The Role of Media in Curbing Terrorism in Nigeria

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Abstract

The media has brought to focus the activities of terrorist groups.Terrorism which is ravaging some countries in the world including Nigeria,is an issue which has drawn the attention of policy makers,citizens and organizations,in Nigeria by various media networks.The media report information capable of effecting change especially in curbing the recent menace of terrorist attacks by the Boko-Haram terrorist grouping Nigeria.The role,constraints and influence of the media is analyzed to the benefit of political analysts, citizens and media organizations.Scholars have tried to analyze the media ability but not with emphasis on curbing terrorism.The two- step theory is used in this study. Qualitative method of inquiry was used in this study and the study discovered that the media has had some success in curbing terrorism in Nigeria.The media if granted their right to freedom of expression be more effective. The paper suggest that the ethics of journalism should be embraced by all media houses in dissemination of information.

Keywords: *Media, Citizens, Terrorism, Nigeria*

1. Introduction

In the just concluded Nigerian Presidential elections of 2015, the media transmitted information on minute to minute happenings in the elections and campaigns. The transmission of information was so massive,coupled with the fact that the youths especially carry their handsets everywhere and even send information to the media houses. This was seen in channels TV as information sent in by the citizenry was published and brought to the knowledge of Nigerians.

Terrorism hit Nigeria with shock as the media brought to the knowledge of Nigerians the Boko-Haram incessant attack in the North East of Nigeria.Nigerians are glued to media report as no one can actually tell what is happening where,when,and how it will happen.Bomb blasts have become a regular occurrence. And seeing that there is much dependence on the media for information,it then appears that the manner in which information are reported will go a long way to effect changes in areas that require such especially in curbing the recent menace of terrorist attacks by the Boko-haram terrorist group in Nigeria. In this study, the media is seen as an influentialbody,and watchdog of the public interest. The Nigerian media being imbued with that consciousness in its tradition of being outspoken carry's such responsibility of making change in the society.Some scholars have attempted to x-ray this, but have not been able to draw out if the media has played a significant role to curb terrorism in Nigeria.

This paper will seek to answer, what is the role of the media?What are the constraints of the media?How influential has the media being in curbing terrorism?The objective of the study is toexamine the role of the media in Nigeria,it will seek to know the constraints of the media in carrying out its functions, and to know how influential it has being in curbing terrorism in Nigeria.

In Ayo Olukoyuns article (2004),he quotes Oseni(1995) that the media is charged with the role of holding governments accountable and guarding against the abuse of power, hence the need to raise countervailing structures of surveillanceto monitorgovernment's activities and stem an inherent disposition towards excess. Terrorism disorganized America's sense of invulnerability and unparalleled might on a sunny September morning. Almost overnight, the American landscape went from one of prosperity, safety, and power to one of threat, fear, and uncertainty.This was the same case with Nigeria,when to the disheartening of all bombs were going up killing innocent people. (Channels T.V, 2013)The worst happened when the Chibok girls

were abducted,and till date their recovery has become a herculean task.The media swung into action immediately giving a run-down of events.This greatly seemed to check the rate at which the attacks occurred as the media disseminated information on the mode of operation of these terrorists. Threat and fear are not simply a psychological phenomenathey are politically consequential for how elites and the mass media communicate with the public and, ultimately, for opinion formation. In times of crisis, citizens turn to political leaders and the media to make sense of new and frightening events. The contours of the information environment in turn influence how people prefer the government to react to threat or terror. Shana Kushner Gadarian (2010) posits thatseveral scholars have variously described the mass media as gadgets used to effect mass communication. For example, Defleur and Dennis(1981) define the mass media as "devices for moving messages across distance or time to accomplish mass communication." The issue of application of the term "mass media" to technical devices is crucial to the understanding of the concept. Throughout the world, the issue of mass communication that is, the act of sending or transmittinginformation from a source to a far-flung heterogeneous mass audience through an electronic means is used. Little wonder why Bittner (1989) says, "Masscommunication is message communicated through mass medium to large group of people". According toBiagi (2003), "mass communication is communication from one person or group of persons through a transmitting device (a medium) to large audiences or markets". Sambe (2005) expressively points out that:Mass communication can be defined as a device by which a group of people working together transmits information to a large heterogeneous and anonymous audience simultaneously. It is a process by which information originates from the source to the receiver, having been thoroughly filtered and transmitted through a channel.In synergy with definitions above, among several others, as put forward by communication scholars, it is obvious that mass communication (media) cannot take place except with the availability of devices such as transmitter, television, and other gadgets to serve as medium, channel, among others.A large number of people as noted in the assertions above has always utilized these medium of mass communication, in receiving information. It can be seen that all the definitions given have some things in common that is, transmitting message via a medium to large groups of different people simultaneously. (Utulu, 2012).

