

Do Journalists at Risk Change the Content of their Reporting? The Case of Journalists Covering Boko Haram in Nigeria

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Abstract:

While much of the literature on journalists at risk in conflict zones focuses on functional aspects of the profession such as access and safety, less attention is devoted to the content journalists produce while under threat and intimidation from combatants with preferred reporting frames and narratives. This article examines whether the content of news produced about Boko Haram (also known as Jama'atu Ahlis Sunna Lidda'awati wal-Jihad) in Nigeria changed after three prominent attacks by Boko Haram against the Nigerian media in 2011 and 2012 for alleged “misrepresentations”. Through a content analysis of 897 news article headlines before and after each attack, the study looks for changes in three factors – labeling (if Boko Haram was specifically named), blame (if Boko Haram was blamed for the conflict/crisis) and framing (episodic or thematic). The findings showed distinguishable changes after attacks, especially in the Northern Nigeria media where threats were most credible. In addition, the study conducted interviews with journalists from Northern Nigeria to understand how such threats impacted their professional routines and story framing decisions.

Keywords: Boko Haram, Risk, Journalists, Threat, Framing

1.0 Introduction

Journalists reporting on conflict have always faced risk. Over recent decades, however, risk has shifted from accidental collateral damage incidents to deliberate targeting by combatants, especially by sub-state actors with little concern for the rules of war. In recent years, ISIS and its affiliates, in fact, have intentionally executed journalists on camera to instill widespread fear and promote their propaganda goals. Media organisations have also become targets of bombings and other forms of attack. According to Foerstel, while “reporting on war has always been a dangerous business...the purposeful targeting of journalists by combatant...is new.” (2006: 23). Armoudian argues that the attacks signal a dark era for journalism and a stark departure from previous decades when combatants, at minimum, tolerated journalists, treating them as civilians, and often sought their sympathies (2017: 1). Convincing journalists of “our” righteousness and “their” wrongness was part of the information war that ran parallel to the physical war. Armoudian has argued that recent attacks represent a changing role for journalists, in which they are part of the story, rather just its conduits; “The harrowing public displays of their deaths are part of the information wars waged by extremists. Designed to horrify and terrify, gruesome public killings of correspondents capture attention, induce grief across the globe, and project a sick form of power.” (Armoudian 2017: 2) While the focus of this study is on Boko Haram and its attacks on Nigerian journalists, similar attacks have occurred in many countries including Syria, Iraq and Afghanistan (Committee to Protect Journalists, 2018).

Boko Haram is a jihadist organization seeks to “Islamize” Nigeria by any means and human cost, including the use of terror tactics involving the indiscriminate and targeted killing of civilians and journalists, primarily in the Northern states of Nigeria and the Federal Capital Territory (Ajayi, 2012). The group carries out its attacks on journalists and media outlets over

reporting it deems unfavorable to its cause, involving “misrepresentations”. Journalists have reacted in various ways to these attacks. While some have relocated from Boko Haram strongholds in Nigeria’s northern regions, others have resigned from their positions and left the profession (Nkanga, 2014).

This article seeks to find out how Boko Haram’s terror tactics involving attacks on journalist and media organizations impact on media content. As such, the study’s research objectives are to find out whether journalists covering Boko Haram changed their pattern of reporting following the group’s attacks.

2.0 Background

The kidnapping and beheading of *Wall Street Journal* reporter Daniel Pearl in 2002 in Afghanistan was a shocking event for journalists and an awakening for journalists around the world of their vulnerability (Nieman Reports, 2003). Pearl murder by Al Qaeda was a harbinger of a tactic that would grow and be used in coming decades, especially by the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) and its affiliates in Iraq, Syria and around the world. In Syria, one particularly noteworthy killing was the beheading of James Foley in August 2014, which, like Pearl, led to significant media coverage and public (CBS News, 2014; Zech and Zane, 2014:2). The beheading videos define victims and opponents of the Islamic State as culpable, deserving criminals, whether through direct action or complicity. In many videos, the victims “repent and recant.” The confessional aspect is part of IS’ attempt to control the narrative and legitimize the murders (Zech and Zane, 2014:6). Intentional killing of journalists also occurred in Afghanistan, where 10 journalists were killed on April 30, 2018 in a double suicide bomb attack in Kabul by Afghan Islamic State (Committee to Protect Journalists, 2018).

