

Newspaper Editorial in Communicating Boko Haram Terrorism and Promoting Good Governance in Nigeria: A Review of Literature

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Abstract: *Nigeria has always been confronted by contradictions due to its multi-ethnic and multi-cultural nature. Amid this, several approaches have been adopted aimed at tackling the onslaught. In view of this challenge, this paper adopts a qualitative approach in analysing secondary data gathered from books, journals and newspapers, and argues that editorial treatment of Boko Haram insurgency should be adopted more by newspapers than deadpan reportage of the rebellion to show the effect of the insurgency on the nation building process. Using the agenda setting theory of the mass media, the paper further argues that editorial will help to bring about good governance on the part of government due to its enlightening, forceful and advocacy nature, compared to straight news. It maintains that it will change the perceptions of some persons, including those in government that the insurgents are being applauded by newspapers while government is being condemned, due to the prominence given to such reports and the news slant. The paper, while citing cases of editorial contributions to national development and governance, concludes that since editorial weighs all sides to an issue and takes a position on it, if adopted by the Nigerian newspapers in communicating the Boko Haram terrorism, it will make all stakeholders involved in the fight against the insurgency to live up to their responsibilities and give the masses confidence in the government, which is the real meaning of good governance.*

Key words: *Editorial, Communication, Good governance, Boko Haram, Terrorism*

I. Introduction

Nigeria is a multi-ethnic society. The nature of the country with its population of over 200 million, is not without contradictions and confrontations. The confrontations have always been about suspicion, injustice, hate speech, religious intolerance, political malpractice, economic instability and environmental ruin. In the past, these confrontations were, however, at low ebb and were constantly managed. Creation of three regions and later seven states were done by the then military governments in order to address the confrontations. The creation of more states and some regional bodies like Oil Mineral Producing Areas Development Agency

Commission (OMPADAC), which was created through Decree No 23 of 1992 by the military government headed by General Ibrahim Babagida while 3% of oil revenue was allocated to it, and later Niger Delta Development Commission (NDDC) on June 5, 2000, were also done to address the specific agitations in the Niger Delta region of the country.

Today, the northern part of Nigeria is also witnessing violent agitation and terrorism. This has increased the contradiction that is threatening the social fabric of Nigeria. As observed by Punch Newspaper of February 18, 2020:

Multiculturalism has become a defining feature in many of the world's fastest growing economies. The North should be brought back to what it used to be; a melting pot. The more people from different backgrounds trust each other, the better for the society. It is obvious that Nigeria's structural oddity hurts the North more than any other part of the country. The unjust rentier system the country's elite has sustained is unravelling and unless they act fast, the contraption may explode with unpredictable consequences

Sadly, the multi-ethnic and multi-religious nature of Nigeria, are constantly increasing the agitations, ideological and religious fights. Example of this is the Jama'atu Ahlis Sunna Lidda'awati wal-jihad (those that are committed to the propagation of the Prophet's teachings and Jihad) widely known as Boko Haram (meaning that western education is not good). Boko Haram insurgency began in 2002 and was spearheaded by Mohammed Yusuf in 2002. Lamenting the consequence of Boko Haram terrorism on the Nigerian society and her people, Senam, Ntiense and Okorie (20) submit that terrorism has seriously destabilized Nigeria's values and ways of life. The widespread sense of insecurity to life and property, occasioned by this epidemic, has become a matter of serious concern to government, security agencies and the Nigerian citizenry at large.

Since its formation till date, it has continued to claim lives and property; bringing about displacement of residents and gulping billions of naira from federal government, state government, regional and world bodies. Realising that the West African region is now caught in the labyrinth of terrorism and other forms of criminality, which have hindered the well-being of the citizens and the economy, leaders of the Economic Community of West African States pledged to deal with the scourge at their recent meeting in Abuja. A \$2.3 billion budget was adopted for that purpose (Punch editorial of January 10, 2020). For 10 years, Boko Haram's murderous activities have led to the death of about 100,000 persons in Nigeria. Military locations are attacked in Borno and Yobe states with reckless abandon. As soldiers are killed, arms and ammunition, including hardware, are then carted away by the insurgents to enrich their armoury. In the wake of all this, the country is facing its worst humanitarian crisis since the Civil War ended, with over 1.9 million people internally displaced. With the Islamic State West African Province now in the North-East in an unholy alliance with Boko Haram, the end of their bloodbath in the area is not yet in sight (Punch editorial, January 10).