Terrorism is older than the ancient civilizations of Greece and Rome. Early examples include the assassination of Julius Caesar in 44 B. C., The Zealots-Sicarii, a Jewish sect, during the first century A. D., the Assassins or Ismaili-Nizaris during the 11th and 12th centuries, the thugs in India, 19th century European anarchists and social revolutionaries, the Ku Klux Klan in the United States.(Jessica Stern,2000) Despite the fact that terrorism is an old phenomenon, the term terrorism has neither a precise definition nor one which is widely acceptable. In fact, terrorism has changed its character and meaning in time and space. What was true for one terrorist group in a certain place at a certain time does not necessarily apply to another in a different country at another time, reflecting different politics and traditions. As a result, consensus has been elusive over a universally accepted definition of terrorism. The conceptual problem posed over the years is best reflected in the famous statement: 'One man's terrorist is another man's freedom fighter'. (Maleeha Lodhi, 2006) The term terrorism first came into use at the time of the reign of Terror' during the French Revolution; it was employed in connection with the intimidating practice of the government in power from 1789 to 1794. Terrorism, as a word in its usual usage, has a connotation of evil, indiscriminate violence, or brutality.Thus, to label a group or action as terrorist is to seek to imply that the actors or the violence is immoral, wrong, or contrary to obvious basic ethical principles that any reasonable human being holds. The US Department of Defense approved definition of terrorism is: 'The calculated use of unlawful violence or threat of unlawful violence to inculcate fear; intended to coerce or to intimidate governments or societies in the pursuit of goals that are generally political, religious or ideological'.(Military guide to terrorism) some of these terrorist groups are, the Alshaabab, ISIS, ISIL, Boko-Haram, Alquaeda,to mention but a few.The media has brought the activities of these terrorist groups to the knowledge of many,stating their locations and mode of activity. This has led Nigerians to take precaution of where to go, and draw the attention of the government for quick policy decisions on arresting the situation.

2. The Two -Step Theory

Among the major theories associated with the use of the mass media to enlighten as well as influence the society is the Two-Step Flow of Communication theory. The theory, developed by Paul Lazarsfeld, Bernard Berelson and Hazel Gaulet

(Anaeto, Onabanjo and Osifeso, 2008), seeks to explain how individuals from different social groups select and use media messages to influence citizens, and even policy makers. According to Lattimore, Baskin, Heiman and Toth (2009) and Littlejohn and Foss(2005), the two-step theory is built on the premise that certain people in our society areopinion leaders who shape how other members of society respond to mass media messages.

Therefore, if those opinion leaders or policy makers can be convinced to support a certain matter they will influence others whom, Baran and Davis (2009) refer to as opinion followers to support

it also. This is predicated on the fact that these categories of persons (opinion leaders) have

greater access to the mass media by virtue of their economic status. Subscribing to the idea,

Haralambos and Holborn (2008) assert that information from the mass media moves in

two distinct stages. First, individuals who have access and pay close attention to the mass

media and their messages receive the information. The second step is its interpretation and

influence by those individuals called opinion leaders who are generally well informed and

respected people pass information to others through informal interpersonal communication.

This informal, personal contact, Freedman, Carlsmith and Seers (1974) acknowledge, has

more direct impact than exposure to the mass media as a source of influence. The implication of this is that opinion leaders/policy makers are characteristically quite influential in getting people alter their attitudes and behaviour. More so, since a greater percentage of Nigerians are not literate, even few who possess one channel of mass communication or the other find it difficult to understand the content of the message, hence the need for proper education. This underscores the appropriateness of the two-step flow theory to the study.