In tracing the roots of this new type of attack on journalists, the US invasion of Afghanistan in 2001, following Al Qaeda attacks on the United States, is often considered to be a critical period (Foerstel, 2006:24). It was just after this period when the first such notable

killing of Daniel Pearl took place and the availability of the rapid dissemination through the internet that had recently growing globally. After all, the implication of this new phenomenon is that “they (the extremists) generate an eerie silence, as the rash of killings and silence have persuaded journalists and their managers to opt out of covering dangerous territories and groups (Armoudian, 2017:2). After a dozen deaths just within the first 10 years of the twenty-first century, then Reuters Editor-in Chief, David Schlesinger, called for a new, more cautious approach to danger zone journalism:

We have to say ‘no’ more often. We have to be prepared to miss the image more often. We have to be ready to lose the shot to avoid being shot. We have to be prepared to miss the image more often. We have to be ready to lose the shot to avoid being shot. We must be ready to lose some stories to avoid losing yet more lives (Schlesinger, 2010).

2.1 Risk in Reporting Boko Haram

The name Boko Haram originates from Hausa¹ language. In the language 'Boko' means book (especially Western or foreign) while 'Haram' is an Arabic word meaning 'forbidden', 'ungodly' or 'sinful'. If the words are pieced together, 'Boko Haram' literally means 'book is sinful' (Danjibo, 2009:7 and Adesoji, 2010:100). But fundamentally the importance is that Western education or civilisation is sinful, sacrilegious or ungodly and should be forbidden. Thus Boko Haram stands for outright rejection of Western education, Western culture and modern science. Rather it advocates the propagation of strict adherence to Islam in its purest form. Boko Haram represents the vision and mission of a fundamentalist Islamic movement in

¹ Hausa Language is the most indigenous lingua franca in West and Central Africa, spoken as a first or second language by about 40-50 million people. It belongs to the Western branch of the Chadic language super-family within the Afro-Asiatic language phylum. The home territories of the Hausa people lie on both sides of the border between Niger, where about one-half of the population speaks Hausa as a first language, and Nigeria, where about one-fifth of the population speaks it as a first language. The Hausas are predominantly Muslims.

Nigeria (Ajayi, 2012). Boko Haram, also known as Jama'atu Ahlis Sunna Lidda'awati wal-Jihad (people committed to the propagation of the prophet's teachings and Jihad) seeks to Islamize 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).

Eight Nigerian journalists have been murdered for their work since 1998. Among the most recent victims was Zakariyyah Isa of the state-run broadcaster *Nigeria Television Authority (NTA)* in a killing for which Boko Haram claimed responsibility in October 2011 (CPJ, 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 (CPJ, 2011). The report states: "Boko Haram perceived cameramen and photographers, particularly those working for state media, as potential spies." (CPJ, 2011) 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 of independent broadcaster *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 travel to some of the most dangerous places in northern Nigeria to get these stories" (CPJ, 2012). 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 people in the process. (Otuchikere et al, 2012). The three media houses attacked by the bombers were the Abuja office of *ThisDay* 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 the 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 [sic] (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 *ThisDay'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 had threatened to kill Adeola Akinremi, the Features Editor for *ThisDay*. 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 *TheCable*, reads: “We have seen your hand against us. Inshallah you will die like other infidels that we have captured.” (*Daily Post*, 2015).

Consequent to the death threat, Akinremi keeps a low profile and has 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. But I have not heard anything yet” (CPJ, 2015). This is a clear indication that journalists reporting on the activities of Boko Haram are operating within the contexts of risks and intimidation.

