

**COMMUNICATION AUDIT OF CABLE NEWS NETWORK (CNN) ONLINE  
REPORTS ON BOKO HARAM INSURGENCY IN NIGERIA (2012-2016)**

**Onwuzuruigbo, Dom Ugo Ph. D.**

Department of Mass Communication,  
Abia State University, Uturu

**Okugo, C. Uzoma Ph. D.**

Department of Mass Communication,  
University of Calabar

**Izuogu, Kingsley Chukwuemeka**

Department of Mass Communication,  
Abia State University,  
P.M.B. 2000, Uturu  
Tel: 08034545500

---

**ABSTRACT:** *Previous studies on conflict reportage in Nigeria had accused Western media of inclinations for feeding the people with inaccurate and contradictory reports. This study was predicated on the need to investigate the patterns and trends of the Cable News Network (CNN's) online reports on Boko Haram insurgency in Nigeria over a period of five years, 2012-2016. The study adopted the content analysis method of research and conducted a census of 58 online reports on Boko Haram insurgency in Nigeria as obtained from Cable News Network website (<http://edition.cnn.com/text=boko+haram>). While direction of reports, sources of report, prominence, balance and report genre provided content categories for the study, the Cronbach Alpha test was adopted for inter-coder reliability. The study found high prominence on CNN's online reports of Boko Haram insurgency in Nigeria. There was high level imbalance in CNN's online reports on Boko Haram insurgency in Nigeria. The study found low level of objectivity in CNN's online reports on Boko Haram insurgency in Nigeria. It was also established that CNN made use of only one source of information in her reports on Boko Haram insurgency in Nigeria. The study found out that the straight news genre dominated CNN's online reports on Boko Haram insurgency in Nigeria. Finally, the study showed that CNN's online reports on Boko Haram insurgency in Nigeria did conform to the allegation of information distortion leveled against Western Media. The researchers then recommended diversification of information sources, combination of report genres and fortification of conflict reporters as measures that would enhance accuracy, objectivity and fairness in conflict reportage.*

**KEYWORDS:** *Boko Haram, Communication Audit, Conflict Reportage, Insurgency, Mass Media*

---

## INTRODUCTION

Boko Haram (“Western education is forbidden”) is a militant Islamist Movement based in North-East Nigeria, which seeks to establish an Islamic State. The group has received training and funds from Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb. Membership is estimated at about one thousand persons. The group was designated by the US Department of State as a terrorist organization in November, 2013. The group’s official name is “Jama’tu Ahlis Sunna Lidda Awati Wal-jihad” meaning, people committed to the Prophet’s teaching for propagation and “Jihad”.

According to the group, Western education should always be dismissed as *ilinum boko*, “fake education” whereas a school that teaches Western education is “Makaranta boko”. The uncompromising hostility of Northern Nigeria Muslims towards anything remotely perceived as foreign, a mindset of Boko Haram that has in the past been applied even towards vocal recitation of the Qur’an, has historically been a source of friction with other Muslims from the Middle Belt of the country.

Boko Haram was founded as a Sunni Islamic Sect advocating a strict form of Sharia law and developed into a Salafist-Jihadi group in 2009, influenced by the Wahhabi movement. It seeks the establishment of an Islamic State in Nigeria, which opposes the westernizing of Nigerian society. The Sharia Law imposed by local authorities, beginning with Zamfara State in January 2000 and covering 12 Northern States by late 2002, was considered by the group to have been corrupted by politicians (Ekwueme & Obayi, 2012).

Sani (2011) reports that the Boko Haram sect kills people who engage in practices seen as un-Islamic such as consuming alcohol beverages. In a 2009 interview, the founder of the sect, Mohammed Yusuf, stated his belief that the theory that the Earth is round is contrary to Islamic teaching and should be rejected. Members of the group were reportedly inspired by Mohammed Marwa (known as “Maitatsine”). However, recent activities of the sect in Nigeria clearly indicate a shift from some of these core motives. It is held that there are both political and religious dimensions of the operations of the sect.

Mohammed Yusuf founded the Sect that became known as Boko Haram in 2002 in Maiduguri, the capital of the north-eastern State of Borno; establishing a religious complex with a school which attracted poor Muslim families from across Nigeria and neighboring countries. The center had the political goal of creating an Islamic State, and became a recruiting ground for Jihadists. By denouncing official state corruption, Yusuf attracted followers from unemployed youths.

Boko Haram conducted its operations more or less peacefully during the first seven years of its existence in 2009. The Nigerian government launched an investigation into the group’s activities following reports that its members were arming themselves. Prior to that, the government had repeatedly ignored warnings about the increasingly militant character of the organization. Clashes with security forces in 2009 in Maiduguri resulted in the deaths of an estimated 700 people. Yusuf was arrested and executed by the police. He was succeeded as a leader by Abubakar Shakau, formerly his second-in-command.

Ekweme & Obayi, (2012) note that the arrest and subsequent execution of Yusuf by the Nigeria Police Force propelled the terror campaign of the sect. Having regrouped under their new leader, in September 2010, Boko Haram invaded Maidugiri prison and released 105 of its members along with over 600 other prisoners. They went on to launch bold attacks in several areas of Northern Nigeria, raising tensions between Christians and Muslims as had been the case decades earlier in the wake of the 1980 Kano riots. The government's reliance on a purely military strategy, once again executing the leader of a militant group, would have unintended consequences.

