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Mercy Ette, Sarah Joe

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## “Rival visions of reality”: An analysis of the framing of Boko Haram in Nigerian newspapers and Twitter

Framing analysis has been on the communication research agenda for several decades. Scholars have explored how communicators, especially journalists, use news frames to influence our perception and knowledge of political issues and public events. But despite its popularity as a research tool, framing remains problematic at several levels due to the abstract nature of the concept. As Maher (2001:84) observed, framing ‘has proved to be an elusive concept to measure’. Other pitfalls in the application of the multipronged concept have been identified by some scholars (Carragee and Roef, 2004, Gorp, 2007, Cacciatore, Scheufele & Iyengar, 2016). In a 2009 study, for example, Jorg Matthes highlighted four problems of framing research, namely: “lack of operational precision, the descriptive focus of many analyses, neglect of visuals, and insufficient reliability reporting” (Matthes, 2009: 349). In addition, several studies have raised questions about reliability and validity of framing as a methodological approach for analysing media content (Hertog & McLeod, 2001; Scheufele, 1999; Tankard, 2001); and the propensity for ‘researcher bias’ (Gorp, 2005:503).

To address the perceived weaknesses in framing analysis, there has been a surge in the application of statistical procedures and use of software in studies. For example, Matthes and Kohring (2008) employed hierarchical cluster analysis in the framing of biotechnology in the *New York Times*; Burscher, Vliegenhart and de Vreese (2016) applied partitioning cluster analysis and automatic sentiment analysis in their examination of news about nuclear power; and Frederick, Pegorano and Burch (2016) carried out thematic analysis of news articles and tweets about the Sochi Olympics using the Leximancer software. Against the backdrop of this expanded approach to framing, this study applies statistical approaches proposed by Matthes & Kohring (2008) and Frederick, Pegorano & Burch (2016) in an examination of frames in the coverage of an archetypal political conflict – terrorism - in newspapers and Twitter. With the media framing of Boko Haram, a transnational terrorist group, as its focus, this study identifies frames in legacy and social media platforms’ coverage of the group in a selection of Nigerian newspapers and on Twitter. Comparing the two

platforms is not empirically straightforward because these platforms operate on significantly different ethos, with Twitter driven by subjectivity and newspapers normatively objective. However, a comparison is justified because it reflects the hybrid nature of the media environment and acknowledges how the participatory norms embedded in social media impact on public discourse. The comparison was also informed by the shift in news production and consumption processes in response to technological developments. All the newspapers used in the study enjoy online visibility and are, therefore, not spatially limited. From that standpoint, it could be argued that geographical location is not critical in terms of reach and readership as the papers are globally accessible, just like Twitter.

The main aims of the study are (1) to explore the viability of new approaches in the identification of frames in the coverage of Boko Haram and (2) to illustrate how the interface of legacy and social media platforms can unearth divergences and reveal “rival visions of ‘reality’” (Norris, Kem & Just, 2003: 5).

### **Framing, Media, and Terrorism**

Framing analysis in the context of terrorism is a dynamic research process that investigates how frames about terrorist organisations, terrorist attacks, or individuals linked with terrorist activities, are produced and sustained over time. It is also concerned with ways in which the media shape social reality and/or influence public knowledge about terrorism (Norris, Kem & Just, 2003). Interest in this area of research has grown following the events of September 9, 2001 and the ensuing ‘war on terror’. However, terrorism is still an “essentially contested concept” (Gallie, 1956:169), which makes it prone to “opportunistic appropriation” (Saul, 2008: 3), resulting in quips like one man’s terrorist being another man’s freedom fighter. Terrorism, in the context of this study, is conceptualised as a form of political violence that:

Is premeditated and designed to create a climate of extreme fear; is directed at a wider target than the immediate victims; inherently involves attacks on random or symbolic targets, including civilians; is considered by the society in which it occurs as 'extra-normal', that is in the literal sense that it violates the norms regulating disputes, protest and dissent; and is used primarily, though not exclusively, to influence the political behaviour of governments, communities or specific social groups (Wilkinson, 1977:51)