3.0 Methodology

On the first research objective for this study on whether mainstream journalists covering Boko Haram changed their pattern of reporting following the group’s attacks on journalists and media, content analysis was adopted as the most suitable research method. In this case, 897 newspaper headlines on the activities of Boko Haram in Nigeria were systematically studied and analysed to determine patterns of representation of Boko Haram over the timeline of the study (2011-2012). In Nigeria, there are over 150 newspapers, most of which are not daily publications and are regional in coverage and circulation (Mapping Digital Media in Nigeria, 2012; Nigerian Press Council, 2009). There are approximately 20 daily newspapers, which have national coverage, circulation and readership in the country (Nigeria Press Council, 2009; Adeyanju & Okweri, 2005; Mapping Digital Media in Nigeria, 2012). The researcher selected the online versions of the two of the national newspapers for this study, which are: *ThisDay* and *Daily Trust*. The articles from both newspapers were selected from AllAfrica.com, a website that aggregates news produced primarily on the African continent about all areas of African life, including politics and culture (AllAfrica.com). The search results on “Boko Haram” within this timeframe produced 327 articles from *ThisDay* and 570 from *Daily Trust* totalling 897, which became the sample for this analysis.

The entire content of *ThisDay* and *Daily Trust* over twelve months (from the 22nd of July, 2011 to 23rd July 2012) was selected as the sample for analysis. These periods form the timeline of attacks, which represents the three major periods of attacks on journalists and media houses in Nigeria. Each of the three sets of attacks, without any prior calculation was separated by a three-month interval. They are as follows:

Attack 1 – October 22, 2011 (Boko Haram’s killing of Isa Zakarriyah of the
National Television Authority (NTA)).

Attack II- January 21, 2012 (Boko Haram killing of Enenche Akogwu of
Channels Television).

Attack III - April 26, 2012 (Boko Haram bombing of the *This Day, The
Moment* and *The Sun* Offices).

Based on these periods of attack highlighted above, the period of analysis began three months (or 100 days) prior to the first attack and ends three months after the last attack. The selection of 100 days before and after the attacks was intended to provide enough room to understand the overall patterns of reporting during the stable or no-attack periods. The research further identified a period following each attack for analysis. These periods were codenamed phases and analysed as Phase 1, II, III and IV. The phases are highlighted as follow:

Phase I: Period before the first attack (July 22, 2011 to October 21, 2011)

Phase II: Period following the first attack (October 23, 2011 to January 20, 2012)

Phase III: Period following the second attack (January 22, 2012 to April 25, 2012)

Phase IV: Period after the attacks (April 27, 2012 to July 26, 2012)

For the second objective of this paper, the in-depth interview was chosen as the most suitable method to investigate the challenges that the citizen journalists' content posed to the work order of their mainstream counterparts. Based on this, interviewing reporters covering Boko Haram is necessary since all interview statements are actions in a context, arising from the interaction between (or among) interviewer and interviewee(s). Interview discourses are, in a strong sense of the word, 'data'. They become sources of information through analysis, and of meaning through interpretation. (Jensen, 2012: 270). This study therefore employed a stratified purposive sampling scheme technique to select ten (10) reporters covering the activities of Boko Haram, who granted interview sessions for this study. In order for the research to be representative, the samples were drawn from mainstream journalists reporting in any of the two geo-political strata of the North and South regions in Nigeria. The research further selected a purposeful sample of the journalists covering the activities of Boko Haram from each stratum.

Based on the overall objectives of the study and research methods adopted, this research is therefore anchored on framing theory. Media framing, also known as the "second level of agenda setting" (McCombs, 1992), is a mechanism of influence in which journalists employ a frame of interpretation in presenting an issue to the public. The theory is related to this study in the sense that based on Boko Haram's attacks on journalists, the reporters might frame the Boko Haram as the actor of the violent attacks.

4.0 Analysis and Findings

The study's analysis of the data is based on the two methods of content analysis and in-depth interview explained above. With content analysis, this research engaged in correlation analysis using SPSS (Statistical Package for Social Sciences) between each of the content variables (the type of label, blaming and framing) and each of the four phases in the study. The

responses from the in-depth interview were analysed based on the themes of the interviewed questions.