Under Shekau's leadership, the group continuously improved its operational capabilities. After launching a string of IED (Improvised Explosive Device) attacks against soft targets, and its first vehicle-borne IED attack in June 2011, killing 6 at Abuja police Head-Quarters in August of that year, Boko Haram bombed the UN Head-Quarters in Abuja, the first time they had struck a western target. A spokesman claiming responsibility for the attack in which 11 UN staff members as well as 12 others died with more than 100 injured, warned of future attacks on US and Nigerian Governments' interests. Speaking soon after the US embassy's announcement of the arrival in the country of the FBI, Shekau went on to announce Boko Haram's terms for negotiation--the release of all imprisoned members. The increased sophistication of the group led many observers to believe that Boko Haram had linked-up with Al Qaeda's North African wing, which was known to be active in Niger (Ekweme & Obayi, 2012).

The group has maintained a steady rate of attacks since 2011, striking a wide range of targets multiple times per week. Targets have included schools, media, and politicians as well as the country's security infrastructure. The tactic of suicide bombing, used in the two attacks on the police and UN Headquarters in Abuja, was new to Nigeria, and alien to its mercenary culture in Africa as a whole. It had only been utilized by Al-shabab in Somalia and, to a lesser extent Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb. Since late 2012 Boko Haram has carried out a number of kidnappings in association with the splinter group Ansaru, which has drawn them a higher level of international attention. They have also ventured into neighbouring countries, further increasing their notoriety.

Within hours of President Goodluck Jonathan's inauguration for his first full four year term of office in May 2011, the group carried out a series of bomb blasts in Bauchi, Abuja and Zaria. The most successful of these was the attack on the army barracks in Bauchi. A spokesman for the group reportedly told BBC Hausa that the attack had been carried out, as a test of loyalty, by serving members of the military hoping to join the group, a claim later emphatically denied by an army spokesman, who asserted "this is not a banana republic" (2011).

However, on January 8, 2012, President Jonathan announced that Boko Haram had infiltrated not only the army and police, but also the executive and legislative arms of government. Boko Haram's spokesman also claimed responsibility for the assassination outside Maiduguri of Abbas Anas Ibn Umar Garbai, a politician and younger brother of the Shehu of Borno. This was one of several political and religious assassinations carried out by Boko Haram that year, presumably with the overall intentions of correcting injustices in the group's home state of Borno.

The common theme throughout the North-East was the targeting of police, who were regularly massacred at work or followed home and gunned down in drive - by shootings, either in revenge for the murder of Yusuf, or as representatives of an illegitimate state apparatus. The arrest of five

officers for the extra-judicial killing of Yusuf in 2009 had no noticeable effect. Opportunities for criminal enterprise flourished. By October 2012, hundreds of police officers had been killed in attacks on more than 60 police stations. The government's response to this increase in insecurity was to invest heavily in security equipment, spending US 5.5 Billion dollars (20% of United States' budgets for that year) on bomb detection units, communication and transport, and US 470 million dollars on a Chinese CCTV system for the capital Abuja (Wikipedia, 2013).

President Goodluck Jonathan's 2011 election victory had been the cause of widespread grievances, as it was said to have broken the terms of a tacit agreement whereby after two terms, the presidency was expected to change hands to a northern, Muslim candidate. This heightened the violence as the group became more aggressive. The subsequent campaign of violence by Boko Haram culminated in a series of attacks across the country. On Christmas Day 2011, a church in the outskirts of Abuja was bombed, killing 37. In Niger state, a suicide car-bomb outside a church killed 43. In May 2013, the president declared a state of emergency in some local government areas in the four worst affected states, and closed the borders with Cameroon, Chad and Niger in the North-East. (Wikipedia 2013).

Instead of abetting violence, the state of emergency intensified it. Two days after the state of emergency was declared, Boko Haram released an ultimatum to Southern Nigerians living in the north, giving them three days to leave. Three days later they began a series of mostly small-scale attacks on Christians and members of the Igbo ethnic group, causing many to flee to their home states. On 20<sup>th</sup> January, 2012, Boko Haram launched by far the deadliest attack yet, where more than 180 were killed in Kano in an assault on police buildings. The dead included a Nigerian Television Authority (NTA) reporter. The Al-Qaeda tactics involved a combination of car bombs, IEDS, suicide bombers and gunmen wearing fake army and police uniforms.

Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch released detailed reports in 2012, widely quoted by US and UK government agencies and the international media, based on research conducted over the course of the conflict in the worst affected regions of the country. The reports were critical of the actions of both Boko Haram and government security forces. Human Right Watch (HRW,2012) was quoted as saying "Boko Haram, should immediately cease all attacks, and threats of attacks that cause loss of life, injury, and the destruction of property. The Nigerian government should take urgent measures to address the human rights abuses that have helped fuel the violent militancy" (p.6)

A state of emergency was declared in May 2013 covering the entire North-Eastern states of Borno, Adamawa and Yobe raising fears of an increase in human rights violations by the military. In the 12 months following the announcement, 250,000 inhabitants of the three states fled their homes, followed by a further 180,000 between May and August 2014. Another 210,000 fled from neighboring states, bringing the total number of people displaced by the conflict at about 650,000; many thousands sought refuge in neighboring countries (Owuloyi, 2013)

In a 2013 US report, Boko Haram was ranked as the second deadliest terrorist group in the world, after the Taliban in Afghanistan. In July 2014, Nigeria was estimated to have had the highest number of terrorist attacks or killings in the world over the past year: 3,477 deaths were reported in 146 attacks. The Governor of Borno State, Kashuri Shettima, announced to journalists in

February 2014 that “Boko Haram are better armed and are better motivated than our own troops. Given the present state of affairs, it is absolutely impossible for us to defeat Boko Haram” (Sani 2011, p.50).