It is also a tactic adopted by both state and non-state actors to intimidate and instigate anxiety (Morin, 2016). Even though terrorism has become an increasingly critical subject of public discourse, as well as an important area of research since the defining event of September 2001, it is not a new social problem. Some scholars contend that epochs of terrorism are interlinked and exist in a continuum (Copeland, 2001; Tucker, 2001; Crenshaw, 2008). The modern form of terrorism defies traditional rules of engagement. For instance, this method of political conflict can be undertaken by well-established command and control structured organisations or lone wolves. “Unlike other forms of violence, its target is not its immediate victims, but a larger audience. Its main goal is not to harm or punish the immediate victims but to send an intimidating message to a target population, state, or organisation” (Morin, 2016:3). Thus, the coverage of this “new form of war” (Margolis, 2004: 403) has attracted the attention of media scholars because it allows for an exploration of different perspectives presented by various political actors.

As information purveyors, the news media play a pivotal role during political conflicts by serving as a dais for contest over meaning. This is particularly critical given the media-terrorism symbiosis. Terrorists engage the media to enhance their tactical and strategic aims as well as for extensive coverage of their exploits, without which their efforts will be sans meaning (Martin, 1985), and the media create a spectacle out of terrorist attacks because they meet newsworthiness criteria such as “novelty, conflict, social impact, importance, consequence and human interest” (Zhang, Shoemaker & Wang, 2013: 451). Yet, unlike legitimate state actors who are granted unrestricted access to the media, terrorist organisations can only attract coverage through the back door, depending on the intensity of their violence (Kampf, 2014). While unprecedented changes in the communication ecology have altered the media-terrorism interface, the news media are still major battlefields for the propagation of information and through them terrorists can achieve their goal of inflicting terror on an audience beyond the locations of their attacks.

The emergence of social media platforms such as YouTube, Facebook and Twitter, has enabled terrorist organisations to disseminate their messages without the mediating influence of legacy media platforms. The unique features of social media platforms – resistance to control, high interactivity, ease of-use, affordability, suitability for visual and textual content – make them ideal for recruiting, fundraising,

training, communication, strategizing and execution of attacks (Weimann, 2006; Galily, Yarchi & Tamir, 2015:999). These platforms allow for the presentation of competing, counter-establishment, or dissident frames and content produced and packaged by 'producers' (Bruns & Schmidt, 2011:4) and 'terrorpreneurs', who are not bound by journalistic standards. The growing importance of social media platforms in the dissemination of terrorist narratives point to a need to interrogate their influence on the framing of political conflict as these platforms tend to serve as soapboxes for people who congregate around homogenous ideologies. The perceived success of these platforms as radicalisation and recruitment centres is emblematic of their capacity to influence the perception of their audiences.

### **Context of study: Nigeria and Boko Haram**

Nigeria, Africa's most populous country, is a divided society that is polarized along geo-religious cleavages. The north is perceived to be predominantly Muslim and the south is home to mostly Christians. This polarisation, which can be attributed to the country's colonial history, fuels competition for "the control of state power, resource allocation, and citizenship" (Osaghae & Suberu, 2005:4). Political conflicts over the years have exacerbated the divides to the point of eruptions such as the 30-month civil war (1967-1970). However, even though the country had experienced different manifestations of political violence that could have been recognised as terrorist acts, terrorism was not acknowledged as a threat until the emergence of Boko Haram (Ette, 2016).

Officially known as Jama'atul Ahul Sunnah Lidda'wati wal Jihad (People committed to the propagation of the Prophet's Teaching and Jihad), Boko Haram has engaged the Nigerian state in an asymmetrical warfare since the turn of the century. The group was initially regarded as a domestic threat, but it has since breached national boundaries into Cameroon, Niger, and Chad and has emerged as a transnational security threat. In 2011, the US House of Representatives Committee on Homeland Security noted an evolution in the group's capabilities and asserted that its reach had gone beyond Nigeria (US House of Representatives, 2011). Like other terrorist organisations associated with Islam, Boko Haram employs violence as a strategy to advance its anti-western ideology and attempts to establish an Islamic caliphate in Nigeria (Adesoji, 2014).