4.1 Content Analysis

In this analysis, this paper identified three variables or content categories namely: the type of label, the type of blaming and the type of framing. The following are brief explanations of the content categories:

- Label: References to how Boko Haram is described or named in the headlines
- Blame: References showing who is responsible for attack/threat or responding to attack/defending between Boko Haram and security agents
- Frame: how the events/ actions are described in the headlines as either episodic or thematic frames

(i) Label category

This section presents findings from the label category of the content analysis method. In Table 1.0, the ‘No label’ category ranked higher than the ‘Nominalised’ version. By nominalized label, it refers to the names that is popularly used in identifying Boko Haram such as, ‘Boko Haram’, ‘Jamaa’tul Ahlu Sunnah’ and ‘Yusuffiyah’. Since the focus of this analysis is on the type of labels or names used in identifying Boko Haram, then nominalised label is examined. The study found that nominalised label ranked highest among all the identified labels.

The following table shows the timeline of the Boko Haram attacks on journalists and media and the type of label adopted in identifying Boko Haram. The four phases represent the timeline of the attacks while the type of label describes how Boko Haram is named in the headlines.

Table 1: The Timeline of Boko Haram Attacks and the type of Label

Type of label	Collectivised	Count	Timeline of Attack				Total
			Phase 1	Phase 2	Phase 3	Phase 4	
	Collectivised	Count	24	5	8	20	57
		% within Timeline of Attack	16.7 %	2.2%	2.9%	8.0%	6.4%
	Functionalised	Count	5	14	19	13	51
		% within Timeline of Attack	3.5%	6.3%	6.8%	5.2%	5.7%
	Nominalised	Count	55	83	133	77	348
		% within Timeline of Attack	38.2 %	37.2 %	47.5 %	30.8 %	38.8 %
	Personalised	Count	4	7	4	2	17
		% within Timeline of Attack	2.8%	3.1%	1.4%	0.8%	1.9%
	No labels	Count	56	114	116	138	424
		% within Timeline of Attack	38.9 %	51.1 %	41.4 %	55.2 %	47.3 %
Total		Count	144	223	280	250	897
		% within Timeline of Attack	100.0 %	100.0 %	100.0 %	100.0 %	100.0 %

This study found that there is a significant reduction in the volume of nominalised label employed in identifying Boko Haram between phase 1 and 4 in this thesis – (from 38.2 per cent at Phase 1 to 30.8 per cent at Phase 4). It is important to note that this is due to ‘No label’ being used more. In the period following attacks, journalists increased the ‘No label’ (from 38.9 per cent before the attacks to 55.2 per cent after). This could imply that with no frames

increased, perhaps journalists did not want to seem like they are taking sides. Also, with the decline in the nominalized label, it could be suggested that journalists have more interests in other topics such as the government's perspectives about resolving the crisis.

This reflects that the reports were reduced in the way it named Boko Haram using any of the group's popular names. This finding can be interpreted as the consequences of intensified attacks on the reporters in the country, cumulating with the last attack on the simultaneous bombing of targeted media houses in the country.

(ii) Blame analysis

The analysis in this section is focused on the sub-categories of 'Boko Haram attacking' and 'Security agents attacking'. This is due to issue of attack which is key to the main objective of this research. This study found that headlines blaming Boko Haram reduced from 14.7 per cent to 13.2 per cent after the attacks. (Table 2). This finding could mean that in the before period, perhaps the media only covered attacks but after, they covered other types of stories about Boko Haram due to more interests in learning about the group. This finding shows that the reporters covering Boko Haram published headlines that mostly featured issues that had no blame for attacking (38.7%). This means that neither Boko Haram nor the security agents in the country was blamed for any crime (see Table 2). This category is followed by 'no attack', which depicted headlines with topic that has nothing to do with violence and had 34.0 per cent. The implication of these findings means that the sub-editors in these newspapers mostly allocated no attacks or crimes against Boko Haram, which is quite unbelievable considering the group's established record of using violence and terrorism. This finding suggests that the newspapers clearly created distance from reports that may be considered unfavourable by the Boko Haram. The findings can suggest that the sub-editors in these newspapers adopted this framing based on their perception of Boko Haram as a group that is capable of violence, and as a possible way to avoid being targeted for attack by the group.

The following table shows the timeline of the Boko Haram attacks on the journalists and media offices in Nigeria and the type of blame adopted in identifying Boko Haram. The four phases represent the timeline of the attacks while the type of blame describes who is blamed for the attacks between Boko Haram and the security agencies.