**Figure 1.1:** *Map of North/East geo-political zone of Nigeria, the host area of Boko Haram insurgents*



### **Terrorism and the Media Symbiosis**

On the part of the mass media, there are indications that they thrive in crises reportage. That may be because crises reportage significantly increases readership, viewership/listenership, and by implication, attracts more advertisement patronage. Consequently, the mass media respond to terrorist attacks with undisguised zeal and zest. Thus, by energizing competition for audience size, circulation and advertising revenue through the dissemination of terror message, the mass media get rewarded (Nacos, 2006). In addition to the mass media's well-known quest for advertisement patronage, there is also this issue bordering on the definition of news as media's ravenous appetite for the unusual, alarming, anecdotal, high melodramatic and the humanized. That is why there is this popular aphorism (though cynical) in journalism parlance that says “if it bleeds, it leads, but if it doesn't bleed, it certainly shouldn't lead, and indeed, may not fit for print at all” (Mueller, 2007).

The truth is that terrorism rightly fits into this idea, as it not only bleeds, but spurts river of blood. It is such quest for human interest stories and drama by the media that (Nacos, 2006) considers to be responsible for over-coverage of terrorist activities. He, (Nacos) made reference to the early 1980 when American Television Channels broadcast more terrorism-related stories, than those of poverty, crime unemployment and discrimination put together.

Thus, it could be said that mass media and terrorism apparently enjoy some degree of symbiotic relationship even though terrorists seem to need the media more than the media need the terrorists. Little wonder the former Prime Minister of Britain, Margaret Thatcher, was widely

quoted as saying that “Publicity is the oxygen of terrorism” (Muller et al., 2003; Vieira, 1991). Going by the above assertion, it is understandable that the main objective of terrorists is to spread the message of fear to as many people as possible, including those not directly involved in the attack; and of course the mass media play an important role in the dissemination of terror messages (achievement of the main objective of the terrorists). That may be responsible for the recent description of the relationship between the media and terrorism as “sleeping in the same bed, but with different dreams”.

But in the actual sense, it is the terrorists who covet media publicity with unimaginable interest. Thus, Gerges (2005) notes that the publicity was so important to former Al-Qaeda leader Osama bin Laden, that his close associates within the group variously spoke of him as being ‘obsessed’ with international media. They called him a ‘publicity hound’, one that had “caught the diseases of screens, flashes, fans and applause”. Gerges (2005, p.194) also added that Bin Laden’s second-in-command, Al Zawahiri had once remarked that “more than half of this battle is taking place in the media”.

In corroboration of terrorists’ obsession with media, *The Economist* of July 14, 2007 quoted an Islamist magazine as saying “Film everything; this is good advice for all Mujahedeen. You should be aware that every frame you take is as good as a missile fired at the crusader enemy and his puppets”. According to a notorious Brazilian guerilla, Carlos Marighella (n.d.), insurgency “is based on the direct or indirect use of mass means of communications and news transmitted orally in order to demoralize the government” (Marighella n.d. p.103). Other scholars such as (Hoffman, 2006; Nacos, 2006 and Ganor, 2002) have also written vicariously on the issue of terrorists’ use of the media to achieve their goals.

Hoffman (2006) explains that without the “media’s coverage, the acts (terrorists) impact is arguably wasted, remaining narrowly confined to the immediate victims) of the attack, rather than reaching the wider ‘target audience’ at whom the terrorists’ violence is actually aimed” Nacos agrees with Hoffman that “without massive news coverage, the terrorist act would resemble the proverbial tree falling in the forest: if no one learned of an incident, it would be as if it had not occurred”. To Ganor (2002), he believes that “terrorists are not actually interested in the deaths of three or thirty-or even three thousand people. Rather, they allow the imagination of the target population to do their work for them.

In other words, it could be rightly argued that terrorists could attain their aims without carrying out a single attack; the desired panic could be produced by the continuous broadcast of threats by radio and television interviews, videos and all the familiar methods of psychological warfare (Ganor 2002). Scholars and experts in terrorist warfare have articulated their positions and views on why these merchants of death crave for media. Alexandar Carlton and Wilkinson (1979) identified three reasons: attention, recognition and legitimacy for their unbridled quest.

Nacos, cited in Ekwueme and Obayi (2012, p.4), extended the terrorists’ media objectives to four. According to him, the first is to gain attention and awareness of the audience and by so doing, condition the target population (and government) for intimidation and fear. The second goal is the recognition of the organization’s motives. They want people to think about why they are carrying out the attacks. The third objective is to gain the respect and sympathy of those

in whose name they claim to attack. The last objective is to gain a quasi-legitimate status and a media treatment similar to that of legitimate political actors.