The Boko Haram insurgency, like every other societal issue, is often reported in the Nigerian mass media. The reportage of the insurgency is frequently given hard news or deadpan treatment as it is seldom given feature and editorial treatment. The straight news reportage of issues takes on the colouration of objective journalism in which issues are reported the way they occurred without injecting opinion and taking a position. On the other hand, feature treatment of an issue only adds flesh to the skeletal structure called news through in-depth presentation of the issue or subjecting the issue to analysis. In this case, opinions are given by the writer without any strong and collective position taken on it. This is where editorial takes a departure from and asserts itself as a subtle advocacy journalism, since issues are presented, and collective position of the newspaper taken on the subject. Editorial brings about enlightenment of the masses on a given issue and elicit debate among the

people. It makes government to frighten when its policies and programmed are x-rayed as unfavourable to the masses. Therefore, it brings about schema for public discourse on issues raised in it and makes the masses to be curious about policies and programmes of government as well as other issues covered by the editorial.

In view of the importance of editorial content to national development and the continued pogrom by the Boko Haram terrorists, which has increased the financial burden of government and poses threat to governance and socio-economic activities of those in the troubled Northeastern part of Nigeria, the researchers discussed the issue to keep government and security agencies on their toes to fight the war and bring an end to the insurgency.

1.1. Statement of Problem

Since 2002 up till now, boko haram terrorism remains the greatest challenge that is confronting Nigeria and her people. The boko haram pogrom has taken grip on the Nigerian society, and billions of naira spent to tackle it. Beginning from the Olusegun Obasanjo's administration, to Umaru Musa Ya'Adua's administration, to Goodluck Jonathan's administration to the present regime of Muhammadu Buhari, policies have been put in place by federal government and some state governments at the epicenter of the insurgency in finding solution to it. Local and foreign military helps had been deployed in hardware and software, yet the boko haram terrorism has continued to claim lives and property of Nigerians, as government seems helpless.

Meanwhile, opinion leaders and the mass media have been reporting the issue, mostly through the deadpan approach which is rooted in objective paradigm. Therefore, awareness has been created on the issue as people, especially those living in the North-eastern part of Nigeria, take precautionary measures on daily basis. To cement the precautionary measures of the masses, government at the federal and state levels in the troubled region of Nigeria, often deploy military and para-military personnel to residential areas, to avoid attacks by the terrorists.

In spite of the above measures, the boko haram insurgency remains unabated with economic, political, social and religious consequences, while media reportage on the issue is always in the aftermath of attack as casualty figures are given. This has raised the questions of "what is the role of the mass media in tackling the menace, and in what way should the issue be handled in the media to have the desired effect on government whose responsibility it is to protect the lives and property of Nigerians?"

1.2. Research Objective

The aim of the paper is to discuss the importance of editorial to national security. Specifically, the objective of the paper revolves around the need to:

1. Ascertain consequences of boko haram insurgency on the Nigerian society,
2. Find out how editorial has helped in tackling insecurity in other societies,
3. Examine how editorial can be applied in Nigeria in finding solution to the boko haram insurgency.

II. Conceptual Framework

2.1. Editorial

Editorial has different meanings depending on the context in which it is defined. For this study, however, editorial is conceptualised as the collective voice of a newspaper which strongly draws people's attention to a serious situation with a view to improving it. It is in this perspective that Ihejirika et al (2014) assert that editorial is the corporate voice or stand of a media outfit on an issue of public importance (p. 31). Eilers (1994), in Osuagwu [17] assert that an editorial is often referred to as the opinion or the voice of a newspaper. It is a write-up giving commentaries and opinions of a publication. These comments and interpretations are usually on recent happenings and timeless topics (p. 78). On their part, Okoro & Agbo (2003), in NOU course module on editorial writing (2008, p. 2) conceptualised editorial as "a critical evaluation,

interpretation and presentation of significant, contemporary events in such a way as to inform, educate, entertain and influence the reader.

