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Author(s) : Osakue Stevenson OMOERA, Kehinde Oghenekevwe AKE

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이화여자대학교
EWHW WOMANS UNIVERSITY

Extreme Violence and the Media: Challenges of Reporting Terrorism in Nigeria¹

Osakue Stevenson OMOERA (Ambrose Alli University)
Kehinde Oghenekevwe AKE (University of Abuja)

I. Introduction

The importance of information in contemporary society cannot be overemphasised as an uninformed person could be said to be a disabled person. In an age that is characterised by technological and scientific literacy, there is very little or nothing one can do if one lacks access to information—the effect would be crippling if not deadly. To bridge this lacuna, the media function or operate to transmit thoughts, ideas, messages, and accounts of events to human society as they occur (Uyo, *Mass Media Messages* 1–2; *Mass Communication Media* 18). Hence, one of the key roles of the media is the provision of information to maintain social order and ensure effective development communication in society. The more robust the information dissemination infrastructure (IDI) is, the safer the human community, whether in the busiest cities or the remotest villages, would be. In Nigeria, like everywhere else in the world, the human factors, that is, the information purveyors, the journalists or media professionals, are critical to the effectiveness of the IDI and the peculiar challenges which they are confronted with, especially in this period of global terrorism, is worth investigating. This article makes a contribution to the

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1. The initial draft of this paper was entitled “Peculiar Challenges Confronted by Press in Reporting Terrorism,” which was presented by the corresponding author in the Countering Violent Extremism (CVE) Media Roundtable organised by the Office of the National Security Adviser (ONSA) in Collaboration with the European Union Technical Assistance to Nigeria’s Evolving Security Challenges (EUTANS), that held from 27th–28th October, 2015 at the Sheraton, Abuja. The authors are appreciative of the facilitators of the event, especially Elizabeth Pearson, Kayode Adebisi, Jacob Zenn, and Zakari Mijinyawa, among others, for providing a congenial platform for the meeting of minds on how the media could be used to address violent extremism in Nigeria.

growing body of knowledge on violent extremism in West Africa, with specific regard to the peculiar challenges Nigerian media professionals are faced with in reporting terrorist activities.

Since the terrorist attack on the United States of America's (USA's) soil at the World Trade Centre (WTC), the urgency for information dissemination, intelligence processing and sharing has become heightened and more compelling globally. The media frenzy in the wake of the WTC attack (now dubbed 9/11 terrorist attack) made the then USA's president, George W. Bush to retort that "you are either with us or you are with the terrorists" (Nacos 13). This was a charge to American journalists not to climb on the bandwagon of what Brigitte Nacos conceptualised as the "mass-mediated terrorism" (13). In recognition of the far-reaching support of the media in lending voice to the demands of terrorists, Margaret Thatcher, British Prime Minister for 11 years, called the media the "oxygen" of terrorists (Muller, Spaaij, and Ruitenberg 15). Thatcher's viewpoint may have been informed by the likelihood that the media or media professionals, while reporting terror acts, could inadvertently magnify or amplify the effects beyond normal proportions, thereby becoming tools in the hands of terrorists. Although Thatcher's suggestion is for the media or media operators not to report terror acts at all in order to stifle the intentions of terrorists, media organizations find themselves in a kind of dilemma as they are expected to fulfil their avowed informational roles to the public as well as make money to remain in 'business' or continue operations.

Today, it appears the Daesh, with such appellations as the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) or Islamic State of Syria and the Levant (ISIL), etc., Al Shabbab, al-Qaida, Boko Haram, and other extremists groups have become very conscious of this dilemma of the media and try to take advantage of it in their terrorist campaigns in parts of Europe, Africa, and elsewhere, as they tend to incorporate the media (whether their internally-operated or sponsored ones, especially on social media platforms such as ISIS's *Dabiq* or *al-Naba* or *Amaq* news agency and the broader media) in their indoctrination, radicalization, and propaganda agenda. It is probably because of this seeming catch-22 situation that Justice Ray argues that the role of the media has to change with the twin duty to give instantaneous global news in the context or vortex of alternative views leading to complex situations and to strike a balance between people's right to know on the one side and national security and social ethics on the other (2).