To Gerrits (1992), the terrorists' use of the mass media is inclined to psychological warfare: demoralizing the enemies (like governments) demonstrating strength, gaining sympathy and creating fear and chaos. Bandura (1998) corroborates Gerrits stance when he asserts that the media are used in this respect for moral justification, arousal of sympathy and intimidation of the public. The long and short of the argument is that the main objective of terrorists use of media is the creation and spread of fear among the people.

Thus, Hoffman (2006, p.174) posits that "only by spreading terror and outrage to a much larger audience, can the terrorists gain maximum potential leverage that they need to effect fundamental political change". Unfortunately, even with the media publicity acclaimed to be the "oxygen of terrorism", the relationship between the Boko Haram sect and the Nigerian mass media has remained in the opposite. Is it not paradoxical that while other terror groups embrace and extensively use the media, Boko Haram does something in the contrary. It could be recalled that the sect has never hidden its disdain and distrust of the Nigerian media.

For instance, shortly after its September 28, 2011 threat to deal with media reporters, it killed Isah Zakari and Bernard Akogwu- Nigerian Television Authority (NTA) reporter and Channels Television photographer respectively. Amidst the condemnation that greeted those killings, the sect went ahead to bomb the offices of *Thisday*, *The Moment* and *Daily Sun* newspapers in Abuja and Kaduna on April 26, 2012. The sect cited lack of objectivity and blasphemy as reasons for the attacks (Ekwueme and Obayi, 2012).

In the words of its spokesman, Abu Qaqa cited in (Izuogu, 2012):

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 the report of the ongoing war, they chose to take side. It is not only *Thisday* that has engaged in negative media campaign. But the sins of *Thisday* are more. They once insulted the prophet Mohammed in 2011 and we have not forgotten. Nigeria media would not be a problem if they do their job professionally without taking sides (p.5).

He further warned: "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 pleas for them to be fair in their reportage".

Interestingly, the issues at stake here are far beyond objectivity and the dictates of Boko Haram. What is rather needed is that the mass media should tilt their reports towards satisfying the needs of the nation and the public in times of crisis, irrespective of whether they are objective or subjective. After all, objective and extensive coverage of terrorist attacks may be more detrimental than beneficial to the interest of a nation.

The Boko Haram insurgency has attracted widespread media attention, both at the local and international fronts. With the enormity of the sect's activities, coupled with diverse perceptions by the public, there has been varied reports of their activities in Nigeria. For most people, there

is no doubt that their world view of events is gleaned from media presentation of reports. That is why media houses and what they do with news stories keep attracting the attention of media scholars. The roadside gossips, bar discussions and academic arguments are largely predicated on media portrayal of events.

The Cable News Network is one of the media responsible for providing the public with the platform to access local and international events in Nigeria, including that of insurgency. Impliedly, the CNN should be able to serve the news and information needs of Nigerians and the world at large on the activities of Boko Haram insurgents in the North/East geopolitical region of Nigeria. But in the face of the allegations of information distortion, news imbalance, under-reportage and imperialism against Western media (Udeze, 2005); coupled with that of inability to objectively present the time perspective of reports of Nigerian origin; the task of providing balanced and objective accounts of the activities of Boko Haram insurgents by the CNN becomes contentious.

Against that background and in line with scholarly postulation that media should maintain high sense of objectivity in their reportage; this study sets out to examine the online reports of the Cable News Network (CNN) on Boko Haram insurgency in Nigeria.

### **Statement of the Problem**

Since 2009 when the activities of the Boko Haram sect became pronounced in Nigeria, the organization and its activities have continued to dominate public discourses. Expectedly, the mass media at national and international fronts keyed into reportage of the rebellious activities of this terror group. With its strategy of suicide bombings, massacre, abductions and other deadly activities, the group (Boko Haram) notoriously shot itself into international media space. Consequent upon its nefarious activities, the United States of America in 2009 blacklisted Boko Haram as a terrorist organization that even has links with one of the world's most-dreaded terror groups called Al-Qaeda.

Interestingly, some research findings have shown that the foreign media, especially from the West, have inclinations for inaccurate and contradictory reportage of conflicts in Nigeria. For example, Kur & Edegoh 2011 assert that Western media, including CNN, VOA and BBC had at various times been found wanting on the accuracy index. They contend that such inaccurate reports by foreign media on conflicts in Nigeria have tendencies of making the parties to the conflict not to work towards amicable resolution of the problem.

Against the background of the allegation of inaccurate reportage of incidents in Nigeria leveled against Western media, the researchers are of the belief that a communication audit is necessary at this point in order to determine the veracity or otherwise of that claim. That is because if a study of this nature is ignored, there is every tendency that people would continue to perceive Western media in the light of that allegation.

### **Objectives of the Study**

The general objective of this research is to investigate the patterns and trends in CNN's online reports on Boko Haram insurgency in Nigeria. Specifically, the study aimed to:



1. find out the degree of prominence CNN gives to its online reports on Boko Haram insurgency in Nigeria.
2. determine the extent to which CNN balances its online reports on Boko Haram insurgency in Nigeria.
3. ascertain the level of objectivity in CNN's online reports on Boko Haram insurgency in Nigeria
4. identify major sources of information for CNN's online reports on Boko Haram insurgency in Nigeria.
5. determine the predominant genre in CNN's online reports on Boko Haram insurgency in Nigeria.
6. ascertain if CNN's online reports on Boko Haram insurgency in Nigeria conform to the allegation of information distortion leveled against Western media

### **Research Questions**

The following questions are formulated to guide the study.

