kidnapping of oil workers, vandalization of oil pipelines and flow-stations, youth restiveness and killings took insecurity into a far-more dangerous dimension. By mid-1990s, the situation had worsened and extended to other parts of the country, with frequent bombings and wanton destruction of lives and property in the Northern part of the country by Boko Haram insurgents (Yar'Adua & Msughter, 2023). As noted by some researchers, the very dangerous trend in insecurity Nigeria experienced then, and to a large extent today came with Boko Haram insurgency (Granville 2020). Commentators have established that the causes and effects of the rise in violence and insecurity have been detrimental to Nigeria.

These causes include ethno-religious conflicts, political violence, systemic and political corruption, economic-based violence, the crisis of resource control and revenue sharing, marginalization, unemployment, poverty, organized violent groups, weak security system, environmental degradation of aquatic eco-system, divide and rule policy of multinational oil companies operating in the Niger Delta region, porous borders, and terrorism. Of all of these causes and manifestations of violence and insecurity in Nigeria, terrorism has been the most fundamental source of insecurity in Nigeria since Boko Haram embarked on its insurgency. Hassan (2014) defined terrorism as a certain kind of violent acts carried out by individuals and groups rather than by the states and events which take place in peacetime rather than as part of conventional war.

The evolution of terrorism and terrorist groups in Nigeria is not a recent phenomenon. According to Granville (2020), the Maitatsine sect has been active in Northern Nigeria during the presidency of Shehu Shagari that was overthrown in a military coup in 1983. Again, between 1999 and 2007 when Obasanjo was President in the present civilian dispensation, terrorism reared its ugly head, with religious riots in Plateau State in North Central Nigeria. According to Oviasogie (2013), Northern Nigeria is a haven for religious conflicts between Muslims and Christians. As a result of the heterogeneous nature of Nigerian Islam, many Islamic sects have sprung up just like the different denominations in Christianity. According to Oviasogie (2013), most of the new Islamic sects were not in congruity with the teachings of the orthodoxy of the Sunni sect and as a result, they started to alienate themselves from the mainstream Islam in the country.

Today, terror groups have political underlying as a means to achieving their goals. Oviasogie (2013) argued that the militants in the Niger Delta used terror tactics to make their grievances known both nationally and internationally. Terror attacks could be used to make demands on governments, for instance, demand for redistribution of resources, freedom of worship, to bring about change in government and self-determination. This is being spearheaded by the dreaded Islamic insurgents in Northern Nigeria, the Boko Haram terrorists who have engaged the federal government in conflict since 2009. Terrorism in Nigeria can be traced to socio-economic, political, and cultural variables. While Islamic fanaticism provided the platform for terrorism. Inequity, economic deprivation, and disparity have been the forces propelling and sustaining their agenda (Idris & Msughter, 2022).

Corruption, poverty, disparity and fervent ignorance are the underlying causes of terrorism as exemplified by the Boko Haram insurgency, as well as other terrorist groups in other parts of Nigeria (Oviasogie, 2013). In my view, another factor that promotes terrorism in Nigeria is the influence of external terror groups such as the Islamic State in Syria, the Levant (ISIS or ISIL), the Al-Qaeda, and the Al-Shabab that operate in Somalia. Demoralized and poverty-stricken Northern Nigerian Muslims probably draw inspiration from these

foreign terror groups to perpetuate their evil deeds in the country. One of the effects of terrorism in Nigeria is the decline of peace. Various issues of The Human Development Report by Transparency International cited by Ewetan and Urhie (2014) shows that peace is eluding the country.

The effects of the Boko Haram insurgency are evident in the increase in security spending in the government as well as in the private sector security investments, and the movement of displaced persons from their places of abode to unfamiliar and most times unwelcomed areas of settlements which breed distrust and hostility from the host communities as a result of ethnic and religious divide (Granville, 2020). Oditia and Akan (2014) argue that terrorist activities have led to the disruption of economic activities, particularly in the North-East axis of the country, evidenced by increased migration from that part of the country to other regions. Significant reduction of properties' rental values in key metropolises in the north, reduction in road transport, and scanty attendance and activities in several open markets in the terror-infested North-East region, particularly Borno, Yobe and Adamawa states.

