

NEWSPAPERS' FRAMING OF 'OPERATION SAFE CORRIDOR' PROGRAMME IN NIGERIA

Amina Abana, Umaru Yakubu Kirawa, Nuhu Diraso Gapsiso
University of Maiduguri, Nigeria

Corresponding email: miiinat99@unimaid.edu.ng

ABSTRACT

This study examined the types and tones of frames used by four online Nigerian newspapers in reporting the Operation Safe Corridor Programme from October 2016 to January 2023. This study was situated within the framing theory and used content analysis as a method of data collection. It purposively selected *HumAngle*, *Premium Times*, *Yerwa Express News* and *PRNigeria* online newspapers based on their editorial contents on conflict and peacebuilding and adopted census technique to examine 7,885 editions of the selected newspapers. A total of 802 news stories and feature articles were recorded and findings revealed that the selected newspapers reported the Operation Safe Corridor Programme using twelve framing categories. Data also revealed that *the return of the repentant* frame is the dominant frame used in the reportage of the Operation Safe Corridor programme, where the tones of frames were mostly positive. The study recommends that newspapers should diversify framing strategies to incorporate other frames such as reintegration and public view frames to provide a balanced and comprehensive view of the initiative. It is the recommendation of this study that further studies on media effects should be conducted to ascertain how these frames influence public perception regarding Operation Safe Corridor programme.

Keywords: online newspapers, framing, operation safe corridor, repentant Boko Haram, reintegration

INTRODUCTION

The media are important platforms for peacebuilding. Regardless of print, broadcast, or online, all media outlets are critical in informing, educating, and enlightening the citizenry through reporting issues in society. Such issues include socio-economic and political developments; national values, security, terrorism, and insurgency, which have become recurring decimals in the international sphere of politics transcending sovereign borders (Ada & Abdullahi, 2022; Afomachukwu, 2020; Pate & Ibrahim, 2021; & United States Institute of Peace, 2021).

Terrorism has become a persistent global threat, endangering peace, stability, and security of nations. Acts of terrorism often involve deliberate use of violence, fear, and intimidation to achieve political, ideological, or religious objectives (United Nations, 2018). Boko Haram, a terrorist group operating in Nigeria, constitute such a threat to the country's sovereign entity. This extremist group, founded in 2002, seeks to establish an Islamic state in Nigeria by employing brutal tactics such as suicide bombings, kidnappings, and mass killings. The rise of Boko Haram has resulted in the destruction of lives and livelihoods and the displacement of millions of people, causing widespread fear and significant humanitarian crises (Obaje, 2017; Udoh, 2017).

In a bid to counter these devastating acts of terrorism, the Nigerian government through its military and other stakeholders, employed a number of strategies to fight Boko Haram insurgency and terrorism and restore peace in the nation. This includes media campaigns, demobilisation of the insurgents, de-radicalisation, rehabilitation, and reintegration of repentant insurgents back into the society. This culminated in the establishment of a radio station called "Lafiya Dole" Radio, meaning "Peace by Force Radio" among others to help in disseminating such information. Radio "Lafiya Dole" was later changed to "Hadin Kai" radio, meaning "Lets Join Hands in Peacebuilding" Radio. It is a dedicated radio station aimed at disseminating counter-terrorism messages and fostering community resilience against violent extremism. The transformation of the counter-terrorism radio station reflected a broader shift towards a collaborative and inclusive approach to peacebuilding, emphasizing the importance of unity and collective action in combating terrorism and promoting stability.

Similarly, a de-radicalisation programme codenamed Operation Safe Corridor (OSC) was also initiated by the Nigerian government to rehabilitate and reintegrate repentant insurgents back into society. The Programme emerged as a strategic response to the long-standing terrorism challenges in the country, particularly in the North-eastern region devastated by the Boko Haram terrorism. Established in 2016 under the administration of President Muhammadu Buhari, the programme was conceived as a rehabilitation and reintegration initiative for former members of the terrorist groups who voluntarily surrender to the Nigerian government (Buratai, 2020). The OSC programme operates under the coordination of the Nigerian military, specifically the Defence Headquarters. It involves collaboration between various government agencies, including the Office of the National Security Adviser, the National Directorate of Employment, the National Orientation Agency, and the Nigerian Correctional Service (Buratai, 2020; Bukarti & Bryson, 2019).