The group has carried out several large-scale attacks in some parts of Nigeria, including the bombing in 2011 of the Nigerian police headquarters and the United Nations' House, both in Abuja, and the Baga massacre in 2015, during which more than 2000 civilians were killed. The sect's campaign of terror has led to more than 17,000 deaths (Obaji, 2016); the displacement of over two million people (Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre, 2016); and a host of other socio-political and economic problems in Nigeria. Some of its atrocities have made headlines around the world and the kidnapping of more than 200 Chibok secondary schoolgirls in April 2014 earned the group global denunciation and triggered the #bringbackourgirls Twitter campaign.

Boko Haram began to seize Nigerian territories in 2013 and by January 2015, had gained control of about fourteen local government areas in the north-eastern part of the country, which led to the declaration of a state of emergency in the main theatres of the insurgency – Borno, Yobe and Adamawa states (Bappah, 2016). However, it would seem that recent military-based counterinsurgency efforts have curtailed its spread. According to President Muhammadu Buhari, all Nigerian territories had been recovered from the insurgents by February 2016. However, the veracity of this claim has been challenged by David Rodriguez, the US Africa Command (USAFRICAOM) leader (Sahara Reporters, 2016). Still, to the President's credit, some Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) have returned to their homelands (Premium Times, 2017) and Sambisa forest, the former stronghold of the insurgents has been recaptured (Broomfield, 2016). Yet, following recent bombings in Maiduguri, the epicentre of the Boko Haram war, there are concerns that the threat posed by the group is far from over.

Like other international terrorist groups such as Daesh, Al Qaeda and Al Shabaab, Boko Haram employs suicide bombings, improvised explosive devices (IED), vehicle-borne improvised devices (VBIED), kidnappings and beheadings (Okpaga, Chijioke & Eme, 2012) as weapons of attack. The nature and magnitude of these attacks result in extensive media coverage on legacy platforms. The group also uses social media platforms including YouTube and Twitter to publicise its successes.

As noted earlier, a great deal of framing research in communication has focused on analysis of media content and this is reflected in Boko Haram related literature. Many

studies have focused on the framing of the group in Nigerian newspapers (Okoro & Odoemelam, 2013; Ngwu, Ekwe & Chiara, 2015; Obaje, 2017); British newspapers (Ette, 2016); and broadcast media (Ezeah & Emmanuel, 2016; Jibrin & Jimoh 2017). On the whole, while some studies have targeted legacy media content, there is a dearth of social media analysis; the application of computer-based approaches; and inductive framing analysis. Here, we bridge this gap by examining content on both traditional and alternative media. We apply automated approaches to enhance the reliability and validity of our study; and allow frames to emerge from the text by adopting an inductive approach.

### **Methodological approach**

The data for this study have been collected as part of a larger study on the framing of Boko Haram in the Nigerian press and on Twitter over a six-month period. Here, we present data for the month of January 2017 on Twitter and in four Nigerian newspapers – *The Guardian*, *Punch*, *Leadership*, and *Daily Trust*. Although there were no ‘what a story-moments’ in terms of terrorists attacks during this period, the socio-political and economic situation in the country kept Boko Haram in the news. For example, President Buhari’s New Year’s speech highlighted the group’s activities and government’s counterinsurgency programme, which, against the backdrop of the economic condition in the country raised questions about the cost of combating Boko Haram. The military’s botched air strike of a refugee camp that resulted in the death of more than 200 IDPs ignited concerns about the safety of victims of terrorist attacks and the impact of the group’s activities on the country.

The newspapers selected for this study represent the two dominant publishing hubs in Nigeria. As outlined earlier, the country is polarised along ethno-regional and religious divides. The publishing hubs reflect these cleavages with *Daily Trust* and *Leadership* representing the northern hub while the southern hub is represented by *The Guardian* and *The Punch*. Portable document formats of *The Punch*, *Leadership* and *Daily Trust* were obtained from paid-for subscription services; while *The Guardian*’s content was accessed on the newspaper’s website – [www.guardian.ng](http://www.guardian.ng). A basic search using ‘Boko Haram’; its abbreviated version, ‘B’Haram’; and the known names of its leaders, ‘Abubakar Shekau’, ‘Darul Tawheed’, and ‘Abu Musab al-Barnawi’; generated a total of 633 articles.