1. To what degree are CNN's online reports on Boko Haram insurgency in Nigeria prominent?
2. To what extent are CNN's online reports on Boko Haram insurgency in Nigeria balanced?
3. What is the level of objectivity in CNN's online reports on Boko Haram insurgency in Nigeria?
4. What are the major sources of information for CNN's online reports on Boko Haram insurgency in Nigeria?
5. Which report genre dominates CNN's online reports on Boko Haram insurgency in Nigeria?
6. Do CNN's online reports on Boko Haram insurgency in Nigeria conform to the allegation of information distortion leveled against Western media?

### **Statement of Hypothesis**

To guide the outcome of this research, the researcher formulated a pair of alternate and null hypotheses thus:

**H<sub>1</sub>:** Cable News Network online reports on Boko Haram insurgency in Nigeria will conform to the allegation of information distortion leveled against Western media.

**H<sub>01</sub>:** Cable News Network online reports on Boko Haram insurgency in Nigeria will not conform to the allegation of information distortion leveled against Western media.

### **REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE**

Kur & Edegoh (2011) conducted an investigation on "Foreign Media Coverage of Communal Conflicts in Nigeria: Implications for Effective Conflict Management". The study holds that negative foreign media report of conflict in Nigeria has the tendency of making the parties to the conflict not to work towards amicable resolution of the conflict. It cites the Jos as an example where many Western media, including CNN, VOA and BBC reported that the endemic Jos crisis is religious. The study argued that such reports came at a time when major stake holders in the crisis had openly said that the perpetrators of the crisis were hiding under religion to cause

violence. Such report by foreign media has the tendency of aggravating the situation, considering the volatility and sensitivity of religious issues in Nigeria.

It also holds that the gory pictures of casualties carried by foreign media about conflicts in Nigeria can easily incite parties to a conflict to embark on reprisal attack. When such gory pictures and negative reports that follow are not balanced, the matter becomes worse. By focusing more on conflict casualties, and less on efforts at curtailing the conflict, foreign media do not contribute to the conflict management mechanism, which they are suppose to do as a matter of social responsibility.

In a similar study, Okoro & Odoemelam (2013) examined the pattern of frames adopted by Nigerian newspapers in the coverage of Boko Haram insurgency in Nigeria using the *Guardian*, *Daily Sun*, *Vanguard* and *ThisDay* newspapers as test cases.

The study found out that there are contrasting patterns in the frames used by the newspapers in coverage of Boko Haram in the year under study. The *Guardian*, *Vanguard* and *ThisDay* newspapers emphasized the responsibility frame 24% as against 17.1% emphasized by the *Daily Sun* newspaper. Also, among the 10 frames used as yardstick for measuring newspaper coverage of the Boko Haram Insurgency, the dominant frame identified in the coverage was the Response frame, 26.3%. Findings also showed that there was 40% non-prevalence in the use of the frames. In their bid to determine how advocacy journalism could conduce to containment of Boko Haram terrorism and threat to national unity, Okugo, Onwukwe, Ihechu & Uche (2012) conducted a case study investigation into documents, diaries, journals, historical artifacts, newspapers/magazines, as well as broadcast media reports on Boko Haram terrorists' activities.

The study found that "the mainstream media by their very constitution, proprietorship, mode of operation and sustenance in this our chequered economy do not have the luxury of time for analytical reports or patience for investigative reporting. They (mainstream media) therefore pander more to straight jacketed reporting without much effort at embellishments. The news is given flat and straight with objectivity as the watchword. At times, snippets of sensationalism are found. This is evidenced by the kind of headlines that stream across our regular dailies, weeklies and on radio. The study argued that "the instinct for survival could have contributed to this method of straight jacket reporting against other forms like advocacy journalism" (p.69). It also held that the "success" of Boko-Haram has a correlation with the identified mode of journalistic reporting. The fulcrum of the study is that the media play a significant role building perceptions.

As for Ewueme & Obayi (2012) who tried to find out how the mass media could be optimally used to curtail the menace of the Boko Haram sect and by extension, preserve freedom of speech/other related freedoms; they contend that despite coming under attacks by the Boko-Haram sect, Nigerian's mass media could still help in building positive and courageous attitudes in the people, in response to the sect's threats. According to the researchers, that could be done through the way the media frame their reports on Boko Haram's attacks, in respect of choice of words, pictures and the language of the reports. The study concluded that Boko-Haram is a faceless, conscienceless and bloody bunch of mass-murdering terrorists and should be appropriately framed as such.

In their study of youths involvement in social conflicts and their implications on Nigeria's image..., Nwonu, Ojo & Odigbo (2014) came up with the following findings: that 34.21% of the

respondents strongly agreed that there is significant correlation between the Boko Haram crisis and Nigeria's international image, 48.42% equally agreed with that notion, whereas 6.58% of the respondents were not sure if there is any significant correlation; 5.53% and 5.26% disagreed and strongly disagreed respectively

Similarly, Doki (2012) conducted a study on mass media and conflicts in Northern Nigeria. In that study which involved a content analysis of *ThisDay*, *Guardian* and *Tribune* newspapers found that the motivating factors behind subjective coverage of the understudied issues were tribalism and religion. It then concludes that there is abundant evidence that the media instigated and sustained conflict in Northern Nigeria. It also submitted that the media also undoubtedly violated the laws and ethics of media practice, and by such violations, committed a crime against the North and generality of the people of Nigeria.