Table 2: The Timeline of Boko Haram Attacks and the Type of Blame

Who is blamed	Boko attacking	Haram	Count	Timeline of Attack				Total
				Phase 1	Phase 2	Phase 3	Phase 4	
			Count	21	31	48	33	133
			% within Timeline of Attack	14.7%	13.9%	17.1%	13.2%	14.8%
	Security agents defending		Count	10	18	37	19	84
			% within Timeline of Attack	7.0%	8.1%	13.2%	7.6%	9.4%
	Boko defending	Haram	Count	3	0	1	1	5
			% within Timeline of Attack	2.1%	0.0%	0.4%	0.4%	0.6%
	Security agents attacking		Count	4	1	10	7	22
			% within Timeline of Attack	2.8%	0.4%	3.6%	2.8%	2.5%
	No blame for attacking		Count	47	90	92	118	347
			% within Timeline of Attack	32.9%	40.4%	32.9%	47.2%	38.7%
	No attack		Count	58	83	92	72	305
			% within Timeline of Attack	40.6%	37.2%	32.9%	28.8%	34.0%
Total			Count	143	223	280	250	896
			% within Timeline of Attack	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

(iii) Frame analysis

In the frame category, the sub-categories that are related to the research question are the focus of this analysis. The two sub-categories that are relevant in this analysis are: the ‘episodic frames about Boko Haram and ‘thematic frames about Boko Haram’, since Boko

Haram is the focus of this thesis in general. By episodic framing, it means that the reports focus on specific events of killing, bombing, gun-shooting by Boko Haram while the thematic emphasizes events in broader contexts, such as security, terrorism, dialogue, solutions to the Boko Haram crisis.

Given the above selection criteria, this study found that the episodic frames about Boko Haram ranked higher than the thematic frames. The episodic frames accounted for 28.4 percent, the thematic frames had 6.5 per cent (Table 3). This shows clear wide margins between the two frames. This finding suggests that reports on Boko Haram focused more on issue-based than general or broad contexts. This could imply that the media coverage is strongly based towards an episodic interpretation of Boko Haram in which the news depicts social issues such as the Boko Haram crisis as limited to events only and not placed in a broader interpretation or context which could engender greater understanding of the issue. In other words, the public are largely presented with acts of violence perpetrated by the Boko Haram group rather than the underlying problems, possible grievances, and solutions to the crisis.

Specifically addressing the research objective, this study found a significant decline in headlines with episodic frames about Boko Haram following the group's attacks (from 32.2 per cent before attacks to 22.5 per cent at after attacks). But it is also pertinent to note that 'No frames', that is, issues that were neither framed as episodic nor thematic increased after the attacks, which was then followed by increase in the episodic frames about Boko Haram. This particular finding could imply that perhaps by avoiding frames, the newspapers seem not to align to any side between Boko Haram and security agents/ government officials.

Table 3: The Timeline of Boko Haram Attacks and the Type of Frame

			Timeline of Attack				Total
			Phase 1	Phase 2	Phase 3	Phase 4	
Type of framing	Episodic frames about Boko Haram	Count	46	60	92	56	254
		% within Timeline of Attack	32.2%	26.9%	32.9%	22.5%	28.4%
	Episodic frames about security agents/govt.	Count	39	54	77	55	225
		% within Timeline of Attack	27.3%	24.2%	27.5%	22.1%	25.1%
	Thematic frames about Boko Haram	Count	9	12	18	19	58
		% within Timeline of Attack	6.3%	5.4%	6.4%	7.6%	6.5%
	Thematic frames about security agents/govt	Count	9	0	0	2	11
		% within Timeline of Attack	6.3%	0.0%	0.0%	0.8%	1.2%
	No frames	Count	40	97	93	117	347
		% within Timeline of Attack	28.0%	43.5%	33.2%	47.0%	38.8%
	Total	Count	143	223	280	249	895
		% within Timeline of Attack	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

4.2 In-depth interview Analysis

The in-depth interview method was adopted to supplement the findings from the content analysis. As mentioned earlier, 10 journalists covering the activities of Boko Haram in Nigeria were interviewed to determine whether Boko Haram's threats had influenced their reporting activities. Most of the journalists interviewed expressed that Boko Haram's threats are real. In the accounts of these journalists, especially those working in the northern region of the country, Boko Haram members knew the journalists' identities and sometimes called them on phone to warn them about some reporting they did. This study analysed the impact of Boko Haram's threats under two themes: Boko Haram's threats to news gathering and Boko Haram's response to negative coverage.