The Nigerian media were major factors in the struggle for the entrenchment of democratic rule and a major vanguard of good governance. Even now that a civilian regime is in place, Nigerians regularly look up to the media especially with the questionable democratic credential of our political parties (and elites), to be the vanguard of democratic consolidation. It is therefore, difficult to talk about democracy and good governance in Nigeria without reserving a place for the media because of their doggedness and above all, their resolve to pursue democratic agenda to usher the country into the center democratic world.The extent of media importance is further made apparent by having it enshrined in the various constitutions of Nigeria (both past and present). For instance, Section 21 of

1979 and section 22 of the 1989 constitution allow the press to ensure that government is responsible and accountable to the people. No doubt, press freedom is one of the basic features of a democracy. Diril-Teilanyo(1999) emphasizes a reciprocal relationship between the two concepts (mass media and democracy). Democracy results in press freedom ("democratization of the press") and a free press helps in shaping and sharpening (as well as enthroning) democracy. The position of Owens–Ibis (1994) as cited by Diril-Teilanyo (1999) aptly captures this relationship by stating that "the presence of democracy in western countrieshas invariably touched on the democratization of the press. A nation in the process of democratization therefore finds help in the pervasive elements of democratization. Raboy (1999) portrays this relationship differently thus:"democratizing media, as a positive value in and of itself, and fostering a role for media in the democratization from the foregoing, it is axiomatic that democracy empowers the mass media and the mass media helps in the sustenance of democracy. It has been differently stated that democratic system allows the survival of the press, enables public discussion which is presided over by the mass media and encourages some measures of sanity and honesty in government. The huge responsibility of the press in a democracy is a reflection of the critical role that the mass mediashould play in normal, free-running democratic systems (Owens-Ibie 1994). The economist was cited by Owens– Ibie(1994) thus: "the people learn about how they are governed, from what they read in the newspapers and what they see on the television news. Unless citizens know something about how they are governed, they cannot have an intelligent opinion about it. And without intelligent opinions about government, you cannot have a healthy democracy".Most of the Nationalist movements also possessed media outlets which helped them in the propagation and advancement of their "political" course. On the other hands, the media was also used by the colonialist to integrate African economies and peoples into the international market economy for the benefit of the colonial rules between 1898 and 1960 (Mwangi, 1998). Toward independence, mass media was used to harness the basis of nationalism and nation-building. In the analysis of politics and society in contemporary Africa (in general), Naomi (1999) identified eight situations that characterized the landscape of Africa at the independence and immediately after independence:artificiality of its political boundaries; multiplicity of societies; economic weakness; external dependence' creation of western-educated elites; fragility of African institutions; absence of shared political culture; and collective memory of humiliation via colonialism.

Therefore, the appropriateness in the assertion of Lerner (1959) that "mass media influences development via the dissemination of developmental information", cannot be downplayed. In addition to this, the media was used to achieve the objective of state consolidation, ethnic harmonization and integration. That is, national unity and development became the first priority of African government. The state endeavored to play altruistic roles by controlling the media in national policies along the aforementioned schemes. On the Long-run the mass media turn-out to be an instrument of propaganda when developmental projects failed (Ronning, 1994). Nevertheless, the initial co-option of the media was to engage them in the process of attempting to harness every available resource for the purpose of development. In most cases, radio was used to take the message of national unity and development to the rural areas where 70 percent of the population lived (Mwangi, 1999). This was clearly painted by Ayittey as quoted by Mwangi [1999] when he averred that "political and development programmeswere packaged with the sole purpose of achieving development. Lippmann (1930) asserts that "the press is like the beam of a searchlight that moves restlessly about bringing one episode and then another out of darkness into vision. This, according to Owen-Ibie is close to surveillance role of the mass media. Democratization in Nigeria fourth republic is deeply rooted in the ability of the mass media to impact the people with adequate knowledge of the beauty of democracy and other democratic values. The enlightenment role of the mass media is beautifully packaged by The Economist (1998), "people learn about how they are governed from what they read in the newspapers and what they see on the television news. Unless the governed know something about how they are governed, they cannot have an intelligent opinion about it.Adebanwi (2011), on media and democracy in Africa, posits that, there is a great deal of evidence, and even praise, for the role of the media (including progressive, radical, and guerrilla journalists) in breaking what Kasoma (1995) called "the myth" that dictatorial regimes in Africa are "invincible and could not be criticised" and for creating a forum for promoting dissent against the established order. Examples of countries where this has been evident include Nigeria, Zambia, Uganda, Tanzania, South Africa, Kenya, and Ghana.