In order to identify frames in newspaper coverage of the group, we adopted Matthes and Kohring’s (2008:263) approach, which conceptualises “a frame as a certain pattern in a given text that is composed of several elements”, that can be identified through a statistical technique – hierarchical cluster analysis (HCA). These elements can be pre-defined to serve as variables in a manual coding process. Frames are those clusters that emerge from the HCA. Thus, as part of the larger study a coding frame was designed, undergirded by Entman’s (1993) definition. The frame elements - problem definition (PD), causal interpretation (CI), moral evaluation (ME), and treatment recommendation (TR)], were crucial to the effective implementation of this method because they served as the variables in the coding process.

The unit of analysis was the article in which at least one of Entman’s frame elements was visible. This was based on the realisation that frame elements were not visible in all the articles. Thus, only pertinent articles, 393 (about 62 percent of the originally retrieved articles) were appropriate for further analysis.

See Chart 1 for details.

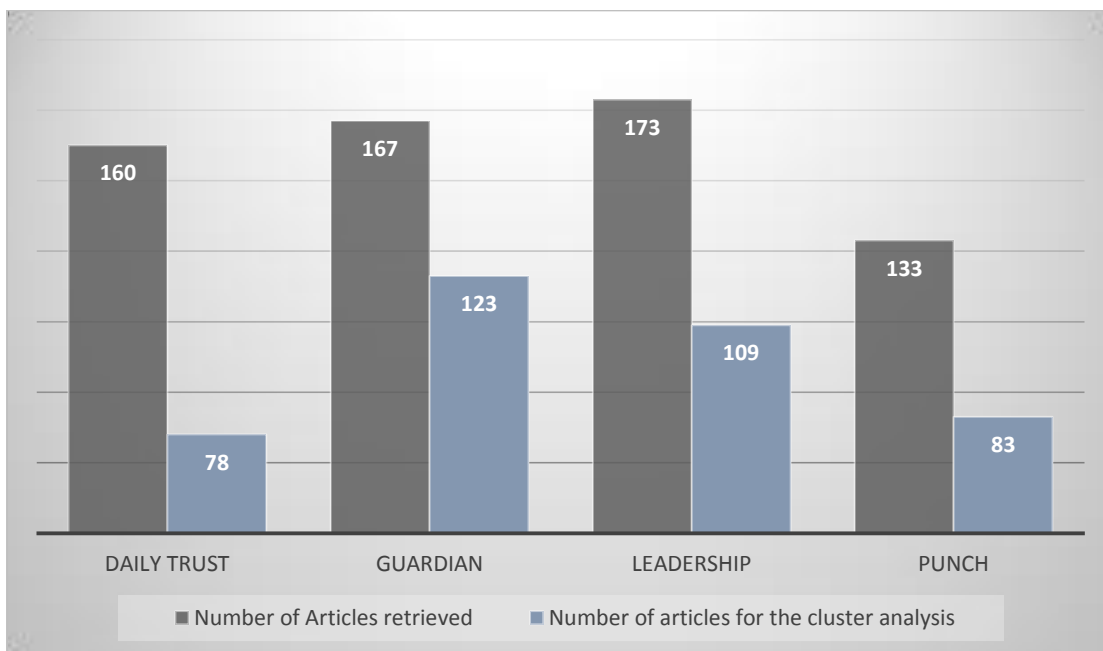


Chart 1: Study population

The problem definition was operationalised under three variables: ACTOR, IDENTITY and IMPACT. These described the main actors in the articles, their



labelling of the sect, and the effect of the activities of the sect on the Nigerian state. The causal interpretation element consisted of two variables: CAUSAL ATTRIBUTION, which described the parties responsible for the emergence or sustenance of Boko Haram, and BENEFIT ATTRIBUTION, the person/parties responsible for the gains against the insurgents. The moral evaluation variable described how different frame sponsors perceived the activities of Boko Haram. It was concerned with the perception of the activities of the group as expressions of the Islamic faith. The treatment recommendation variable spelled out what solutions were advocated for resolving the Boko Haram conflict. The coding categories applied were “mutually exclusive, exhaustive, and independent” (Matthes & Kohring, 2008: 266), with a mean reliability of 0.94, and a range of 0.7 to 1.0 based on Holsti’s formula. These original variables (categoricals) were converted to dummy variables, to allow for further statistical analysis. To also ensure proper results, only variables with a frequency of five percent or more, were included in the final stages of the data analysis (Matthes & Kohring, 2008:268).