In another study on audience perception of the role of the mass media in the coverage of the 2001 Tiv/Jukun ethnic conflict, Orhewere & Kur (2007) found that there is a tendency for the media to present the news quickly rather than accurately in crisis situations and that early media reports of an unexpected event will tend to exaggerate the crisis. It however, maintained that responsible media practice in times of conflict suggests that the media do not carry inaccuracies, distortions, conflict, confusion and errors of facts in their reports; instead, the most crucial role of the media should be in helping to prevent or at least attenuate the severity of conflicts. It submits that the desire to report news quickly should not take precedence over accuracy, and advised the media to avoid stereotyping; but focus more on the mechanisms of conflict management than on actual conflicts.

## **THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

This study is framed around the following two important theories of Mass Communication.

### **Framing Theory**

The concept and theory of framing suggest that the way and manner an issue is presented, influences the way it will be perceived and subsequently the decisions and choices that people will make. It refers to the way media gatekeepers organize and present events and issues they cover and the way audiences interpret what they are provided with.

To Tankard et al. (1991, p.5) "a frame is a central organizing idea for news that supports a context and suggests what the issue is through the use of selection, emphasis, exclusion and elaboration.

In the words of (Entman 1993, p.52), framing essentially involves selection and salience. To frame therefore is to select some aspects of a perceived reality and make them more salient in a communicating text, in such a way as to promote a particular problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation and/or treatment for the item described. He adds that frames then define problems - determine what causal agent is doing with what costs and benefits, usually measured in terms of common cultural values, diagnose causes -identify the forces creating the problem; make moral judgments-evaluate causal agents and their effects; and suggest remedies - offer and justify treatments for the problems and predict their likely effects.

A number of studies are in agreement that news is not just something out there, but a construction by journalists, from selection of occurrences. These studies submit that news is a social product molded by many organizational and professional factors. The underlying assumption of framing

theory is that:

The determination of what is or not news, what is or is not significant, is a function not of the nature of the world "out there" but of the work of those who must somehow bring into being some things which are more important than others and hence, more worthy of publication (Molotch and Lester 1975, p.236).

The way journalists do their work by selecting and processing what becomes news is not a neutral activity, as proponents of objectivity would like us to believe. Journalists are not dry wool that absorbs any liquid dipped into it. They (journalists) bring to their work certain knowledge or cultural maps which in some way, influence the way they conceptualize events and issues. Journalists, like "all individuals interpret (the) world by calling on the knowledge structure that are acquired through shared social learning, individual experience and personal reasons" (Dunwoody and Griffin 1994, p.24). We make sense of the world through these knowledge structures or mental maps. In fact, human beings act according to what they know and understand and not necessarily according to what they simply see or hear (Mendelsohn 1990, p.38).

These frames or inferential structures function in two ways. First, they are used in classifying events into various types of news- political, economic, human-interest, crime etc. Second, these concepts help shape the meaning of events, making them understandable and intelligible (Chibnail 1977).The journalists employ these frames not only to comprehend events and issues for themselves, but also to construct stories for their audiences (Dunwoody and Griffin 1993). Through the use of those frames, the press can "impose its own meaning, frames and symbols to a given event". (Einsiedel and Caughlan 1994,p.136). Through framing journalists are able to organize otherwise fragmentary items and give them some structures to make them meaningful.

In that context, (Mc Quail 2000) submits that framing is a way of giving some interpretation. On that note, one may reasonably ask, is there any possibility that journalists using different frames may signal the same event differently? The answer to this question is that it is rare for journalists to use different frames to signal the same event differently. This is because journalists seem to approach the same events using very similar frames. No wonder why Dunwoody and Griffin (1994, p.24) aver that "frames utilized by journalists for story construction are not idiosyncratic. Rather journalists across a wide-range of media seem to employ similar mental maps and, thus produce stories that reconstitute the world in similar way".

Over the years, many scholars have tried to find reasons for this homogeneity among journalists. Walter Lippmann, for instance, advanced the argument that journalists tend to standardize popular expectations and definitions of such a situation, based on stereotypes picked from their cultural environment. According to Lippman (1993), "In the great booming, buzzing confusion of the outer world, we pick out what our culture has already defined for us, and we tend to perceive that which we have picked out in the form stereotyped for us by our culture" (pp.54-55). Such process of standardization simplifies the work of the journalists in processing the news. As Rocho (1975, p.112) observed "without standardization, without stereotypes without routine judgment, without fairly ruthless disregard of subtlety, the editors would soon die of excitement".

Meanwhile, there are scholars who believe that the similarity in news coverage is due to occupational routines employed by journalists, while some others stress the point that the elite

through their access to the media are able to set the frame and primary definition with which reporters approach the news.