However, the OSC programme became an issue of public concern due to several factors. Foremost is the fact that the insurgency still lingers, scepticism surrounding the genuineness of the repentance, quality of the rehabilitation, and fear of regrouping of the insurgents (see for example Bukarti, 2021; Kperogi, 2020; Monguno, 2022; & Zulum, 2021). Such reactions have been previously justified by several studies showing that Nigerians do not

hesitate to react to public issues in the media (Felbab-Brown, 2018; Tucker & Mohammed, 2018). Therefore, could these reactions have been influenced by the way the media covered, framed, and presented the OSC to the public?

From the commencement of the operation, the media have been co-opted as partners in progress and have been at the forefront in providing real-time coverage of the issue. Scholars (Ada & Abdullahi, 2022; Adebajo, 2021; Demarest & Langer, 2021; Ette & Joe, 2018; Owonikoko, 2022; Obaje, 2017; & Udoh, 2017) believe that the media have been instrumental in covering issues relating to Boko Haram. The question now is; how did the media cover OSC issues? what types of frames did the media used in representing these issues? What are the tones used in reporting and framing the OSC issues?

Though, studies examined the coverage of the Boko Haram conflict from various viewpoints, especially on how the media set agenda about the conflict. There are also studies that particularly examine the OSC from the perspective of dealing with Boko Haram defectors (Bukarti & Bryson, 2019) and peacebuilding through Operation Safe Corridor and the Niger Delta Amnesty programme (Olusegun & Matsilele, 2019). The surrendering of the Boko Haram fighters is, however, attributed to how media communicate messages to their audiences (Monguno, 2023).

So, it is safe to assume that some of these successes may be attributed to media coverage and framing of the OSC. Though, the question of how the media framed the OSC have not been adequately documented from the literature examined, thus raising the question of whether the media, particularly the online media have contributed to the resistance, challenged or neutralised the resistance towards the OSC programme. This study therefore attempts to provide answers to this question by examining the types of frames, the dominant frames and tones of frames used by the selected newspapers in framing the Operation Safe Corridor.

Existing literature proposes that whether a story is positively or negatively presented, media framing is an important tool for investigating how issues of societal concerns are represented as they select some aspects of perceived reality to promote a particular problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation, and/or treatment recommendation in their reportage (Entman, 1993). This study therefore examined how the media framed Operation Safe Corridor in Nigeria by *HumAngle*, *Premium Times*, *Yerwa Express News*, and *PRNigeria* from October 6, 2016 to October 6, 2023

THE ROLE OF THE MEDIA IN FRAMING ISSUES

There are scholarly articles and empirical evidences that critically examine media's role in shaping public perception about terrorism and security issues. The Boko Haram insurgency which spanned over a decade is a complex and multifaceted conflict that has devastated Nigeria and Nigerians leading to killings of thousands of people including women and children, mass destructions of properties, kidnappings, and widespread displacement of people among others. Yakubu, Aiguoarueghian and Orobator (2016) observed that the Boko Haram insurgency and Niger Delta militancy have led to the death of thousands of individuals, devastated families, and affected both the international community, state and federal government as well as the Nigerian economy. They therefore, recommended that the Federal Government should sincerely and practically embark on job creation for the unemployed youths, particularly in the troubled regions. This and many of such recommendations could be the reason why the Federal Government launched the Operation Safe Corridor programme and included skill acquisition

and empowerment drive to support the repentant Boko Haram fighters to embark on meaningful ventures.

Bukarti & Bryson (2019) confirmed that Nigeria has three different de-radicalisation programmes. This include a 2014 established Prison Programme in Kuje, Federal Capital Territory which combats religious ideology and offers vocational training to fighters convicted of violent extremist offences or inmates on or awaiting trial. Another one is Yellow Ribbon Initiative established in 2017 by Neem Foundation to provide psychosocial, behavioural and reintegration training to women, children and young people associated with Boko Haram. Then, there is the Operation Safe Corridor which encompasses four broad stages to include; documentation and profiling, buy-in, de-radicalisation and reintegration of repentant Boko Haram insurgents. Relating this discussion to the role of the media, Ebiede, Langer & Tosun (2020) highlight the importance of media education in the de-radicalisation efforts of the Federal government, while Ikelegbebe, A. & Umukoro, N. (2016) added that media literacy and education can play crucial roles in countering extremist ideologies and promoting critical thinking among individuals.