(i) Boko Haram's Threats to News Gathering

This study found that the patterns of news gathering by the journalists are often influenced by the dictates of Boko Haram. **Reporter A**, covering the northern region (Personal Communication, April 21, 2016), provided graphic details of such challenges:

Sometimes in Maiduguri, Boko Haram used to organise teleconference with reporters. They will call a particular reporter and say they want to speak with the press. They will ask that phones be put on hands-free. The reporter will be there and they will be talking. The reporter will be asking them questions and they will be replying. That is a way they used to disseminate information to the press (Interview with Reporter A, April 21, 2016).

Furthermore, Reporter 1, also covering northern Nigeria, notes that Boko Haram has one of the most sophisticated networks of intelligence. The reporter provided an interesting narration on other means of disseminating information outside teleconferencing discussed by Reporter A. According to this reporter, "the Boko Haram members produce audio and video recordings of their activities or certain information, which they place in envelopes at certain places, and thereafter call on a reporter to pick up the envelopes. Sometimes, they warn the

reporters, saying ‘we are watching you as you are picking the envelope’. This is one of the ways Boko disseminates information to the press.” Reporter I (Interview with researcher, May 5, 2016).

The above context therefore suggests that reporters within Nigeria covering the Boko Haram activities have been compelled to follow the news gathering styles that have been dictated to it by the Boko Haram group. In addition, Reporter D, (Interview with researcher, February 11, 2016), also reporting from the North, affirms that most journalists, especially those reporting within the northern part of the country are most prone to the risks from Boko Haram: “It is riskier for journalists around here (in the North), especially when we are gathering information, because most of these people (Boko Haram) know us (journalists) and they know that we will definitely come to the scene of incidents to report. They must have been hiding somewhere close to the scenes and we don’t know how they get our phone numbers. They will call, saying ‘you have to be very careful; if you do not report this story well, we will deal with you’”. In addition, Reporter I (who covers the North) contends that journalists have been denied their privacy outside the field of reporting. He asserts: “On several occasions, some members of Boko Haram even went to journalists’ houses threatening them that they had reported badly about them, which usually necessitated transfer of journalists from the northern region to any other states in the South” (Reporter I, Interview with researcher, May 5, 2016). It is noteworthy that all the reporters interviewed from the North expressed that Boko Haram’s threats affected their styles of expressions in reporting the crisis.

However, Reporter C and Reporter E, from the southern part of the country, noted that Boko Haram’s threats have gone beyond only reporters within the northern region. They affirmed that even columnists and editors had, most times, received threatening text messages and phone calls over stories pertaining to the group. Reporter C states: “We received a lot of threatening text messages. At times, they (Boko Haram) might even trace one’s address making

our families afraid for our and their safety”. (Reporter C, Interview with researcher, February 8, 2016). According to Reporter E (Interview with researcher, March 4, 2016), “For those of us who have regular columns, if you write anything that affects Boko Haram or that they feel is insulting to them or that reveals their strategy or tactics, or you write things advising the government on the best way to go about tackling them, then they are all out for you. They send all manners of text messages, phone calls, etc.”

In this discussion, this study found notable differences in the responses of the reporters covering the northern and southern regions. The reporters from the North were more at risk than their counterparts from the South because of their relative locations to Boko Haram’s direct attacks. This result can be supported by the findings from the content analysis which confirms that *ThisDay* newspaper with its head office located in the South, provided more discourse on the activities of Boko Haram than *Daily Trust*, which has its head office located in the North. In addition, the CDA finding shows that while *Daily Trust* used indirect expressions to articulate discourse about Boko Haram, *ThisDay* newspaper adopted clear and direct expressions to report on the Boko Haram activities.