3.2 Insurgency: A Global Phenomenon

Insurgency over the past two decades has become a feature of societies around the globe. The mass media are the central institutions in the process of mobilization for war and conflict, while the outcomes of wars and conflicts the world over have always been catastrophic for the safety of journalists (Pate & Oso, 2017). This role of the media has a negative effect, whether in the planning stage of insurgency or at the execution stage. Pate and Oso (2017) confirm that "The mass media are always the source of information; the public expects from the media accounts of the conflict that would enable them to have a rationale understanding of the crisis.

Looking at insurgency from a global perspective, Eze (2014) is of the view that after the first Al-Qaeda attack on 29th December 1992 in Aden, Yemen, known as the 1992 Yemen Hotel Bombings. Countless insurgencies have resulted in the deaths of millions of people, including journalists, and the displacement of many. He further argued that, in the last 10 years, over two million people have died from terror attacks throughout the world.

Between 1992 and the middle of the 2000s, many terrorist attacks were carried out globally, ranging from February 26, 1993, the first bombing of the world trade centre USA, the August 1998 bombing of the US embassies in Nairobi Kenya, and Dar es Salam Tanzania, the bombing of the US Navy warship in October 2000 (*Guardian*, October 31st 2016). The most destructive act of terrorism ascribed to Al-Qaida was the series of attacks in the United States on September 11, 2001, during which four commercial airlines were hijacked, two of these crashed into the Twin Towers which later collapsed destroying the rest of the world trade Centre building complex.

The third crashed into the Pentagon and the fourth in the field during the struggle between the passenger and hijackers to control the airplane. Other deadly attacks were April 11, 2002, Mombasa attacks and the 2003 Riyadh compound bombings (*The New York Times* 9th, Dec. 2002). Recent terrorism cases like ISIS and the insurgency in Syria are clear indications of global terrorism. According to the Global Terrorism Index, 32,658 people died of terrorist attacks worldwide in 2014 alone. This represents an 80% increase in deaths associated with terrorism. Iraq, Nigeria, Afghanistan, Pakistan, and Syria account for 78% of

the entire global cases of terrorism (GTI, 2015). However, there has been a decline in the rate of death since 2015 (GTI 2018, 2019, 2020, and 2021).

On the African content, the trend is not different as a series of terrorist groups have caused much havoc on the continent. Ekwueme and Obayi (2002) observed that the African continent has in the past decades been assaulted with a high incidence of terrorism. Such groups like the Al-Shabab in Somalia have mushroomed over the years to become potent threats to the stability of the continent. Eze (2004) identifies that one striking factor in today's insurgency throughout Africa is the growth in a number of them with fundamental ideology. The ruthless attacks and killings are increasing daily.

In Nigeria, the first case of terrorism was the emergence of Maitatsine which can be loosely translated to mean 'the one with curses' or 'the one who curses', a terrorist sect led by Muhammadu Marwa from the northern town of Maroua in Cameroon. Marwa, who was the leader of the fundamentalist religious sect would challenge the state with his audacious teachings and unleash maximum destruction in a bid to establish his concept of how society should operate. Maitatsine spoke with anger and instructed his followers that Western education is a sin, they should do away with all tools of modernity and establish an Islamic state to replace the existing Nigerian government.

Among the beliefs of Maitatsine, which brought him strong opposition from the other clerics was his declaration that he was a forerunner of the long-awaited Imam Mahdi. There was a declaration that all the hadith and Sunnah (recorded action, sayings and tradition of the prophet Muhammed) were false and that no one should follow them, Maitatsine did not stop there he further banned his followers from facing Ka'aba while praying and that nobody should say Allahu Akbar (God is great) while praying and whoever said so was condemned to hellfire. Christians, Muslims, government, traditional worshippers, who he criticized and fought with. He finally declared himself a prophet and messenger of God.

In 1980, because the government was already planning on how to subdue Maitatsine and his followers, the government began the attack. By the time the raid ended, about 5,000 Nigerian lives were wasted. Maitatsine was killed in the first wave of fighting. The military crackdown led to the arrest of almost 1,000 people of which 224 were foreigners. (New African 1984, p 29-44).