2.1.1. Boko Haram

Reuben [19]. defines boko haram as an offensive term used in referring to an organised group of people in the North-eastern part of Nigeria; those who carry sophisticated weapons on daily basis to instill endless fear in the people and government; kidnap, kill people and destroy communities in large proportions.

2.1.2. Terrorism

According Nation Report entitled “Larger Freedom” released on March 17, 2005, as cited in Momoh [10], terrorism is any action intended to cause death or serious bodily harm to civilians or non-combatants, with the purpose of intimidating a population or compelling a government or an international organization to do or abstain from doing act. On his part, Yonah, cited in Asadu[2]. views terrorism as the process of deliberate employment of psychological intimidation and physical violence by sub-national groups to attain strategic and political objectives in violation of law.

2.1.3. Governance and Good Governance

According to Nnoli [12]. governance is a process of social engagement between the rulers and the ruled in the society. It is based on the understanding that the government cannot carry out its functions without using, or depending on, the ruled in one form or another (p. 200). On his part, Heywood (2007) notes that “governance is a broader term than government. Although it still has no settled or agreed definition, it refers, in its widest sense, to the various ways through which social life is coordinated. Government can therefore be seen as one of the institutions involved in governance...” (p. 6). On the other hand, according to Agere (2000), cited in Auwal [3]. “good governance is used to portend the ability and capacity of public office-holders to ensure the political, socioeconomic, cultural and even environmental well-being of citizens in the context of pursuing development and good standard of living in all spheres within the realm of the political system” (p. 64). Odock (2006), cited in Momoh [11], views good governance as “a system of government based on good leadership to the electorate as well as transparency in the operations of government.

Therefore, good governance entails a sustained policy, programme or action by or of government that positively affects the lives of the masses and give them strong hope in government. It translates from policies, programmes and actions to social security and economic prosperity of the masses which ignite their strong sense of belonging to a country. This is why Abraham (2011, p. 9) notes that “national security remains the foundation of good governance, social welfare and economic development of a country and its people”.

2.2. Theoretical Framework

This work is anchored on the agenda setting theory. Maxwell McCombs and Donald Shaw are acknowledged for the theory which they popularized in 1972. According to Ochonogor& Emmanuel (2021, p. 3), the theory is about the “capacity of mass media in influencing the people’s opinion based on the currency that the issue gained in the media reports”. Explaining what agenda setting theory is, Sheyigari [21] avers that “This theory is about what the public think is important. It describes a very powerful influence of the media-the ability to tell us what issues are important”. People have also known that much of the issues considered important in society and in fact discussed are part of items earlier projected by the mass media. It is therefore believed that people consider as important those things reported in the media, and that major issues discussed in society are introduced by the mass media. This is the idea behind agenda setting theory of mass communication (Wogu, 2008, p. 142).Pate &Daudu (2013), in Nwanmereni [13], have agenda setting function of the mass media on their minds when they narrate that:

The media go beyond providing information per se because most of the time, individuals use such information to form opinions on very serious issues in material life. Studies have established that there is a relationship between issues considered important by the media and issues that the public also consider important. Even if they may not tell the people what to think, the media are found to often direct our minds on what to think about

From the above submissions, it could be inferred that agenda setting is about the willingness of the mass media gatekeepers to carefully select an issue or issues which they consider important, and give them prominence through placement, headline, editorial, and through repeated discourse on those issues, so much that they become ubiquitous among the public who later embrace those issues and join in discussing them as dominant issues. Agenda setting is, therefore, considered appropriate for this paper due to the problem it seeks to address.

2.3.Literature Review

People have written on the significance of editorial to nation building process. A few of the literatures manifest in this paper. In a study by Talabi, Adaja & Sanusi, [22] entitled “A content analysis of newspaper coverage of sustainable development goals (SDGs campaign)”, the researchers, while stressing on the importance of news analysis, said it is imperative to note that newspaper presentation of SDGs stories should equally dwell more on editorials and feature stories as these patterns of story presentation allow for in-depth analysis and enlightenment. Meanwhile, Ugondo [24] asserts that globally newspaper editorials exert much influence on social, political and economic issues. Editorials facilitated the abolishment of slave trade in the eighteenth century (Washington Post), influenced public assumptions that Iran had a clandestine nuclear weapons programme (Izadi and Sagaye-Biria), persuaded a considerable share of readers to vote for Labour (Ladd and Lenz), produced more negative public evaluations of Barack Obama in the month prior to the 2008 United States (US) presidential election when the race was salient (Pyszczynski, Henthorn, Motyl and Gerow, 2010).