In line with Matthes and Kohring’s (2008) design, data from the coding process was analysed through a statistical procedure – Cluster Analysis. A cluster analysis presents one way of making sense of complex data and is especially effective if the objective is to break down the said data into smaller units that could facilitate meaning creation (Estivill-Castro & Yang, 2004). A cluster analysis according to Rokack and Maimon (2005:322) “groups data instances into subsets in such a manner that similar instances are grouped together, while different instances belong to different groups”. The goal of this procedure, was therefore, to locate smaller homogeneous groups and distinguish them from more heterogeneous subsets (Berry & Linoff, 1997). Here, the approach was applied to identify different groups of articles that shared similar frame elements. Since each group/cluster represented a frame, the prevalent frame for each of the newspapers was the cluster category that indicated the greatest difference between group and the least difference within group members.

Although there are assorted clustering methods, the hierarchical cluster analysis has been adopted because there are statistical measures available (the scree plot), to guide the suitable number of clusters. The agglomerative strand of the hierarchical cluster analysis, specifically the Ward’s method, was also selected because it starts

out by showing each article as being unique, while tracing its membership in larger groupings via a Dendrogram – a tree-like diagram that indicates the “nested grouping of objects and similarity levels at which groupings change” (Rokack & Maimon, 2005:331). An examination of the Dendrogram, the scree plot and the table of means and standard deviation facilitated the identification of frames. Variables with higher means indicated the frame elements that were given more salience, while lower mean values represented elements that were given lesser prominence.

## **Twitter**

The dataset from Twitter was mined using Mozdeh’s Twitter Time Series Analysis software. The search terms ‘Boko Haram’, ‘B’Haram’, ‘Abubakar Shekau’, ‘Darul Tawheed’, and ‘Abu Musab al-Barnawi’ were used to harvest 127,180 tweets from 41,849 unique contributors in January 2017. All Boko Haram-related tweets were considered relevant as there was no attempt to apply location filters. This was an acknowledgement of the global nature of media platforms in a digital age. The tweets were exported into the Leximancer software because the text-mining tool has a capacity to analyse large quantities of data from social media sites (Sotiriadou, Brouwers & Le, 2012, Bal et al, 2012). The Leximancer text analytics software is not only a veritable tool for the analysis of qualitative data (Cretcheley et al, 2010), it is also capable of “providing a basic content analysis with descriptive statistics, ...and able to discover the key discourses or concepts within a text, what they are made up of and how those discourses stand in relation to others within the text (Isakhan (2005:9).

The software produces a ‘concept map’, which indicates the dominant themes and their relationship within a data set. In addition, its application of statistics-based algorithm has been known to reduce the reliability and validity challenges of manual content analysis (Biroscak et al, 2017). As in most computer-based approaches, we interpreted and discussed the generated themes in a meaningful way by firstly, exploring actual tweets to gain a robust understanding of what the themes – “reoccurring concepts within text that provide general meaning to a reader” represented (Frederick, Pegoraro & Burch, 2016:802). Secondly, we employed an axial coding strategy to reduce themes to frames, based on their homogeneity

(Benaquisto, 2008). The labelling of the frames was carried out to reflect “the emergent context” (Frederick, Pegoraro & Burch, 2016:802).

## **Results and discussion**

This study set out to answer two key questions: How was Boko Haram framed in legacy media represented by four Nigerian newspapers? How was the group framed in social media represented by Twitter? The idea was to test if an analysis of the two platforms would produce comparable frames.