3.3 The Birth of Boko Haram Insurgency

About two decades later, another insurgency involving the terrorist sect Jama'atu Ahlis-Sunnah Lidda'awati Wal-Jihad popularly known as Boko Haram which means; Western education is a sin or Western civilisation is forbidden. 'Boko Haram' is also loosely translated as 'Western education is forbidden' (The National Counter Terrorism Centre, 2014). Some Nigerians believe that the present-day Boko Haram is an offshoot or mutation of the Maitatsine. Sheik Muhammed Awal Albany, a popular Salafi Islamic scholar observed that Yusuf the father of Muhammed the leader of Boko Haram and his uncle were the commanders of Maitatsine's army, his father was killed while his uncle narrowly escaped from Kano to Maiduguri during the heavy military onslaught on the sect. Muhammed's uncle raised him as a child after the death of his father.

However, that is not to say that other factors did not contribute to the growth of the emergence of Boko Haram and it is not clear if Boko Haram has confirmed or denied this relationship. Although, Maitatsine and Boko Haram have many beliefs and features in

common. Since 2009 the sect has launched attacks that have claimed about 50,000 lives and property worth billions of naira have been destroyed (Pate & Oso, 2017).

This group came to the limelight in 2009 after the arrest and subsequent murder of the former leader Muhammed Yusuf. The Boko Haram insurgents have carried out several attacks on schools, churches, mosques, banks, military, paramilitary and police formations, media houses, markets, and other strategic places resulting in many deaths and increased media coverage. The group according to the Global Terrorism Index (2014) aims to overthrow the Federal Government and entrench Islamic or Sharia rule in Nigeria. Since 2011 when the insurgents started their large-scale bombings and killings mainly in the North-Eastern part of Nigeria, an estimated 15,000-18,000 citizens have been killed (CNN, 2015; Vanguard, 2015). Similarly, The Punch reports that 'Boko Haram has devastated North-East Nigeria in its quest to create an Islamist state, killing over 20,000 people and displacing 2.6 million from their homes' (*The Punch*, 29/10/2016). The group has also intensified attacks in neighbouring countries such as Niger, Chad and Cameroun.

Some scholars argued that Boko Haram gained international notoriety in 2014 when they kidnapped over 200 school girls in Chibok, Borno State Nigeria (Mohammed et al., 2025). This attack among others was enough to raise the international profile of the group. The global media attention to the Boko Haram insurgency was heightened by the magnitude of the abduction of these teenagers. It attracted wide media coverage and global reaction and concern. The Chibok abduction has a symbolic resonance that Boko Haram exploited. For instance, the leader of the group Abubakar Shekau infamously said he seized 'your young women' and that he would 'sell them in the market'. In this instance, 'your young women' to be sold 'in the market' symbolise the vision of moral disorder and the objectification of women. Shekau further mocked the bounty placed on his head and threatened to 'sell Presidents Jonathan and Obama into slavery'.

Given the growing profile, assessing the coverage of the insurgency by journalists provides a critical opportunity to further examine and understand the challenges journalists face in covering insurgency, especially in the Nigerian context. Hamza in Pate and Oso (2017) is of the view that 'The Boko Haram terrorism and violent extremism that ravaged the North-East Nigeria from 2009 to 2015 had exposed weakness in the safety policy and protocols for local journalists in times and zones of tension in Nigeria'.

The media which are often referred to as the watchdog of the society and the fourth estate of the realm, exist as an organ of information, education, promotion, surveillance, social enlightenment and mobilization (Msughter & Abba, 2017). These functions set the journalists in a position that much is expected from them in reporting and providing vital information about Boko Haram insurgency. Azeez cited in Ngigi et al., (2016) asserted that reporting on terrorism present a number of dilemmas and paradoxes to journalists, whose responsibility is to inform the public objectively, fairly and accurately.

3.4 Potential Synergy between Boko Haram and International Terrorists Groups

Given the sect's antecedents, Okpaga, Chijioke and Eme (2012) are of the view that 'the nature of violence unleashed by Boko Haram has heightened fears among the people and international community and that the hostility has gone beyond religious or political colouration'. Citing a report from Human Rights Watch (HRW), Okpaga et al., (2012) state that 'about 935 people have been killed since 2009 when the sect began its onslaught on the country. The authors conclude that the security challenge has become a great source of worry