Media scholars are divided on whether the role of the media should

primarily be to serve the information needs of the reader/public or exercise restraints in reporting terrorism. Whatever leaning one takes, the call is for the media to show a sense of obligation and serve the overall good of society. At this juncture, it is imperative to conceptualise terrorism. Terrorism has been signposted as

the premeditated use or threat of use of violence by an individual or a group to cause fear, destruction or death, especially against unarmed targets, property or infrastructure in a state, intended to compel those in authority to respond to the demands and expectations of the individual or group behind such violent acts.” (Onuoha and Ezirim 2–3)

Regardless of the proliferation of other emerging definitions of terrorism, the thrust of every definition anchors on the quest of the terrorists to resonate their acts. There is no better medium to amplify this in contemporary world than the media. In Nigeria, almost on a daily basis, the media is riddled with reports of bombings in the north-eastern flanks of the country, including Maiduguri, Konduga, Kaure, Bama, Gwoza, Biu, Damboa, Michika, and Madagali, where Boko Haram appears to hold sway.

Although there are other groups whose violent activities are of extreme proportions (e.g., the so-called Fulani herdsmen terrorists who terrorize virtually every geopolitical zone in Nigeria; the Niger Delta Avengers), the bestiality and inhumanness of Boko Haram, which according to Onuoha, has now metamorphosed into the Islamic State West African Province (ISWAP), is unparalleled in the annals of violent extremism in Nigeria or West Africa (1). Onuoha further claims that “more than 17,000 people have been killed in Boko Haram’s six-year quest to create an independent state but the violence has been mainly confined to Nigeria’s Muslim-majority north” (1). Indeed, the Institute for Economics and Peace in its global terrorism index states that “Boko Haram has become the deadliest terrorist group in the world, even ahead of ISIS which it pledges allegiance to” (8). A great deal of research gives credence to the claim that terrorism instils fear in societies (European Commission 42). Also, observable evidence as indicated in media reports on the Charlie Hebdo and Bataclan concert hall attacks in Paris, France in January and November 2015; airport and train station suicide bomb attacks in Brussels, Belgium in March 2016; hotel terror attack in Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso in January 2016; shopping mall attack in Nairobi, Kenya in September 2013; *ThisDay*

Newspaper bomb attack in Abuja, Nigeria in April 2012, underline the fact that for the seeming fear to thrive, the media have inadvertently become instruments of transference. The foregoing hinges on the interplay between the media and the terrorists. The society needs information to thrive; the media is obligated to deliver on the informational needs of society and the terrorists need the media to magnify their gratuitous destruction of lives and properties (Glupker 13).

In this complex relationship, the media stand at a crossroads as the public feeds on the media's informational offerings which serve the society, including the media and their operators, the terrorists, and depending on the orientation of the news reports, the listening public are likely to be victims or accidental culprits. Hence, the relationship between the media, the public or society and the terrorist groups tend to be skewed against the public or society generally. Indeed, terrorism and terrorists target everybody, regardless of one's religion, race, gender, or place of origin, "from ISIS in France to Boko Haram in Nigeria terrorism has struck everyone" (Osei-Opare 37).