### **The framing of BH in the Nigerian Press**

Pulled together, the frame elements in newspaper articles delineated four clusters. The biggest cluster, which comprises 207 articles, produced a frame that we termed social consequences. It was prevalent in three of the newspapers: *Leadership*, *The Guardian* and *Daily Trust*. Articles in this cluster focused on the vicious nature of Boko Haram attacks and the traumatic impact of their activities on citizens. The stories also captured the role of Boko Haram in Nigeria’s humanitarian crises and the harrowing experiences of child soldiers forcefully recruited by the sect. As one article reported, some of the child soldiers saw “their parents killed, most often before their very eyes, their sisters taken away and their homes set ablaze before they were forcefully co-opted by Boko Haram to fight alongside them” (Abubakar 2017, para 19). A report published by *The Guardian* on January 6, 2017, outlined how “the Northeast region of Nigeria has suffered severe humanitarian crisis as a result of Boko Haram insurgency. This resulted in drastic decline in socio-economic activities including farming, pastoralism, commerce and social interactions among the populace especially in Borno, Yobe and Adamawa states.’ (Datti, 2017, para 1).

The second frame, War against Boko Haram, consists of ninety-three articles in which all the newspapers framed Boko Haram insurgents as outliers engaged in a senseless conflict with the Nigerian state. The articles described the strategies of the Nigerian armed forces to contain the rampage of Boko Haram. For example, in an interview with the *Daily Trust*, Lieutenant General Tukur Y. Buratai, the chief commandant in the war against Boko Haram, described how the Nigerian military

ousted the insurgents from their strongholds, an event which the *Daily Trust* had described as “The Great Victory in Sambisa” (“The Great Victory in Sambisa”, 2017, January 1). Similarly, in a Christmas message, President Buhari celebrated “the fall of “Camp Zairo,” the last stronghold of the Boko Haram terrorists in Sambisa Forest, and commended the military for their exploits against the insurgents (*Guardian*, January 4, 2017)

The third frame, which was labelled economic consequences, describes the economic toll of Boko Haram’s activities on the Nigerian state. It was prevalent in the *Daily Trust* and *The Punch* and detailed the economic cost of tackling Boko Haram. For example, the *Daily Trust* reported that the reconstruction and rehabilitation of the north-east where the impact of the conflict was most evident would cost the country about 121 billion naira (£27 billion). Some reports in *The Punch* quoted political actors who claimed that “the state suffered economically from the insurgency, causing the flow of investment to nosedive’ and that setbacks in agricultural production caused by the Boko Haram crisis had cut the state’s monthly internally generated revenue from N1bn to less than N200m” (Livinus, 2017: p.42).

The smallest cluster consists of twenty-eight articles that identified members of Boko Haram as Islamic fundamentalists, which meant their activities were construed as being expressions of their Islamic faith. This frame was labelled Morality and was used to explain the religious or moral context of the activities of Boko Haram. . According to de Vreese (2005:56), “the morality frame interprets an event or issue in the contexts of religious or moral prescriptions.” This frame was visible in papers published in the southern hub and echoed the fact that “members of the group expound radical views and contempt for Western civilization; preach against Western way of life and values and campaign to spread extremist Islamist ideas across Nigeria through violence” (Ette, 2016:457). The group was accused of carrying out “dastardly and ungodly acts,” which resulted in the ‘killing of thousands of Christians and destruction of hundreds of churches and over 50,000 homes’ (*The Punch*, 2 January 2017, p.12)

### **The framing of Boko Haram on Twitter**

The Leximancer concept map produced seventeen dominant themes from 127,180 Boko Haram related tweets, which morphed into three frames through an axial

coding procedure. One of the frames was new and invisible in the newspapers. The three frames were: War against Boko Haram, Morality and War against Women. As noted already, two of these frames were similar to the frames identified in the newspapers. However, the focus of the clusters was different from narratives in the newspapers. For example, the war against Boko Haram frame on Twitter was concerned with winners and losers, and the role of President Buhari and the military in the ouster of the sect. Tweets in this category described the war as an internecine conflict, especially after a botched air strike by the Nigerian military on a refugee camp. To some commentators, the military was equally culpable of killing innocent civilians. A tweet claimed: “The Nigerian Military has killed as many innocent people as Boko Haram in 2 years - RT@Batarhe. Some tweets made the president and the military objects of ridicule by framing them as ‘losers’: RT @Amaka\_Ewko in particular regularly mocked the president’s claim of victory over the insurgents, especially after a Boko Haram flag that the military said was captured from the insurgents was put on display. @Amak\_Ewko responded: “Buhari’s Army can’t arrest Boko Haram members but their flag. Meanwhile the group is on the move;” “Biafra Today: Buhari Caught Lying Again After Raising Fake Boko Haram Flag in Aso Rock, Got exposed by IPOB.”