Ugondo maintained that also, in Africa, newspaper editorials acquired a front seat and status as the mouthpiece of the masses for social struggle and change in the African continent, particularly in the fight against colonialism and apartheid (Oyovbaire), through editorials, the news media rattled public opinion to support civil society organisations such as the labour unions against the issue of petrol prices in 2002 in Nigeria (Torwe). According to Asadu [2] the media need to report the activities of a terrorist group like Boko Haram to make people not only aware of their actions but also to educate them on how to avoid the attacks of the group. Through this, the media help in reducing the effects of terrorism on the people (p. 85). In the meantime, none of the literatures cited above treated newspaper editorial in communicating boko haram terrorism and promoting good governance in Nigeria. This is the gap in literature which this paper seeks to fill.

III. Discourse

Conflicts, both domestic and transnational, are the staple of the media. The appetite of journalist and journalism for conflict has fueled some measure of suspicion that the mass media banner coverage is inadvertently lubricating the unyielding desires of combatants to embrace peace (Ajilore et al, 2018, p. 47). The above submission is among the views and continued perceptions of some people about newspapers’ coverage of terrorism and other violent situations in the world. The perception, perhaps, is because of the prominence that is often given to such reports and the news slant, among others. It is in view of the above submission that this paper argues that editorial, which takes on issues from different dimensions, exposes the issues, analysis them, give detailed information about them, educate the masses and proffer solutions to the issues through logical presentation of facts, plus its effectiveness in addressing national issues, should be adopted often by Nigerian newspapers in communicating the Boko Haram terrorism.

Editorial uses strong argument to convince people on an issue raised, provides facts and gives conclusion, while submitting its position on the issue. Therefore, instead of mere reportage of the boko haram

menace in deadpan format, newspapers in Nigeria can change style in reporting the issue through editorial. There are those who believe that the federal government lacks the political will to confront the insurgency. According to Akor et al (2017) the political will to deal with the issue of Boko Haram has been weak over the years. One major setback to the fight against the Boko haram terrorist group is the lack of political will to bring perpetrators and sponsors of Boko haram...to justice (p. 193). To ensure political will, therefore, the submission by Hamburg & Vance (1997), in Abraham [1] is apt:

Therefore, media remains an important component of statecraft, not only for India but even for the rest of the world, as it helps the States attain their goals and objectives...In the contemporary strategic environment, media and the Government have a very strong and symbiotic relationship, which is believed to be evolving as even political actors have started working in the environment set or prescribed by the media for undertaking their duties. Thus, not only are the perceptions of the public set by the media in this modern world, but also that of the authorities and leaders, which in turn help them to set up policies in tune with the demands of the people (p. 10).

A nation that is not motivated cannot preserve its freedom and ideology for long as threat to any element of national power creates security concerns. The unique coverage and impact of the media can, thereby, be accelerated| to promote and expand security awareness among the people and used for moral building (Abraham [1])

So, editorial aimed at awakening the government to its responsibility would be good communication. Editorial is not another name for adversarial journalism. Editorial weighs all issues. It attacks while necessary and also applauds when necessary. From time the press has been seen playing the most noticeable and fundamental roles in the running of a society (Udoudo, in Udoudo & Omojunikanbi [23]) One of the ways in which the press plays significant role in the running of a society is through editorial. The press in Nigeria has continued to play this role. Punch Newspaper, for example on December 12, 2019, through its editorial in which the paper began to address President Muhammadu Buhari as the president, General Muhammadu Buhari (Retd), expressed the voice of many Nigerians concerning what its perceived as the despotic leadership style of President Muhammadu Buhari's administration. This was due to the detention of some prominent Nigerians on grounds of alleged corruption, among other issues. Punch newspaper, while justifying its action, contends that:

It is gratifying to observe that the positives of our intervention outweigh the vitriol that emanated from expected and unexpected quarters. The editorial accomplished its purpose, and bore other unexpected dividends. It has given a voice to the sense of helpless outrage that right-thinking members of society feel towards the continued assault on the rule of law; galvanised groups and individuals to speak against dictatorship; amplified the voice of dissent against the regime's serial abuse of power; highlighted its disregard for basic rights; returned, in a forceful manner, the twin issues of human rights and disobedience to court orders to the front burner; and, lastly, sent a strong message to the regime and its apologists that Nigerians, though silent, are not asleep

Punch newspaper in the editorial explained that the current administration (which it now addresses as the regime) under the headship of Muhammadu Buhari has slid toward dictatorship, abuse of fundamental rights of the people and is against the rule of law, among others. One of the issues raised strongly by that editorial was the continued detention of the leader of revolution now protest, Omoyele Sowere and the leader of Islamic Movement and Islamic Human Right Group, Ibrahim EL-Zakzaky. In the aftermath of that editorial, people the world over were more exposed to the purported dictatorship style of the Muhammed Buhari's administration. Less than three weeks later Sowere and EL-Zakzaky were released. By that editorial, Punch newspaper spoke the voice of majority of Nigerians and contributed a great deal in the release of Sowere and Zakzaky less than three weeks after it was written. So, good editorial is not just the collective voice of a newspaper; it is also the

voice of the people. It is the people's advocate, and can be structured under advocacy journalism which, according to www.unescap.org, cited in Enobakhare&Nyekwere [4], involves:

raising awareness of issues and concerns to produce change, organisation of information into arguments to convince a specific group to take action on a specific goal, generation and utilization of reliable information to help leaders, policy-makers and decision makers to adopt responsible and relevant policies and programmes and purposive efforts to change specific policies or practices on behalf of, or with a specific group (p. 31).

For example, Punch Newspaper editorial of January 10, 2020, while commenting on efforts by the West African region in tackling the Boko Haram insurgency writes:

While member-states will contribute \$1 billion, the balance is expected from international partners. As a result, the President of ECOWAS Commission, Jean-Claude Brou, has been mandated to organise a donor conference as soon as possible, just as he will put in place, a transparent mechanism for managing the funds. The commission says the money is intended for the provision of equipment to support the defence forces of member-states, training of relevant bodies and effective intelligence sharing. This communal response, though belated, is a move in the right direction. Intriguingly, non-state actors have demystified the security forces of many member-states.

According to Joseph [19] the media must design programmes to highlight how good governance can be achieved; and the importance of achieving set goals and objectives...the media must rise up to the task of publicizing corruption cases (whistle blowing) in all the arms of government in Nigeria and draw the attention of the anti-corruption agencies, the government and security operatives so as to nip it in the bud (p. 40). The above submission emphasizes on the need for continued news analysis or news interpretation. It also calls for an integrated media approach in informing and educating the people (including people in leadership positions) on issues in the society. These are parts of the functions of the media. According to Dominick (2011), cited in Okon [16] another example of this function can be found on the editorial pages of a print medium. Interpretation, comment and opinion are provided for the reader as an added perspective on the new stories carried on other pages. Articles that analyze the causes of an event or that discuss the implications of government policies are also examples of the interpretation function. Through this function, the audiences become exposed to a large number of points of view and because of this; a person can evaluate all sides of an issue before arriving at an opinion (p. 64).

Okon [15] maintains that no doubt, by structuring public discourse, the media determine our social priorities. This is predicated on the premise that the news media have the power to set agenda on public discourse, direct attention to particular issues and ultimately influence how we think about those issues. The media indisputably create an important link between citizens and their governments. The link, as stated above is provided effectively through editorial, since according to Osuagwu [17] editorial is the subjective view of a publication on issues that are contemporary and of public importance. Thus, the editorial provides a forum for the media to be responsive to societal problems and, thereby, proffering solutions. The mass media, through their editorial pages, bring up an issue that the Editorial Board Members consider very important or critical to the development of Nigeria, and/or detrimental to the nation's development. Therefore, such issue is analysed from different angles, judgement passed on it and solutions provided while calling on the government to act. The boko haram pogrom is a critical one, and so, the mass media in Nigeria, through editorial, are expected to highlight the issue, among others, for enlightenment of the citizens and persuading the government to take action aimed at quelling the insurgency.