since the crisis has shifted to the realm of terrorism. This is described as a global phenomenon where no one is safe. Expressing the same view, Karmon (2014) argues that the watershed event that marks Boko Haram's passage from a purely Nigerian phenomenon to an international jihadist actor was its attack on the United Nations Headquarters in Abuja, Nigeria's capital on August 26, 2011. Karmon (2014) further states that the organisation, 'Jama'at Ahlu Sunna li Da'waati li-Jihad, popularly known as Boko Haram (BH) rose to international prominence in 2010 and 2011, when it carried out a series of deadly attacks against the Nigerian government and detonated a car bomb at a United Nations building in Abuja, the capital.' According to the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, attacks between May and mid-December 2013 killed more than 1,200 people, a figure that does not include insurgents killed during targeted military operations (Karmon, 2014). The activity of the group is specifically captured by Karmon (2014) who states: Boko Haram targets include police stations, government buildings, churches, politicians, newspapers, banks, and schools. Their tactics include; drive-by shootings on motorcycles, the use of improvised explosive devices, and suicide bombings (Aondover et al., 2024).

From the foregoing, some researchers concluded that it is suggestive that the strategy and tactics of Boko Haram have a strong semblance with the Al-Qaeda group. They align their position with the conclusion of the American Foreign Policy Council in one of its reports that the potential for Boko Haram to evolve from being a local to a regional or global threat is clear, and there are signs that several Boko Haram factions have already abandoned Nigeria-oriented objectives in favour of embracing transnational militant objectives (Mustapha, 2019). Following this summation, Forest (2012) provides a series of evidence of Boko Haram's general alignment with Al-Qaeda on an ideological level as he states: "The grievances that animate their violent attacks are similar in terms of portraying Western globalisation and the status quo as inherently disadvantaging Muslims'. He further explains that both groups promulgate the view that politicians and wealthy elites have destroyed the purity of Islamic societies by allowing vices like prostitution, pornography, and alcohol to corrupt mankind.

This explains the ideological mission of Boko Haram as Minteh and Perry cited Mustapha (2019), the new leader of the group after the death of its leader Mohammed Yusuf. Umaru clarified the meaning of the phrase 'Boko Haram' which suggests that Western civilisation is prohibited, not specifically Western education, and he states: 'Boko Haram does not in any way mean 'Western education is a sin', as the infidel media continue to portray us'. Boko Haram means 'Western Civilisation is forbidden.' The difference is that while the first gives the impression that we are opposed to formal education coming from the West, which is not true, the second affirms our belief in the supremacy of Islamic culture (not education), for culture is broader. It includes education but it is not determined by Western education. In addition, Boko Haram and al-Qaeda members also share a belief in the superiority of governance by Sharia law instead of secular laws and claim to be defending Islam against Western influences that constrain or prevent Muslims from fulfilling their religious duties.

In this context, Al-Qaeda's ideology of 'think globally and act locally' is intended to inspire the kinds of attacks against authorities that Boko Haram has become known for (Forest, 2012). Drawing a comparative analysis of Boko Haram and Al-Qaeda. Mustapha (2019) have found that the locally-based terror group has much in common with Al-Qaeda. Even though Boko Haram operates at a local level in comparison to Al-Qaeda's international platform, a fundamental driving mechanism for these commonalities largely stems from the ideological vanguard characterising the two groups. One is purely based on religious factors geared towards saving the soul of Islam at all costs. Similarly, Gourley (2012) argues that the

group had largely been a domestic guerrilla movement focused on internal change before the August 26, 2011 bombing of the United Nations building. An act that indicated a change in tactical and strategic trajectory. This implies that while verbal overtures were made between the two groups, no official linkage was ever made, and many have discarded Boko Haram as a potential al Qaeda affiliate.

Nevertheless, Gourley (2012) posits that 'Boko Haram is not only an ideal fit for al Qaeda, but it is active in the process of becoming a franchise.' To determine if any potential synergies exist between the two groups, Gourley (2012) has drawn certain comparisons and contrasts between the two groups and the various al-Qaeda franchises. He noted that shortly after the attack on the UN headquarters in Abuja, Nigeria, Boko Haram was linked to Al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb and Somali Al Qaeda affiliate al Shabaab. These concerns are buttressed by documentation that verbal communications have been made between AQIM and Boko Haram (Aondover, 2017). However, the tactical linkages are not enough to draw similarities in the activities between the Boko Haram and Al-Qaeda groups. Instead, it is important to determine how each Al-Qaeda franchise acquired its status to determine if Boko Haram is on the same trajectory (Gourley, 2012). Szrom and Harnischi in Gourely (2012) have identified some common traits in all Al-Qaeda havens: 'underdevelopment, incompetent governance, and a citizenry disenfranchised by – or disillusioned with – the central government, an environment conducive to Al-Qaeda's presence and operations must also have a history of radical Islamism that Al-Qaeda operatives can exploit.'