The Morality frame, which was also prevalent in newspapers published in the southern hub, interpreted Boko Haram’s activities in the context of Islam. Tweets associated Boko Haram with other terrorist organisations such as ISIS, which claim to be representatives of true Islam. The tweets highlighted the atrocities of Boko Haram as expressions of their religious beliefs: [RT @pmclauth: ISIS & Boko Haram taking sex-slaves, is no different from what goes on in Bradford & Luton. All in core Islamic texts], [Daily drawing. Details: DSS confirms arrest of Abu Musab Al-Barnawi ISIS Recognised Boko Haram leader], [@TheLoneVenda @zithabb Well, Boko Haram, Isis , Saudi Arabia, Yemen etc all exercise Sharia...it's inhumane...can't let that spread, can we?], [@pmggal Entire Muslims are terrible..no matter...its ISIS..Boko Haram just want to kill u.@iSlaveTrolls @finite\_planet @SarishkaSingh].

The war against women frame, which was only prevalent in Twitter, was used to describe how women and girls are the primary victims of the insurgents. Tweets focused on Boko Haram’s sexual and gender-based violence and how kidnapped women are turned into sexual slaves, raped, and impregnated: [Boko Haram are

nothing but sexual pests preying on young girls. A bunch of paedophiles], [Everyone suffered Boko Haram's kidnapping and sexual slavery, including young Nigerian girls], [Must read: "Captivity bonding" of women and young girls (youngest 11 yrs) under Boko Haram], [Heart Breaking Story: I Was Raped, I Have Three Kids for Three Terrorists – 15-year-old Boko Haram Escapee Tells Story ...], [Boko Haram Jihadists Teach Boy Soldiers How to Rape Women]. The tweets also highlighted how women are deployed as weapons of war: [RT @UKInfidel: #IslamExposed: #BokoHaram Scum Use Little Girl as #SuicideBomber in #Maiduguri], [Army kills three female suicide bombers, arrests Boko Haram leader on wanted list], [RT @AshleyWarrior: 10 year old girl used as a suicide bomber in likely Boko Haram Nigeria NYE attack #IslamIsTheProblem #BanIslam].

Altogether, the frames that emerged from the analysis of tweets demonstrated how social media platforms such as Twitter empower individuals to express anti-establishment views in ways not possible on legacy media platforms.

The foregoing discussion was undergirded by one of the objectives of this study, which was to address the reliability and validity challenge of framing through the use of the approaches suggested by Matthes and Kohring's (2008) and Frederick, Pegorano and Burch (2016). These methods proved viable and led to the location of five divergent and convergent terrorism-related frames in newspaper and Twitter texts. Two frames, the war against Boko Haram and morality, were prevalent on both platforms while the social consequences and economic consequences, and the war against women were prevalent in newspapers and on Twitter respectively. It is worth pointing out that there were subtle differences in the tone and direction of newspaper and tweets in the convergent frames. For example, in the war against Boko Haram frame, the president was singled out for positive coverage in the newspapers published in the northern hub. Although the military received accolades for their gallantry in the fight against Boko Haram, it was the president who was lavishly celebrated in reports of counterinsurgency programmes. He was portrayed as a warrior who defeated the insurgents in fulfilment of his campaign promise, while ex-president Goodluck Jonathan was vilified for allegedly facilitating the proliferation of the sect. In contrast to the northern press, the southern-based newspapers attributed victory to the military. The variance in direction could be explained by the ethno-religious cleavages that underpin Nigerian politics and journalism.