II. Theoretical Scaffold

Theoretically, this article is hinged on the media theories of agenda-setting and gate-keeping. First, it employs the agenda setting theory (AST), through which some media and communication scholars gauged people's reactions to election campaigns in the US and elsewhere through critical analyses of campaign messages in the media in the 1970s (McCombs and Shaw 176–87). Over the years AST has demonstrated that the more attention the media pay to a subject matter, the more importance is given to it by a media audience (McQuail 10). Furthermore, Marcel Okhakhu posits that the media, particularly the press, determine what is considered crucial and relevant in society and it is this ability to confer importance that sets it out (94). Lang and Lang (qtd. in Folarin 27) assert that two factors in agenda setting should be primed:

1. the 'reciprocal effect,' concerned with the very presence of the media at the scene of an event; and
2. the 'landslide effect,' which refers to the (usually exaggerated) impressions created by the kind of media handling or reporting—

waving crowd, ovations, booing, and so on.

In view of this, the media could be apprehended as pivots which confer importance on the issues they bring to the public domain or space for critical discussion and remediation where necessary. For this reason, it is believed that the media wield formidable “powers” that allow them to “dictate” what the public talks or thinks about. Twinning the AST in this study is the gate-keeping theory (GKT). The theory draws on the dynamic nexus between the array of news available to the media and the need to “weed” some out in order for others to “grow,” with a view to maintain balance. Stuart Soroka underscores the importance of gate-keeping in news media activities, thus:

Media gate-keeping has been well-studied. We know that journalists and editors have to select from a wide range of stories. We know that selection is systematically biased, driven by a combination of organisational factors, news norms, and audience interests. And we know that the resulting news content is skewed towards stories that are, for instance, more sensational, and/or unusual, and/or conflictual, and/or geographically proximate. (514)

The above, to some extent, captures the choice news media men and women have to make in the face of overwhelming number of events against a backdrop of other contending issues. The implication of these theoretical constructs is that through the process of priming, framing, screening, selection, and conferring importance, stories about Boko Haram’s terrorist activities can be consciously allowed to pass through the “gates” kept by the reporters, editors, among other media professionals. Thus, stories/news items on Boko Haram extremism permeate the spaces and airtimes of the print and electronic media, apparently, to ensure the issue remains in the public domain and the populace is kept abreast of the dimensions, perspectives, and attempts at curtailing the excesses of the terror group (Omoera and Ogah 69). The contemplation here is that there is every likelihood that through such a deliberate strategy, media professionals could engender a paradigm shift in news reporting activities, which would, in turn, increase the level of awareness on terrorism and terrorist acts among the Nigerian populace, and in so doing, stem the tide of wanton destruction of lives and properties, including that of journalists.

III. Terrorism and the News Media Interface

According to the United Nations, terrorism is:

An anxiety-inspiring method of repeated violent action employed by (semi)-clandestine individual, group or state actors, for idiosyncratic, criminal or political reasons, whereby in contrast to assassination—the direct targets of violence are not the main targets. (par. 5)

Drawing on this, one comes away with the idea that terrorism is a heinous crime, which transcends the targeted victims. Its primary object is to instil fear in the minds of those who the terrorists are yet to physically attack. In any case, the ripple effects of terrorist acts need a medium to travel to get to the real and imaginary victims as well as governmental and nongovernmental organizations. In the thinking of the terrorists, what better vessel to relay such fears other than the media? Daily, the media is flooded with news of terror attacks. For instance: “Nine Dead in Suspected Boko Haram Attack in Borno” (Adekunle 1); in Nigeria-Niger border, another deadly Islamic militants emerged: killed 26 and injured 30 (Ireporterstv 1); the bombing of the United Nations Headquarters in Abuja that killed over 23 and maimed others on August 26, 2011 (*BBC News* 1). These news reports speak to the fact that such attacks were done to psychologically assault and hem in people as well as draw international attention in an ideologically skewed manner.