Nigeria fits perfectly into Szrom and Harnisch's pattern of Al-Qaeda operating environments, excepting the history of radical Islam (Gourley, 2012). With the ideological component binding or linking Boko Haram to al Qaeda, it is no historical accident to see a common approach in strategy and technique between the two groups. Minteh and Perry succinctly analysed the strategies employed, 'Boko Haram and Al-Qaeda have used bombings (suicide and car bombs), targeted assassinations and arson attacks against perceived enemies. On several occasions, the use of cars and suicide bombs have been attributed to both groups. Al-Qaeda's first World Trade Centre attempt in 1993 was through a car bomb attack. The same is true for Boko Haram when it used car bombings in both the August 2011 attack on the UN compound in Abuja and the November 2012 attack on St. Andrew Military Protestant Church at the Jaji Barracks in Kaduna State. Minteh and Perry (2013) further pointed out the use of kidnapping as another fundamental strategy for both Al-Qaeda and Boko Haram, stating that over the years, both groups had carried out kidnappings in demand for ransoms, either in the form of money or a political shift.

Some scholars have noted that 'pressured by increased scrutiny of terrorist money sources and strikes aimed at its financiers, Al-Qaeda in Pakistan has turned to kidnap for ransom to offset dwindling cash reserves' while 'for the first time Boko Haram had similarly carried out kidnappings demanding ransom for the release of all its members or it will execute all the French citizens' (Mustapha, 2019). In addition, both groups propose the use of arson attacks as another form of strategy. Though Al-Qaeda has not used arson in the past, two issues were published in a magazine affiliated with the group. They have on many occasions called on western Muslims to use forest fire arson attacks in the US. In the same vein, Boko Haram has set fire to churches, schools, and homes in northern Nigeria, such as the December 2011 arson attacks on churches and schools, including the St. Theresa Catholic Church at Madallah, Suleja, and the First Baptist Church in Maiduguri, Borno State.

Therefore, in addition to having a common ideological component, Minteh and Perry (2013, p.18) have concluded the synthesis of operations of both Boko Haram and Al-Qaeda as having 'carried out operations with similar political, economic, and social implications on the global war on terror.' With their emergence as groups under the same radar of international counter-terrorism forces. Both groups embarked on targeted assassinations of mostly prominent political, community, and religious leaders sympathetic or supportive of international forces that toppled the Taliban regime.

Establishing the potential synergies between Boko Haram and Al-Qaeda group help in identifying common traits between Boko Haram and ISIS. This will allow journalists covering Boko Haram to understand and prepare for the risky assignment. ISIS members are jihadists who adhere to an extreme interpretation of Sunni Islam and consider themselves the only true believers (BBC, June 2015). Furthermore, it is averred that beheadings, crucifixions, and mass shootings have been used to terrorise their enemies. ISIS members have justified such atrocities by citing the Qur'an and Hadith, but Muslims have denounced them'. (BBC News, June 2015) Based on this, even Al-Qaeda leader, Ayman al-Zawahiri, who disavowed IS in February 2014 over its actions in Syria, warned Zarqawi in 2005 that such brutality loses Muslim hearts and minds' (BBC News, June 2015).

In her assessment of traits of terrorism in Boko Haram, Greig (2015) captures the group: "Boko Haram has been wreaking havoc in Africa's most populous country. The Nigerian militants are responsible for a six-year campaign of targeted bombings, assassinations, and abductions, killing 50 Friday alone." She further explains that the group's name, which can be translated as 'Western Education Is Forbidden,' has become infamous for kidnapping hundreds of schoolgirls as well as a vicious insurgency that has claimed the lives of thousands. Consequently, an international report on the gathered intelligence adds to the growing concerns that the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS) and Nigeria's Boko Haram has established direct links.

According to the British report, 'Intelligence agencies are concerned that what were once symbolic links between ISIS and Boko Haram have now developed into a practical relationship with the Islamic State offering advice on strategy and tactics'. Emboldened by the success of ISIS and now seemingly armed with armoured vehicles and artillery, observers said Boko Haram was 'beginning to operate more like a conventional army in Borno and the neighbouring north-eastern states of Adamawa and Yobe'. It was further noted that Boko Haram's actions in the last ten years have frequently mimicked those of ISIS from punishments such as stoning and beheading of its victims to taking territory and an increasingly sophisticated use of social media that's very much in the ISIS 'style' (Milmo & Witherow, 2014).