The framing theory is relevant to this study because Boko Haram is a shadowy but powerful sect, bent on enthroning its parochial religious belief in the North/East Nigeria and by extension, the entire country. Again, the mass media can contribute immensely in the containment and ultimately, the defeat of the sect by the way they frame stories of the sect and its activities. In that regard it becomes imperative that care should be taken in the choice of words, pictures and language of the reports.

### **Media Ideology Theory**

This theory according to Lambert and Michael (1987) explains that reports, coverage and activities of the media are reflections of ideologies. The theory posits that the media is an institution greatly influenced by ideological underpinnings. These underpinnings play out in varied activities of the media, particularly news report and news itself. It is one of the theories that explain the conceptions of the mass media (Michael, 1989).

As it relates to media reports, it is held that that media ideology of news differs and this however is a function of the culture, economic and social, as well as, other factors intertwined with the media. The ideology is such that defines what is newsworthy or that which has news value and more importantly, the perspective or slant such story carries in the media. Further analyzing the history, Michael (1989) holds that there is often the tendency for conflicts with allegations of misrepresentations, bias, prejudice, etc. when various media ideologies play out in international fronts, especially as it concerns news reportage and coverage. The Media Ideology Theory was formulated at the wake of the aggression, allegations and counter-allegations that trailed the rift between most third world countries and the industrialized West in the early 1970s ([www.wikipedia.org/media ideology theory](http://www.wikipedia.org/media%20ideology%20theory)).

In relation to this study, foreign media reports which have been found by many studies/researchers as pandering towards 'negative' or crises-driven ideology, do not in most cases give room for a detailed news reportage, and by so doing, attract claims of prejudice, bias and misrepresentations. Boko Haram activities fall within the so-called 'crises-news' and given the slants or perspectives of coverage /reports of foreign media, especially those in the West on the issue, the image of the nation could be affected by such reports or coverage. Wrong impression and perceptions could be built on such negative reports or crises-driven reportage of the media especially the West or the North Pole of the dichotomy of International Communication. Images are formed through media reports (Michael, 1989).

### **RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

This research adopted the content analysis approach. Content analysis is considered suitable in this study because it is a research technique used to make replicable inferences by interpreting and coding textual materials. In other words, through a systematic evaluation of texts such as documents, oral communication and graphics, qualitative data can be converted into quantitative data as noted in [www.terry.uga.edu/management/content/analysis/research/](http://www.terry.uga.edu/management/content/analysis/research/). The target population of the study comprises all the online reports (news, interviews, commentaries/analysis and

documentary) of the Cable News Network on Boko Haram insurgency in Nigeria within the period under reference. According to <http://edition.cnn.com/text=boko+haram>, there are a total of 58 of such reports. In other words, the actual population of this study is 58 online reports of Boko Haram insurgency in Nigeria as recorded in CNN's website. The coding scheme was used as instrument of data collection.

## **FINDINGS OF THE STUDY**

In the course of investigations on patterns and trends of the Cable News Network's Online Reports on Boko Haram Insurgency in Nigeria, the following findings were made.

1 The Cable News Network (CNN) gave high prominence to the online reports on Boko Haram insurgency in Nigeria. That was because a greater percentage of the incidents reported by the CNN within the period under investigation had Voice Over, Sound-On-Tape and lasted over 180 seconds.

2 Available data on CNN's online reports on Boko Haram insurgency in Nigeria showed lack of balance, given that preponderance of words has a higher percentage than that of proportional in words and visuals.

3 There was low level of objectivity in CNN's online reports on Boko Haram insurgency in Nigeria. This may be a fall-out of the fact that in the actual sense of it, Journalists are not neutral observers, but political actors whose actions are influenced by their environment and whose degree of objectivity is relative to their choice to seek/use sources that conform to pre-existing prejudices.

4 Within the period of the study, there was only one source of information for CNN's online reports on Boko Haram insurgency in Nigeria. This may not be unconnected with the fact that the medium may be more pre-occupied with financial gains than in the discharge of its professional responsibility.

5 The straight news type of report dominated CNN's online reports on Boko Haram insurgency in Nigeria. So it could be said that going by report genre, the CNN was to some extent objective in her account of the insurgency in Nigeria. This assertion is supported by the fact that straight news report is neither editorialized nor laden with reporter's prejudices.

6 CNN's online reports on Boko Haram insurgency in Nigeria did conform to the allegation of information distortion leveled against Western media.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

Based on the findings of this research, the study recommends the following:

- CNN's reporters should endeavour to diversify the sources of their reports on Boko Haram insurgency in Nigeria, as doing so will definitely enhance reportorial balance.
- It is also recommended that the Cable News Network (CNN) should combine all report genres in her account on Boko Haram insurgency in Nigeria, such that whatever is missing in one genre will be found in the other.
- The Cable News Network (CNN) should as a matter of great importance ensure that its conflict reporters are adequately equipped with sophisticated communication and life-saving

gadgets. The recommended gadgets will no doubt act as morale-boosters and protective measures to propel conflict reporters into going the extra mile in order to obtain on-the-spot information.