The internationalisation of terror acts is readily made possible via media platforms. In a split second, news channels are agog with terrorists’ heinous acts. Sharkdam Wapmurk, Oluwatooni Akinkuotu, and Vincent Ibonye argue that terrorists see the media as a political weapon of terror which serve their cause(s), but not in the same sense as of media professionals or organisations (324–25). They want to gain an aura of legitimisation that such media attention fetches them. A boost in audience/readership would be as a result of their prolonged acts of terror. The media itself reaps from this relationship with the terrorists. For Marshall McLuhan, “real news is bad news—bad news about somebody or bad news for somebody” (294–95). He further confers on the press the status of a “private confessional form” wherein he infers that the more sensational the confession, the more attention it gets (295). Both the print and electronic media benefit hugely from relaying sensational and gory events. This explains why media outfits like to register their presence at scenes of mishaps

or attacks so they can feed their audience the blood-curdling happenings. The news media audience demonstrate an appetite for such offerings. For instance, the *Sun Newspaper* in Nigeria is widely known for “heartbreaking” news coverage. Its front page is usually splashed with horrific headlines and images which attract people to ‘reward’ their curiosity.

Television stations which are able to tap into breaking news of terror attacks usually hold audience members spellbound to their screens. Terror acts of kidnapping, maiming, hijacking, bombings, etc., lie within the domain of eliciting symbolic or ritualistic acts of cohesion which are features of coronation, conquests, and contests (Dayan and Katz 92). The media will confer importance on any event with any or all of these features and without difficulty put the same in the public domain with the hope of gaining attention. It is no surprise; therefore, Richard Morin claims that the kinship between the media and terrorism is “a macabre example of win-win in what economists call a ‘common-interest game’” (par. 2). In view of this, Adesina Azeez argues that:

Reporting on terrorism presents a number of dilemmas and paradoxes to journalists whose responsibility is to inform the public objectively, fairly and accurately. It is a dilemma to them because one of the main objectives of a terrorist act is to maximize publicity in order to create a psychological effect on the public. This leads to some questions concerning the role of the media in reporting terrorism. (1)

In other words, both the media and terrorists tend to ‘profit’ from or take advantage of terrorist incidents. On the one hand, terrorists get free publicity for themselves and their inordinate causes. On the other hand, the media make money as reports of terror attacks increase newspaper sales or the number of television viewers or traffic on social media sites. Hence, the attendant ‘rewards’ of magnifying terror activities to gain readership/viewership motivate the media to select, exclude, and include news items. The media are keen on subscribing to terrorists-induced coverage because there is a growing competition among news media organisations or professionals. To keep ahead, they tend to indulge in coverage that has gory details to gain ratings, arrest audience attention, circulation and ultimately profit (Nacos 16).

In the same vein, the media culture is noted for the violent nature of television in recent times and it is crucial to the semiotic and financial earnings of the outfit (Lewis 5). Regardless of the seeming symbiotic relationship

between the two entities, there are instances where the media have received a backlash of attacks from terrorists who felt labelled or defined as “evil.” In Nigeria, for example, *ThisDay Newspaper’s* office was bombed on 26th April 2012. Another news media office was also bombed in Kaduna the same day while a number of journalists have either lost their lives or got maimed as a result of terror acts in Nigeria and elsewhere. It is precisely these kinds of situations that make us highlight the need for the media to be an effective ‘gatekeeper,’ which filters news reports on terrorist crimes and propaganda. In so doing, media professionals must strive to come up with solutions to lessen the negative impacts of terrorist acts by way of gate-keeping and setting the agenda for change in their news reports.

IV. Challenges of Reporting Terrorism in Nigeria and the West African Province

The culpable-media and the vulnerable media models advanced by Kevin Barnhurst examine the culpability and victimisation of the media (112). In the first place, the media is blamed for being an accomplice to the crimes of terrorism by reporting the wrecking ball messages of the terrorists. By conveying these messages to a larger audience, terrorists are buoyed to further blood-let and this gets ‘covered’ too by the media. It becomes a vicious cycle that can hardly be broken. The second model which treats the media as a victim of terrorists or terror acts proposes that with the emerging cut-throat competition among media professionals, even if some media outfits or operators refuse to purvey or escalate terror messages, others would. This attitude makes a victim of the media as the ‘breaking news culture’ imbibed by contemporary news media organizations makes each of them to strive to be the first to relay a ‘developing story’ in their news feeds, whether the information supplied is harmful or not (Barnhurst 114). Caught in this proverbial web between the devil and the deep blue sea, the global media, including the Nigerian media, is confronted with serious challenges of how to disseminate terror messages without aiding terror acts/terrorists or being victims. It is in this connection that we examine some of the challenges the Nigerian media professionals face and some strategies to remediate them.