(i) Boko Haram’s Response to Negative Coverage

According to most of the journalists interviewed, one of the foremost challenges they encountered in covering the crisis is the threats from Boko Haram. The reporters explained that the Boko Haram often threatened to attack journalists for using expressions they considered offensive to their group. Hence, the reporters became confused and tried to moderate expressions to use in identifying Boko Haram in relation to attacks. Reporter B (Interview with researcher, March 10, 2016), who covers the northern region, explained that if a news report is not in the interest of the Boko Haram group, the reporter of such news were called upon by phone with the threat message of: ‘you lied on us and we know how to deal with you’. Due to

the threats, the reporter needed to request relocation to Abuja (the headquarters of most news outlets in Nigeria) or other places the reporter considered safe and would not venture to get back to the location until the heat had cooled off. This reporter further emphasised that Boko Haram's threats were not empty; they carried them out in reality. He cited the example of one of their colleagues that was killed in the cause of reporting. "They (Boko Haram) went to the house of one of our colleagues in NTA (Isa Zakarriyah) and killed him. That is why, at a point, we (reporters in the North) had to abandon our offices to relocate to Government Houses at the heat of the crisis because it seemed to be more secure" (Reporter B Interview with researcher, March 10, 2016).

In the same context, Reporter A affirms, "at that time, Boko Haram was launching attacks on a daily basis. We were afraid they would overrun the whole of Maiduguri and other states in the North. In Maiduguri alone, Boko Haram had occupied 22 local governments out of 27. We were really agitated" (Reporter A Interview with researcher, April 21, 2016). In the same way, (Reporter D Interview with researcher, February 11, 2016) states that, "those reporters that cannot withstand the pressure had to seek transfer. At a point, some media houses did not even have reporters, because if the administrative bosses in the media houses refused to grant transfer, the reporters would just go away, and for the media houses to see another person to cover the state would be quite difficult."

Furthermore, Reporter D (reporting from the North) asserts: "As journalists, covering insurgency is a new trend. Sometimes, we don't know the actual words to use when writing a report." He notes that the Boko Haram group did not want to be addressed as terrorists and rather preferred to be addressed as Jama'atu Ahli Sunna Lidda'awati Li-Jihad. According to this reporter, "knowing the appropriate name to settle for in addressing Boko Haram became an issue since one does not want to be in any problem with this group" (Interview with researcher, February 11, 2016).

In support of this argument, Reporter B, also covering the northern region, explains that lack of security from the military against Boko Haram's attacks beset the activities of reporters covering the North. "In fact, at a point in 2013, I had to be shuttling between two houses. I decided not to stay in my house because the insurgents have said that they know my house, that they know where I live. Although I have written about their operations, which have been very unpalatable that made them to warn me against such reports and I became agitated and had to think about my security because I know that it's only when you are alive that you can write a good story" (Reporter B, Interview with researcher, March 10, 2016).

Additionally, in the opinions of Reporter H from the southern region (Interview with researcher, April 14, 2016), even reporting on a remote issue that does not directly concern Boko Haram could put one in serious danger. This reporter claimed that he was beaten and had his car snatched at gunpoint by unknown people a few days after writing on a topic related to Boko Haram. The accounts of the reporters from the North show that they were having difficulties on the appropriate words and expressions to use in identifying Boko Haram. Also, reporters from the South also encountered risks in other aspects of their reporting. The findings show that there are differences in the type of risks that the reporters from the two regions encountered. These findings resonate with the results from the content analysis in this study, which confirm that *Daily Trust* newspaper with its head office located in the northern region identified Boko Haram by nominalised label, that is, the popular names the group is known by such as Boko Haram, Jamaa'tul Ahlu Sunna Lidawaati li Jihad and Yusuffiyah. These are names that have no emotionally charged meanings attached. This could suggest that the newspaper did not want to be seen as associating Boko Haram with negative connotations. On the other hand, *ThisDay*, represented Boko Haram by functionalised label – names that clearly depict the actual roles that the Boko Haram group carried out in the reported violent activities.

Such names include gunmen, suicide bomber and killers. This could mean that the reports identified Boko Haram as a group capable of violence.