3. Role of the Media

The mass media function in various ways. However,the mass media's basic function has to do with what Harold Lasswell defines as communication. That is, to tell people, who says what in the society, to whom, when and How.In carrying out this basic function, the mass media perform various tasks that have been classified into four functions by Wright (1960) and cited inAkindele and Lamidi(2001). These are: surveillance, correlation of facts of the environment,transmission of heritage, and entertainment.The surveillance function involves mass media operators having to nose into the nooks and crannies of the society to fish out information that is of interest to the people. In correlation,the media act to mediate even the taste of the people because they interpret the information so gathered by sifting and discarding what may not be in the interest of the people before purveying such information to them. By such interpretation,they help to create values (for culture), which are then transmitted from generation to generation.The three functions of the mass media,explained above, if closely examined, would reveal the role of the media in fostering national security.

First, by effective surveillance of the environment, the mass media would unveil those areasindividuals or entities that may likely constitute a breach of national security. Secondly, by correlation, the mass media assist other agencies to interpret the information so gathered about the environment and contribute in the utilization of such information to take steps to remedy any breach of national security or foster the perpetuation of practices that enhance national security. Thirdly, by transmission of culture, the media enhance the entrenchment of those norms, thedefense of which constitutes national security.

4. Media Constraints

The operators of the mass media, including journalists, producers, newscasters, editors and so on, are expected to know their limitations in order to avoid offending the law. The areas of most conflict between the media and the law are libel, invasion of privacy and disclosure of official secrets. At times gatekeepers experience a situation where they are between the call of duty and the need for "national security". This is the kind of security equated with the safety of the interests of a political superior.(EloIbagere, 2010).Elo explains further that the dilemma here is whether to publish or broadcast information that is detrimental to the interest of the superior and jeopardize his job and personal security, or falsify the information or ignore it and keep his job. This becomes crucial by virtue of the kind of leadership this country has had.

Everywork in the media is subjected to legal and ethical constraints. Everyone who works in the media industry has a responsibility to be aware of them, so they don't anger anyone or do something illegal.(www.kerryenimbro.blogspot,15/11/2012).

The legal constraint has to do with legal laws that control the media sector, while the ethical constraints are the rules and accepted norms of the society guiding the media houses as not to offend any party,whether the government,the individuals or morals guiding the organization.

National security appears to be the protection of government officials. And in pursuance of the realization of this security,media men are forbidden from purveying information that is atvariance with the interests of those in power. This colonial view informed the colonial enactment entitled: The Seditious Offences Bill of 1909, which aimed at punishing "publications that were designed to inflame an excitable and ignorant populace" (Mytton 1983 in Ibagere 1996).This was sequel to the comment of a colonial official that, press liberty was a "dangerous instrument in the hands of semi-civilized negroes" (Adeseye and Ibagere 1999).But there have not been many significant cases of libel. Nor have there been cases of invasion of privacy or breach of confidence because the codes of practice also regulate the conduct of gatekeepers in specific terms. This indicates that the mass media have been working in partnership with the law to ensure national security, peace and progress. However, the rule of law continues to be abused by those in power.Here a schism exists between the law and the mass media. If the rule of law is allowed to prevail,cases involving any breach of the law should proceed to the court where the judiciary performsits function of interpreting the law.

Terrorism shattered America's sense of invulnerability and unparalleled might on a sunny September morning. Almost overnight, the American landscape went from one of prosperity, safety, and power to one of threat, fear, and uncertainty. Threat and fear are not simply psychological phenomena they are politically consequential for how elites and the mass media communicate with the public and, ultimately, for opinion formation. In times of crisis, citizens turn to political leaders and the media to make sense of new and frightening events. The contours of the information environment in turn influence how people prefer the government to react to threat. While terrorism is inherently dramatic and threatening (Gans 1979), in a competitive media environment, journalists and editors have incentives to use emotionally powerful visuals and storylines to gain and maintain ever-shrinking news audiences, and these elements of news coverage can strengthen the public's sense of threat. The War on Terror news frame that emerged after 9/11 argued, in line with the president's positions, that a military solution was necessary to counteract terrorism and this frame received little serious opposition from Democratic leaders or the press (Entman 2003). Individual perceptions of threat lead citizens to support policies that they believe will neutralize the source of threat and protect them (Gordon and Arian 2001).