Craze for Sensationalism: In the wake of global terrorist attacks, the global media have been caught in the mesh of sensationalizing news reports.

For instance, the media hype that surrounded the attack on WTC in USA in 2001 supports the claim that the 21st century media is extraordinarily sensational in its reportage. The live coverage of the happenings, the mangled bodies, the death toll and gory reportage unintentionally helped to ‘massage’ the ego of mindless terrorists who rabidly sought sensational news coverage for their dastardly acts. In Nigeria, many people have become traumatised or distraught as a result of being exposed to broadcast or print media coverage of suicide bomb attacks, especially those carried out by indoctrinated children in the cities of Abuja, Kano, Suleja, Maiduguri, town of Bosso in southern Niger Republic, and so forth. In a bid to outdo each other, most Nigerian media organisations respond to the human and infrastructural carnage, with a worrying departure from the norms of objectivity, prudence and calmness. Terrorists tend to catch in on such media ‘confusion’ in terms of sensational or dramatic reportage to indoctrinate, radicalise, and enlist new members into their fold. With caution and etiquette thrown to the winds, Nigerian media professionals appear to be at sixes and sevens, thereby imperilling themselves in the line of duty.

Matters are made worse for the average Nigerian media professional because of the many years of mis-governance, political and religious crises in the areas where Boko Haram operate as it appears to be winning an increasing number of sympathisers who now enlist as its members, alongside others who are coerced to join the terror group. This negative development is likely due to the asymmetric reportage occasioned by sensationalism in the Nigerian media and that of its neighbouring countries of Cameroun, Niger, Chad, among others. Therefore, there is the need to counter such media narratives, which subtly ‘project’ Boko Haram agenda, without knowing it. For instance, the media professionals or journalists would do well to emphasise the efforts of the Nigerian military and its allies from neighbouring countries against the seeming ‘successes’ of Boko Haram by downplaying, for instance, the hit and run suicide missions the terror group has recently adopted, both visually and aurally in the media.

It is worth restating that Nigerian media professionals must strike a balance between the demand and supply of terror reportage. First, on sensationalism/dramatization of terror events or transnational organised crimes (TOCs), the media should as a matter of urgency play down on reporting spectacularly terrible acts. The catch is that if the terrorists aim at using the media to amplify their acts, playing down on them will not only reduce the media’s use for

publicity but also bring about a decline in the level of fear permeating the public space. In this regard, the Nigerian experience where the Nigerian army issues press releases to douse the tension at the public level after each media furore in terms of reportage on Boko Haram carnage is commendable and should be emulated by the broader media in Nigeria and the West Africa region.

Poor Networking among Nigerian Media Professionals: A majority of the Nigerian media professionals in a bid to sensationalise their reports on terror acts tend to work at cross purposes with their colleagues on the one hand and the Nigerian military and other security operatives on the other hand. The terrorists tend to capitalise on this poor networking to further unleash terror on the Nigerian populace, especially in towns and villages in Borno, Adamawa, and Yola and communities in neighbouring countries. Hence, there is the need for a collective effort of both purveyors of “soft power” including media professionals, intelligence officers and “hard power,” including the military to stop the marauding Boko Haram insurgents from gaining grounds among the Nigerian populace.