## REFERENCES

- Alexander, Y.: Carton, D and Wilkinson, P. (1979). *Terrorism: Theory and practice*. Boulder: Westview Press.
- Bandura, A. (1998) Mechanism of moral dis-engagement. In W. Reich (Ed.). *Origins of terrorism, psychologies, ideologies, theologies, state of mind*. Washington DC: Woodrow Wilson Centre Press.
- Chibnail, V.O. (1977). Journalistic practices and news coverage of environmental issues. *The Nordicom Review* No.1
- Doki, A.M. (2012). Mass media and conflicts in Northern Nigeria. *Reach. A Journal of Mass Communication and Information Management in Nigeria*. Vol.3, No 1, pp.33-39
- Dunwordy, S. and Griffin, R. J. (1994) Journalistic strategies for reporting long-term environment issues: A case of three superfund sites. In I. I-lasen (Ed.). *The Mass Media and Environment Issues*. Leicester University Press.
- Economist (2007). A world wide web of terror. Volume 384, issue 8537, July 14, Accessed from <http://www.economic.com>
- Einsiedel, E. and Caughlan, E. (1994). The Canadian Press and the environment: Reconstructing a social reality. In A. Hansen (Ed.). *The Mass Media and Environmental Issues*. Leicester: Leicester University Press.
- Ekwueme, A. C. and Obayi, P.M.(2012). Boko Haram assault on Nigeria: towards effective mass media response. *New Media and Mass Communication*, (5) pp. 1-7
- Entman. R. B. (1993) Framing: Toward clarification of a fractured paradigm. *Journal of Communication*, 43.pp. 51-58
- Ganor, B. (2002). *Terror as a strategy of psychological warfare*. July 15. Accessed from <http://www.ict.org.it>
- Gerges. F. A. (2005). *The far enemy why Jihad went global*. New York: Cambridge University Press
- Gerrits, M. (1992). *The trouble with the world*. USA: Lawrence Erlbaum
- Hoffman, B. (2006). *Inside terrorism* (revised and expanded edition). New York: Columbia University Press.
- <https://reportsinnaijablogspot.com>
- Human Rights Watch (2012). Boko Haram renews attack on North/East Nigeria
- Izuogu, K.C. (2012). Evaluation of the creative strategies in political advertisements of ACN and PDP Presidential candidates in the 2011 elections. *Seminar Presented to the Department of Mass Communication, University of Nigeria Nsukka*. In partial fulfillment of the requirements for the award of the degree of Doctor of Philosophy (Ph.D.)
- Kur, J. T. & Edegoh, L. O. (2011). Foreign media coverage of communal conflicts in Nigeria: Implications for effective conflict management. *Proceedings of 4th International Conference on Research & Development* 14 (7) p. 10-16.
- Lippmann, W. (1992). *Public opinion*. New York: Harcourt Brace.

- Mc Quail, D. (2000). *Mc Quail's mass communication theory*. London: Sage Publications.
- Marighella, C. (n. d.). *A study in guerrilla warfare*. Accessed from <http://www.guerrilla-warfare>.
- Michael E. O. (1989). *Media ideology framework*. Accessed in [www.ehow.com](http://www.ehow.com). Retrieved 20/11/2014.
- Molotch, I. I. and Lester, M.(1975). The great oil spill as local occurrence and national event. *American Journal of Sociology*, 81(2).
- Mueller, C. (2007). *Manual of urban guerrilla*. Havana: Tricontinental
- Muller, R. Spaaij, R. F. J. and Ruitenber, A. G. W. (2003). *Trends in terrorism*. Alphan aan de Rijn: Kluwer
- Nacoz, Z. J. (2006). *The nature and origin of terrorism*. New York: Cambridge University Press
- Nwonu, C.O.; Ojo, L.I. & Odigbo, B. (2014). *Appraisal of Youths' Involvement in Social Conflicts and the Implications on Nigeria's Image and Tourism Development*. Conference Proceedings of the African Council for Communication Education (ACCE) Nigeria Chapter, pp. 197-217.
- Okoro, N. & Odoemclan, C.C. (2013). Print media framing of Boko Haram insurgency in Nigeria: A content analytical study of *Vanguard* and *ThisDay* newspapers. *Research on Humanities and Social Sciences*. 3, (11), pp.86-94
- Okugo, C. U. Onwukwe, D. C, Ihechu, P.I. & Uche, U.(2012). Advocacy journalism as a remedy to Boko Haram insurgency and threat to national unity. *Journal and Linguistics and Communication Studies* 2 (1) pp. 61 -72 .
- Orhewere, J. A. & Kur, J. A. (2007). The audience perception of the role of the mass media in the coverage of the 2001 Tiv/Jukun ethnic conflict. *The Nigerian Journal of Communication: The Bi-Annual Journal of the African Council for Communication Education (ACCE)*, Nigeria Chapter. (1) (4) pp. 54-63
- Owuloyi, L. (2013). Boko Haram and dialogue initiative in Nigeria: *The Prospective Journal of Social Issue*. 4 (1) pp. 60-75.
- Roch, B. (1975). *News-making*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Sani, S. (2011). Boko Haram: History, ideas and revolt (1). *Guardian Newspaper* of Wednesday 6, (p.xiv)
- Tankard, S. (1991) Media frames: Approaches to conceptualization and measurement. *Paper Presented to the Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication Annual Meeting*. Boston Massachusetts.
- Udeze, S.N. (2005). *After the whirlwind: A discourse on International Communication*. Enugu: Rhyce Kerex, Publishers.
- Wikipedia (2013). Oil subsidy removal; Police mount nation-wide road block in Lagos and other cities