5. Influence of Media on Policy Attitudes

Terrorism can influence the public by having a venue via the mainstream media (Norris, Kern, and Just 2003) and also through the way that terrorism stories are presented to the public. Terrorism is newsworthy given its dramatic nature and receives inordinate coverage on the national news. Even before the recent focus on terrorism, terrorism news predominated over other types of potentially threatening news. Iyengar (1991) found that ABC, CNN, Aljazeera, NBC, and CBS broadcast more stories on hijackings in the 1980s and presently than on poverty, unemployment, race, and crime combined. Terrorism receives a considerable amount of coverage, and the coverage itself tends toward sensationalism (Nacos, Bloch-Elkon, and Shapiro 2007). Visual imagery may powerfully arouse emotions and influence attitudes independently of news story messages (Brader 2006). Visual information, particularly negative imagery, captures viewers' attention and interest, is easier to understand than verbal information, and makes retrieving information easier (Neuman, Just, and Crigler 1992; Newhagen and Reeves 1992). Negative visuals like those in terrorism stories are likely to induce emotion since they evoke a fear of death (Landau et al. 2004) and remind viewers of their traumatic emotional experience on 9/11. Surveys of Americans immediately after 9/11 showed a strong connection between media exposure to the attacks and post-traumatic stress disorder (Schuster et al 2001). The more television coverage people watched on 9/11 and afterward, the more severe their stress responses, especially among people who saw vivid images of the attacks.

6. How media interact with terrorism and shapes policy

The perception of threat after the Chibok girls were abducted by the Boko-Haram was compounded by media coverage that portrayed ''vivid and unceasing depictions of death and destruction'' (Landau et al. 2004), meaning that the effect of threat may be conditional on media consumption. Druckman and McDermott (2008) found that distress increases framing effects, suggesting that individuals concerned about terrorism may be more open to persuasion and the messages offered about foreign policy through the mass media. It is no doubt of the fact that in the early administration of President Buhari,it was seen on channels T.V the great concern of the administration to clamp down on social media,as its influence on people ravaged the entire nation ,especially on the area of character exposure of leading personalities who were vying for various electable positons.

Thus, the influence of threat on opinion may depend on exposure to coverage of terrorist acts or threats. In other words, threat should have a larger influence on attitudes for those people exposed to fear-inducing media stories. If this is true, then we should expect the interaction of perceived threat and exposure to emotionally threatening media content to predict policy decisions. That is, increased media consumption in combination with heightened threat will increase support for policy action. However, this relationship exists primarily when media content provides emotional coverage of threat. In times of crisis, citizens turn to the government and mass media for answers, comfort, and protection. In the hours after the Chibokabduction terrorist attacks, millions of Nigerians turned on televisions in their homes, schools, and workplaces to make sense of events and to understand how they should react. But television heightened threat instead of providing comfort because it focused on threatening, emotionally laden images of terror. Television watchers saw how the girls were confiscated in the forest and made to recite Islamic writings. The way bombs went up even in Abuja killing lots of people,the emotional cues in the media combined with the perception that another attack was likely shaped the types of policies that the public demanded to address terrorism in the aftermath of the attacks. In policy areas where there are resonant images reflected in mass media coverage that can induce negative emotions, these findings suggest that elites have an opportunity to persuade citizens to support preferred policies, particularly punitive policies. TheChibok experience has led policy makers to strengthen the girl child education and foreign bodies and NGO's are attracted by media to support and remedy the situation. This article outlines how the media play a role in convincing some members of the public to support different policies than they otherwise might. Yet, if the media can activate citizens' sense of impending danger, my findings show that when political leaders trumpet the right threatening message and the mass media use the right images, the public may consent to other measures and approach of a solution, even though a citizenry with less emotion may have chosen otherwise.

7. Conclusion

The study shows that the media has had some success in curbing terrorism in Nigeria.The fact remains that,the media if granted their right to freedom of expression, will do even better. The dissemination of information, and at the right time, places caution on citizens and alerts the government on decisions to take. The media also serve as a check to actions of individuals and government as well.

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