To this end, the issue of poor media infrastructure, particularly in north-eastern Nigeria must be addressed to enhance networking among journalists working in that area. This is critical for achieving the desired results of checking the excesses of the Boko Haram sect, which appears to have penetrated the grassroots populace in Borno, Adamawa and Yola communities through the use of posters, CDs, VCDs, tracts, etc., containing indoctrinating messages. Besides, practising Nigerian journalists must update their knowledge on how to take advantage of new information and communication technologies (ICTs) in networking among themselves and reporting terrorist acts or TOCs. Gone are the days of “we don’t have equipment to work with” because only the lazy journalist would say he or she is unaware of the latest electronic news gathering (ENG) and satellite news gathering (SNG) gadgets that are available, which could greatly enhance networking and reportorial activities.

Subjectivity: One of the hallmarks of journalism is objectivity. Oftentimes, media critics have accused the media of unbalanced news reportage. The news is often skewed for effect, thus, tilting to subjectivity in favour of terror vendors or mongers. Mark Blaisse observes that the media have become susceptible to influences that hinder objective and accurate reporting (138). Harping on the entertainment role of the media, he bemoans the value placed on entertainment rather than fair reports (138). With particular reference to the Boko Haram issue, it has been argued in some quarters that the terrorist sect has infiltrated

the ranks of the broader media in Nigeria (Liman 5). This is due, largely, to pecuniary motives as some unpatriotic journalists have had to one-sidedly trumpet the activities of Boko Haram because they are on the pay roll of the sect.

Unfortunately, this is a very pervasive challenge in the Nigerian media, with regard to the coverage of terrorism-related acts. The primary duty of the media is to serve public good by not being partisan or prejudiced. The point being made is that even though good and bad news should go hand in hand but bad news must not triumph over good news, for whatever reason. For instance, activities of the Nigerian military and other security operatives, including local vigilantes in communities besieged by the Boko Haram sect should be consistently lauded in media reports to strengthen public confidence in these institutions while the terror sect's acts are time and again toned down.

Stereotypes: The media have ingrained in our subconscious the images of terrorists in such a way that the public is not allowed to rationalise against what the media label it. Azeez contends that the definition and labelling of terrorists is ideological, and constructed in a closed way that gives little room for negotiation of meaning of the terrorists on the part of the target audience on whom it is being imposed (3). The media define terrorism with the stories they carry, the images that accompany them, the re-enactment of past terrors in films and docu-drama. These offerings shape our mental perception of terrorism. This is a serious challenge the Nigerian media as well as those in the West Africa region have to come to terms with and address. Indeed, Stuart Hall argues that in stereotyping terrorism through labelling and definitions,

A symbolic frontier between the normal and the deviant and the normal and the pathological, the acceptable and the unacceptable, what belongs and what does not or is other, between insiders and outsiders, us and them. (258)

The implication of Hall's input is that the media create a divide between us and terrorists, leaving us with a belief that the terrorists want us to subscribe to; a belief that mythologizes terror sects. It is the job of the Nigerian journalist to detect and resist such instruments of psychological warfare.

Language: Another challenge the Nigerian media professionals are confronted with in covering terror-induced events is the use of evaluative language. The temptation to use horrifying metaphors to paint pictures of

savage acts of terrorism is so gratifying that the average Nigerian journalist, like his or her counterparts elsewhere, hardly knows when their language becomes detrimental to the physical and mental well being of the audience. It is probably in recognition of the need to regulate the terror lexicon that the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) developed an in-house reporting style for war, terror, and emergency stories (Liman 5). In the guideline, rather than call them terrorists, bombers, attackers, and gunmen, they are identified as kidnappers, insurgents, and militants. This is to play down on the emotions these lexicons evoke in the audience members. In the same vein, some scholars are now routing for what they call peace journalism to counter the concept of war journalism (Udo-Udo 1).