Researchers have argued that Boko haram has allegiance to ISIS. They justify by citing an audio message purported to be from its leader, Abubakar Shekau, who has rebranded swearing allegiance to ISIS and renaming itself the Islamic States of West Africa Province (Mustapha, 2019). The audio message according to Cable Network News (CNN) states: 'allegiance to the Caliph of the Muslims, Ibrahim ibn Awad ibn Ibrahim al-Husseini al-Qurashi' which is another name for ISIS leader, Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi. Subsequently, another audio message by an Islamic State group representative announced that Boko Haram's pledge had been accepted by the militant group's leader and went on to congratulate 'our jihadi brothers' in West Africa. Significantly, the alliance grants Boko Haram legitimacy in the world

of Islamic extremism; a world where recruiting, funding and marketing are as important as in any corporation (Greig, 2015).

Since Boko Haram's allegiance to ISIS, the group has set a terrifying new precedent by releasing its first gruesome video of a beheading. The video adopts many of the same style as the hundreds of barbaric videos released by ISIS over the past years (Akbar, 2015). Counter-normative violence especially beheading, has emerged as a key component of the Islamic State (IS) strategy in Iraq and Syria, and has served to distinguish its 'brand' of violence from others in the global jihadi struggle for hearts and minds'. Although, IS currently stands out for embracing beheading as a defining element of their brand, the practice is also widespread in Mexico's drug war from the standpoint of organisational perspective, beheadings distinguish the Islamic States' brand of violence from that of its Al-Qaeda rivals in Syria, the al-Nusrah Front. In addition, beheadings signal to other factions that the Islamic State claims to be the legitimate heir to the broader regional movement.

3.5 Risks in Reporting Boko Haram

Boko Haram represents the vision and mission of a fundamentalist Islamic movement in Nigeria. It is also known as Jama'atu Ahlis Sunna Lidda'awati wal-Jihad (people committed to the propagation of the prophet's teachings and Jihad), which seeks to Islamise Nigeria by whatever means at its disposal and at whatever human cost. This leads it into the category of terrorism. So far, the dastardly activities of this sect have been confined to the Northern states and the Federal Capital Territory (Ajayi, 2012). However, the prophet of Islam who they claim to propagate his teachings was not a terrorist, and neither did he teach terrorism.

Boko Haram has threatened and carried out attacks on journalists and media outlets for reports deemed unfavourable to their cause (Owens-Ibie & Aondover, 2025). Several journalists have relocated from Boko Haram strongholds in Nigeria's northern regions. Others routinely exercise self-censorship. According to the interviews with journalists by the Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ), 'many journalists have resigned their appointments because of fear of being killed' (Nkanga, 2014). Eight Nigerian journalists have been murdered for their work since 1998. Among the most recent victims was Zakariya Isa of the state-run broadcaster Nigeria Television Authority (NTA) in a killing for which Boko Haram claimed responsibility in October 2011. About a month before the killing, Boko Haram had issued a statement saying it would attack media organisations for what it described as misrepresentations of its activities.

The report states: 'Boko Haram perceived cameramen and photographers, particularly those working for state media, as potential spies'. In an emailed statement issued after the killing, Boko Haram spokesman, Abul Qaqa said the militants killed Isa 'because he was spying on us for Nigerian security authorities' (CPJ, 2011). Following Isa's killing in January 2012, Enenche Akogwu an independent broadcaster with Channels TV was slain by unidentified gunmen as he interviewed witnesses after bombings blamed on Boko Haram (Nkanga, 2014). According to CPJ's 2012 report, Akogwu had just returned from a police news conference following coordinated bombings by the extremist Islamist group, Boko Haram that left at least 178 people dead. Kayode Akintemi, Channels TV General Manager of Operations described Akogwu as 'a very hard-working journalist who travels to some of the most dangerous places in northern Nigeria to get these stories'.