5.0 Conclusion

After the Boko Haram attacks, the study found a significant reduction in the volume of nominalised label (names popularly used to identify Boko Haram, such as Boko Haram, Jama'tul Ahlus Sunnah LiDawwati Li Jihad, Yusuffiyah). The reports adopted the nominalised label more than the functionalised label which depicted Boko Haram by the exact violent roles it played in the crisis. In addition, the headlines largely used indirect language to refer to the actions of Boko Haram in the violence. This evidence shows that the newspapers avoided direct reference to Boko Haram following the group's attacks. In the opinions of the reporters interviewed for this study, Boko Haram members often suggested specific styles for the journalists to gather and report news about their group.

In relation to who is assigned blame for attacks, this study shows that in the period following the Boko Haram attacks on journalists and the media, there was reduction in the volume of reports which ascribed blame to Boko Haram for the reported violence. The finding could also suggest that the reporting seems to tone down the way it attributed blame for violence to Boko Haram. However, in comparison to security agencies, Boko Haram was attributed more blame for violence than security agents. The finding also shows that the headlines were more positive towards security agents than Boko Haram. Moreover, in the period after the Boko Haram attacks, the reporting adopted a combination of explicit and implicit language in identifying Boko Haram in relation to the violent actions, which demonstrates that the reports moderated the choice of words used in describing the violence in relation to Boko Haram. The study further found that the reporting used explicit language in referring to the violent actions by the security agencies against Boko Haram. In other words,

the violent actions of the security agents seemed to be justified against Boko Haram. This, perhaps, seems to mean that the security agencies committed less violence.

Concerning the type of frames used in identifying Boko Haram, this paper confirms that after the Boko Haram attacks, there was reduction in the episodic framing about Boko Haram, which featured specific violence perpetrated by the group such as bombing, gun shooting and other specific violence. The reports indirectly connected Boko Haram to the violence largely using the assigned names of Boko Haram such as bomber, Islamist, gunmen – which indirectly referred to Boko Haram. This result is backed by the interview finding that confirms that Boko Haram members were averse to being identified as terrorist but preferred to be called Jamatul Ahlus Sunnah Li Dawaati Li Jihad (People committed to the propagation of the Prophet's teachings). The finding suggests that the newspapers were being cautious by reducing the specific mention of the violence that Boko Haram was connected to and indirectly naming Boko Haram in the violent reports. It is pertinent to note that the study found that in the period after the Boko Haram attacks, the category of 'no frames' increased, which means the reports did not frame the crisis around Boko Haram or security agents/ government. Perhaps, by avoiding frames, the newspapers did not want to be seen as taking sides.

Regarding the interview findings, this paper establishes that reporters covering the Boko Haram crisis in Nigeria encountered major challenges in covering the activities of the group. Boko Haram was identified as constituting the major risks to the journalists in the form of threats and attacks. In the opinion of the reporters interviewed for this study, journalists also encountered other challenges from security agencies and media owners in the country. The journalists averred that the combination of the security challenge from security agencies and media owners with Boko Haram's threats and attacks had created a general insecure reporting atmosphere for them. Specifically, the reporters acknowledged that journalists covering the activities of Boko Haram, especially those located in the northern Nigeria, were made to

‘forcefully’ accept the reporting frames from the Boko Haram insurgents and followed news gathering patterns preferred by the group. The reporters further confirmed that they either had to scale down on their reporting on the group’s activities or avoid the news altogether for their safety.

These results correlate with the findings in the content analysis of this study, which show that although the volume of coverage of Boko Haram by journalists was the highest in comparison to other sources such as security agencies, government and Boko Haram itself but the coverage declined after the Boko Haram attacks. The finding suggests that in spite of the risks involved in reporting the crisis, journalists still showed some commitment to the reporting but became agitated after the direct attacks on them. The interviews further show that they were often forced to cover Boko Haram by editors against their will, and they had to due to lack of job opportunities. Hence, the government, media owners and other stakeholders should make efforts to address the security challenges in the country as they do not only affect the security and safety of the journalists covering the Boko Haram imbroglio but also the news content.

Overall, this study therefore argues that the noticeable change in the coverage of the reports following the Boko Haram attacks on journalists and media offices in Nigeria may be attributable to the threats and attacks of journalists by the Boko Haram group, which may result in making the reporters less committed.

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