Differentiation: Differentiation, with regard to violent acts or TOCs, is a vexed issue in the Nigerian mediascape and, indeed, in the whole of West African province. Hence, it is imperative for both the new and traditional media operating in this region to properly differentiate terrorism from other forms of vices in their reportage. Armed robbery and other criminal acts should not be lumped with terrorism. Ethnic and communal clashes or upheavals should be delineated from terrorism. Having a clear perspective on what is at issue will go a long way in avoiding the purveyance of provocative statements to the public. The situation of Fulani cattle farmers in parts of the north central, south eastern, south western, and south southern Nigeria who frequently clash with other ethnic groups, and whose group may have been infiltrated by terrorist elements across Nigerian borders comes to mind.

If the media continue to prime them as terrorists, however loosely, it could lead to them being treated as terrorists, which would result in reprisal attacks. This has been the recent scenario across the country, with accusations and counter accusations being purveyed in the media to the detriment of national security and unity in the country. As well, the Shiite Muslim group in Kaduna, northern Nigeria is currently brewing a legal showdown with the Nigerian army due to an attack on its members. Such scenarios could easily lead to the breakdown of law and order in parts of the country if the media fail to differentiate ethnic or religious clashes from the terrorist acts as perpetrated by Boko Haram.

Ambiguity: Terrorists engage in war in the media-sphere with the aim of transmitting fear to the public en-route the media. Their propensity to own media airtimes, be splashed on pages of newspapers, dominate the online media is borne out of the attendant 'rewards.' In January 2015, *Nairaland*

(an online media forum in Nigeria) reported the Nigerian army's response to a news coverage by Cable News Network (CNN), which alleged that some Nigerian soldiers bought their own kits to fight the deadly terrorist sect, Boko Haram, and that they (Nigerian soldiers) take care of themselves when injured (par. 1). This allegation by a section of "credible" media deals a great blow to the psyche of the Nigerian populace who are grappling with terrorism amidst other national woes, including massive official corruption, economic recession, and senseless political wrangling. The report is ambiguous as it does not clearly state what exactly happened. It is, perhaps, because such situations that Abraham Kisang advises that "there is an urgent need to develop guidelines for journalists covering terrorist attacks in Kenya and in the world" (83). Hence, both local and transnational/international media must refrain from such acts and toe the line of patriotism, national cohesion, and respect for international protocols.

As part of the panoply of strategies to deal with the challenges of reporting terrorism in Nigeria, we wholly reproduce for the guidance of Nigerian media professionals, the European Union Technical Assistance to Nigeria's Evolving Security Challenges (EUTANS) framework for reporting violent extremism responsibly (1–2). Accordingly, the framework in its stream A, posits that journalism entails a high degree of public trust. To earn and maintain this trust, it is morally imperative for every journalist and news medium to observe the highest professional and ethical standards. In the exercise of these duties, a journalist should always have a healthy regard for public interest. Truth is the cornerstone of journalism and every journalist must strive diligently to ascertain the truth of every event. The following EUTANS' guideposts could be of great benefit to practising journalists in Nigeria as they go about their investigative and reportorial tasks:

1. Editorial Independence: Decisions concerning the content of news should be the responsibility of a professional journalist.
2. Accuracy and Fairness:
 - i. The public has the right to know. Factual, accurate balance and fair reporting is the ultimate objective of good journalism and the basis of earning public trust and confidence.
 - ii. A journalist should refrain from publishing inaccurate and misleading information. Where such information has been inadvertently published, prompt correction should be made. A journalist must hold the right to reply as a cardinal rule of practice.