Sharma (2006), in Abraham [1] had earlier notes that on the same line, the media accentuates the act of terrorism by raising general information about their cause, provoking policy debates, building sympathetic international environment, and providing greater attention to the terrorist outfits. "The media have an important

contribution to make to the strengthening of peace and international understanding and in countering racialism, apartheid, and incitement to war (p. 45).

Since, according to Senam, Ntiense& Okorie [20] “The mass media occupy a strategic position in the society-a position which, if well harnessed, would prove wonderfully beneficial”, we hope that editorial is one journalistic approach that will make the strategic position of the mass media in the Nigerian society more beneficial.

IV. Conclusion

This work was necessitated by the need to add more voice to the security challenges confronting Nigeria and her people. In doing so, it recognized the ethnic and religious colourations that surround the pogrom but drew empirical evidences from books, journals, newspapers and other materials in arguing that newspaper editorial would help the government to sit up and face its responsibility of protecting lives and property of Nigerians. The paper adopted a qualitative approach due to the nature of the work, for the discourse. Using the agenda setting theory as its anchor, the paper finetuned itself properly and in synchronisation with the variables for discourse.

The objectives of this paper include: Ascertain consequences of boko haram insurgency on the Nigerian society, find out how editorial has helped in tackling insecurity in other societies and examine how editorial can be applied in Nigeria in finding solution to the boko haram insurgency. The objectives of this paper have been fulfilled following the empirical evidences adopted in the discourse. It has been ascertained that boko haram terrorism has great consequences on Nigeria. For emphasis, it has discovered that the socio-economic situation of many people in the Northeastern part of Nigeria, has been greatly affected while with over 1.9 million people internally displaced. To this end, the problem of boko haram terrorism has become glaring, seeking answer to research question two “find out how editorial has helped in tackling insecurity in other societies”. Answer to this question has been provided, as it has been established that through newspaper editorial.

For instance, Ugondo [24] asserts that globally newspaper editorials exert much influence on social, political and economic issues. Editorials facilitated the abolishment of slave trade in the eighteenth century (Washington Post), among other findings. On research three “examine how editorial can be applied in Nigeria in finding solution to the boko haram insurgency”, it has been established that since editorial weighs all sides to an issue and takes a position on it, if adopted by the Nigerian newspapers in communicating the Boko Haram terrorism, it will make all stakeholders involved in the fight against the insurgency to live up to their responsibilities and give the masses confidence in the government. This followed an empirical evidence in the work of Ugondo [24] which notes that:

Also, in Africa, newspaper editorials acquired a front seat and status as the mouthpiece of the masses for social struggle and change in the African continent, particularly in the fight against colonialism and apartheid (Oyovbaire), through editorials, the news media rattled public opinion to support civil society organisations such as the labour unions against the issue of petrol prices in 2002 in Nigeria (Torwe). Finding to research question three, is in agreement with the submission by Ochonogor& Emmanuel [14] that “fundamentally, the media most times condition how people understand and act on issues”. More so, with these finding, the theory adopted for this paper has been found to be relevant even in the contemporary time.

V. Recommendations

Based on findings and limitations of the work, the following recommendations are made:

1. Manifest contents of select national newspapers domicile in Nigeria, should be studied to ascertain

among others, frequency of editorial about boko haram pogrom in the country. This will help to show the seriousness or otherwise, which newspapers attach to the insurgency. More so, it will prove, whether or not, newspapers in Nigeria are setting agenda on boko haram terrorism.

2. Advocacy journalism should be consciously adopted by the national dailies to complement editorial contents, in setting agenda on boko haram terrorism. This will help to put pressure on the government to live up to its primary responsibilities (protection of lives and property).

3. Further study, based on focus group discussion or interview, should be conducted to ascertain from boko haram victims, their socio-economic condition. Knowing their real situations will help in coming up with appropriate recommendation (s) to government and other bodies, that can help in ameliorating the plights of boko haram victims. This will bring about good governance when government adopts such recommendations.

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