The statement is an indication of Akogwu's doggedness in reporting the activities of the Boko Haram group in its northern enclave. Shortly after the killing of Akogwu, for the

first time since Boko Haram began a series of deadly bomb attacks, it turned its attention to the media in April 2012. It unleashed a string of coordinated attacks on three media houses in Abuja and Kaduna, killing nine (9) people in the process (Otuchikere et al., 2012). The three media houses attacked by the bombers were the Abuja office of *This Day* Newspaper, and *The Sun* and *The Moment* offices in Kaduna which were hit simultaneously by the blasts (Otuchikere, et al., 2012).

The Boko Haram group identified deliberate misinformation being peddled about it in Nigerian and foreign media as a major reason for its onslaught on the media (*Premium Times*, 2012).

The spokesperson for the sect, Abul Qaqa stated: We have repeatedly cautioned reporters and media houses to be professional and objective in their reports. This is a war between us and the government of Nigeria; unfortunately, the media have not been objective and fair in their report of the ongoing war, they choose to take side (Madunagu, 2012). This indicates that the Boko Haram group identifies subjective and unfair reporting of its group's activities as the major reason for its attacks on the media and its practitioners. Qaqa further explained that *This Day's* 'sins are more grievous', for the newspaper had 'once insulted the Prophet Muhammed in 2001 and we have not forgotten'. They recently said our Imam executed me which is false; here I am speaking to you, I am alive and healthy' (Madunagu, 2012). Qaqa warned of more attacks on the media. He states: 'We have just started this new campaign against the media and we will not stop here, we will hit the media hard since they have refused to listen to our plea for them to be fair in their reportage' (*Premium Times*, 2012).

Consequently, in July 2015 the Boko Haram group threatened to kill Adeola Akinremi, the Feature Editor for *This Day*. The death threat was issued after the journalist wrote a piece titled, 'Why Boko Haram don't deserve our amnesty.' The editor wrote it after his return from Adamawa State to investigate killings by the insurgents and the plight of the Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs). The warning email suspected to have been written by Boko Haram and published by the Cable reads: 'We have seen your hand against us. 'In sha Allah' you will die like other infidels that we have captured' (*Daily Post*, 2015). *Daily Post* succinctly described the death sentence passed on Akinremi by the Boko Haram group, thus:

You have been joining our enemies. You have made yourself their mouth but we will get you 'in sha Allah'. This is a holy mission for Allah, so stop writing against us. You are going to Michika calling yourself a brave journalist, but you are a coward. We will get you. It is your government that talks of amnesty, we are not looking for amnesty. Allah is with us. You are now a walking dead and prey to the Lions of Islam from the bullet of a passing car or a nearby rooftop (*Daily Post*, 2015).

The mention of death 'from the bullet of a passing car or a nearby rooftop' indicates a threat of assured death for Akinremi. The reports further warned:

We are not asking you to repent, because of your error we will use your blood to send warnings to others. Those people from America and Europe that are using you against our mission will soon know the truth. Our wounded fighters will never give up. They will return to fight for Allah to get their reward. Your soldier will soon know the truth (*Daily Post*, 2015).

According to Mustapha (2019), the invocation of threat in this statement is an indication that the Boko Haram group has unleashed a new war on Nigerian journalists and the media. Consequent to the death threat, Akinremi kept a low profile and scaled down his writing on issues relating to Boko Haram as he and his family fear a potential attack.' He states: 'I don't know what can happen anytime, anywhere. I have requested a police report on the update of their investigation. I have not heard anything yet' (CPJ, 2015). This is a clear indication that journalists covering the activities of Boko Haram are operating within the context of risks and intimidation.

IV. Conclusion

This paper has demonstrated that the relationship between media and terrorism, particularly in the Nigerian context, is both complex and consequential. News coverage of the Boko Haram insurgency reveals not only the challenges of reporting in a volatile security environment but also the power of the media in framing public perceptions of terrorism. While the media serves as a crucial source of information for citizens and policymakers, the tendency toward sensationalism, heavy reliance on government narratives, and limited interrogation of the socio-economic roots of terrorism have contributed to a narrow understanding of the insurgency. Such patterns inadvertently risk amplifying Boko Haram's propaganda by reinforcing fear and insecurity among the public. The study underscores the urgent need for Nigerian journalists and media organizations to adopt more balanced, conflict-sensitive approaches that emphasise context, human impact, and peace-oriented narratives. By fostering a more responsible media practice, the Nigerian press can play a transformative role in countering extremist ideologies, promoting national cohesion, and contributing to long-term peacebuilding efforts in regions affected by terrorism.

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