- iii. In the course of his or her duties a journalist should strive to separate facts from conjecture and comment.
3. Privilege/Non-disclosure:
 - i. A journalist should observe the universally accepted principle of confidentiality and should not disclose the source of information obtained in confidence.
 - ii. A journalist should not breach an agreement with a source of information obtained as “off-the-record.”
4. Reward and Gratification:
 - i. A journalist should neither solicit nor accept bribe, gratification, or patronage to suppress or publish information.
 - ii. To demand payment for the publication of news is inimical to the notion of news as fair, accurate, unbiased, and factual report of an event.
5. Violence: A journalist should not present acts of violence, armed robberies, terrorist activities, or vulgar display of wealth in a manner that glorifies such acts in the eyes of the public.
6. Access to Information: A journalist should strive to employ open and honest means in the gathering of information. Exceptional methods may be employed only when the public interest is at stake.
7. Public Interest: A journalist should strive to enhance national unity and public good.
8. Social Responsibility: A journalist should promote universal principles of human rights, democracy, justice, equity, peace, and international understanding.
9. Press Freedom and Responsibility: A journalist should strive at all times to enhance press freedom and responsibility (EUTANS 1–2).

The contemplation here is that when the Nigerian journalist lives by such guideposts he or she is bound to act more responsibly and responsively in the course of carrying out his or her duties, especially in the age of transnational terrorism.

V. Conclusion

In a 21st century world where terrorism appears to have taken roots, the

public more than ever before need the media, both local and international, to responsibly report on events that border on the security of lives and properties. Governments at different levels also need to recognise this influence of the media in order to be able to sensitize their citizens on appropriate security measures to take in the event of a terror attack. In the Nigerian context, the terror sect, Boko Haram, appears to also realise the power of the media in its propaganda, radicalisation, and recruitment of members. Hence, it deploys different media channels to mobilise and win the sympathy of the populace, particularly in the Moslem-majority north—the terror sect deliberately exhibit destructive propensities for the media to relay to its immediate and remote victims, whether physically or psychologically. This is a huge challenge for the Nigerian media, which are expected to “suffocate” such narrative. The onus, therefore, is on media professionals and relevant state actors to counter or change the terror sect’s narrative by way of setting the agenda. In so doing, they must proactively gate-keep, in whatever way possible, what the extremist group seeks to transmit in order to mitigate the programmed negative consequences on the populace in Nigeria in particular and the West African province generally.

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Abstract

Reporting terrorism or extreme violence presents a myriad of challenges and dilemmas to media professionals, information managers, and other state actors who are saddled with the responsibilities of objectively, responsibly, and accurately purveying information to ensure effective development communication in society. By the same token, insurgent or terrorist groups spread their inordinate causes, transmit their messages of radicalisation, and garner support, recognition, and legitimacy from the populace through media channels such as handbills, internet, radio, and film. The paradox, therefore, is that in their informational offerings, the media or media professionals have inadvertently become accomplices or victims/endangered species in terror acts. In spite of this, they are duty-bound to report the events regardless of the consequences on the audience(s). Indeed, it has been argued that the sensational reportage and overly dramatization of the activities of extremists groups in the media further propagates terrorist acts. This article examines media reportage of terrorism occasioned by the activities of Boko Haram terrorist sect(s) in Nigeria and the challenges media professionals are confronted with in the line of duty. Mooring itself on the agenda setting and gate-keeping theories of the media, it uses historical-analytic method to interrogate the complex relationship between the media and Boko Haram terrorists as well as the dangers posed to Nigerian media professionals and the collective security of the Nigerian state and even the neighbouring countries.

Keywords: extreme violence, media, Nigeria, Boko Haram, reporting terrorism, IDI

Osakue Stevenson OMOERA, Ph. D., teaches in the Department of Theatre and Media Arts, Ambrose Alli University, Ekpoma, in South-South Nigeria, where he specialises in Media Sociology and Nollywood Studies with particular focus on the social impacts of the media, the Benin video-film, and African cultural studies. Omoera is widely travelled and has over eighty publications in specialist books and learned journals spread around the world.
omoera@yahoo.com; osakueomoera@gmail.com

Kehinde Oghenekevwe AKE is currently an M. A. student in Media Studies at the Department of Theatre Arts, University of Abuja, Abuja, North-Central Nigeria.

akekehinde@gmail.com

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