The morality frame also conveyed different undertones. This frame was prevalent in *The Guardian* and *The Punch*, the southern newspapers. The publications described members of Boko Haram as Islamic fundamentalists. The northern papers, in contrast, labelled them as miscreants, criminals, and troublemakers. The lexical choice of labels was instructive. As explained earlier, northern Nigeria is home to Islam. For Muslims in the north, attributing the group's acts of violence to their Islamic faith would have raised questions about the assertion that Islam is a religion of peace. Thus, describing the conflict as a war between criminal elements and law-abiding citizens, could have been an attempt to distance their activities from Islamic ideologies and practices. For the southern press, the labelling of members of Boko Haram as Islamists, in addition to associating the group with Islam, could also have been an attempt to present it as a northern problem. In fact, an army spokesperson, in an interview with *The Punch*, attributed the emergence and sustenance of the sect to the northeast (Akinloye, 2017).

The emergence of convergent frames: war against Boko Haram and morality, might have been shaped by the context of our study and the Nigerian media ecology. Firstly, our study covered the month of January when news about recent counterinsurgency success was still making headlines, Twitter represented an alternative platform where 'producers' could express their opinion about the issue. While most stories in the press were news or interview-based, thus requiring a degree of protocol; tweets presented personal perspective. Secondly, as location is one of the numerous factors that influence editorial content, it could be argued that this contributed to the emergence of the morality frame in the two southern newspapers, and on Twitter.

The divergent frames, social consequences and economic consequences can be categorised as generic frames (Matthes, 2009:350); and indicative of news values and journalistic practices. In addition, they might have been used to draw attention to Nigeria's humanitarian crises, which could attract global attention and financial support, considering the country's economic situation - Nigeria had been in recession since August 2016 (Martin, 2016).

As noted earlier, one of the frames identified on Twitter, war against women, was not visible in the newspapers. The emergence of this frame signifies the difference

between legacy and social media. Unlike social media, the legacy media are subject to institutional positions. Moreover, they have established identities and are restricted by internal and external factors such as ownership and operational environment. As a global platform Twitter is not constrained by the limitations that are embedded in the content production process of newspapers. 'Producers' on Twitter have no institutional positions to protect. They also have fluid and fuzzy identities and even journalists who use Twitter often do that in their personal capacity and not as a voice of their media organisations.

## **Conclusion**

This study set out to explore the framing of Boko Haram, a transnational terrorist group, in a selection of newspapers and Twitter through the use of innovative approaches to content analysis. Matthes and Kohring's (2008) hierarchical cluster analysis approach aided in the identification of frames in newspapers while the Leximancer software expedited the analysis of a larger set of texts, a feat that would have been difficult to execute using the first approach, due to the volume of texts involved. For example, there would have been a need to apply sampling techniques, which may have increased the likelihood of bias. Although both approaches allow for some elements of subjectivity, they, however, contribute to the transparent means of identifying frames within text, thus minimising the reliability and validity challenges of framing research. It is worth noting that we acknowledge that quantitative methods do incorporate some measures of subjectivity, for instance, while the cluster analysis enables the grouping of different articles, the labelling and interpretation of frames is a subjective decision. This often entails reviewing articles to interrogate latent meanings in each frame. The qualitative analysis of the frames enabled us to go beyond the data and drill deeper into the text to understand embedded meanings in the frames and explain their context. Pulled together, the two approaches made it possible to identify clusters of articles and tweets that had similar frame elements and consequently to detect emerging frames.

This study has highlighted the relevance of social media platforms in the framing of issues of public interest and while newspapers have continued to dominate the media space, it is important to acknowledge the growing relevance of alternative platforms in shaping and influencing the opinion of their users. Although it is



possible to exaggerate the impact of Twitter, the number of relevant tweets during the timeframe of the study suggests that the platform provides a forum for the politically engaged. The frames that were identified demonstrate the differences between the two platforms even in instances of convergence. While convergence between legacy and social media platforms does exist, unearthing divergences has the potential to reveal a different version of reality. This was apparent in the ways in which the two platforms presented Nigeria's ongoing battle against the Boko Haram insurgency.

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