The media which are seen as vehicles through which information, ideas and messages are conveyed to the public also play critical roles on how messages are disseminated and understood. Hence, Gapsiso & Garba (2023) submit that the media is widely seen as a powerful and influential machinery in relations to crises management and conflicts mediation and a veritable tool for dialogue and peacekeeping owing to its professional mandates and normative characteristics. Ali (2013) added that the media have roles to play in national security of countries. In his paper on the role of the Media in National Security in Nigeria from 1960 to 1999, he emphasised the important roles of the media in providing information that promotes national security and cohesion. Nwabueze and Ekwughe (2014) are also of the opinion that there is strong correlation between the media and the insecurity in Nigeria. They emphasized that the media have practical measures relevant to combating insecurity in societies like Nigeria through sustained retraining of journalists on evolving terrorism and conflict reporting.

Empirically, a qualitative comparative analysis by Salihu and Yakubu (2021) revealed that the workings of the peace building operation which encompasses religious reorientation, counselling, capacity building and payment of stipends at the end of the day was left under secrecy compared to Presidential Amnesty Programme. The study recommends that media should be reorienting the people and officials of the programme to entice Boko Haram combatants to defect and be accepted by members of the society. In addition, to establishing a strong monitoring and evaluation mechanism of ensuring the efficacy of the programme. Another evidence from the study by Kanason (2020) titled “No peace without forgiveness: Scanning ‘Operation Safe Corridor’ in Northeast Nigeria” revealed that the success of the peacebuilding and counterinsurgency operation was undermined by the top-to-bottom and military dominated approach. This argument is supported by how the Operation Safe Corridor programme was received differently by various stakeholders. Evidences from the literature sifted various reactions and positions towards the programme. While some rejected it (Ndume, 2020; Owolabi, 2021; Felbab-Brown, 2018), some disregarded it (Yakubu, 2021), others condemned (Owolabi, 2021; Kperogi, 2020; Itodo, 2020) and complained (Aborisade, 2021; Bukarti, 2021; Onuoha, Ikechukwu & Ngwu, 2021; Zulum, 2021; Tucker & Mohammed, 2018 & Monguno, 2023) about the programme. Most of them cited the wrong-timing, lack of substantial legal backing, communities excluded from decision-making (imposed

reintegration) as well as the possibility of repentant Boko Haram insurgents going back to their crimes.

Similarly, the programme witnessed the Chairman Senate Committee on Army and the Senator representing Southern Borno, Senator Mohammed Ali Ndume persistently disagreeing publicly with the government policy. This period also witnessed an interactive town hall meeting in Maiduguri, Borno State where stakeholders from religious, traditional and political sphere gathered to brainstorm and chart a way forward on the massive surrendering of the insurgents and the mode of operation of the Operation Safe Corridor. For example, Maina, Abba, Isa and Umar (2022) examined “Community Perspective of Boko Haram Repentant Terrorist in Maiduguri Metropolitan Council, Borno, Nigeria” to determine the perspectives of some communities on reintegration of repentant Boko Haram members in the society. Data from this research revealed that 72% of the surveyed population are aware of the Deradicalisation, Rehabilitation and Reintegration programme, but are not willing to accept the repentant insurgents back into their fold because the insurgents had killed their relatives, destroyed their means of livelihood and survival, businesses and shelters and caused them hardship, thus, they doubt the genuineness of their repentance.

Amidst all these is the media covering and reporting events as they unfold. In representing issues happening in the society, the media use frames in constructing these realities. In line with this thinking, Price and Tewksbury (1997) stated that media framing focuses more on how events and messages are presented. Evidences are abundant on how different media frame issues in the country. Okoro & Christian (2013), who explored the framing of the Boko Haram insurgency by various newspapers highlight the different frames employed and emphasize the need for positive media representation of government efforts in combating terrorism, suggesting that such coverage could foster public trust in government during crises. This means media framing can influence societal perceptions of security initiatives like 'Operation Safe Corridor'. Similarly, Ireju et al. (2014) further elaborate on the media's influence by investigating the coverage of the Chibok schoolgirls' kidnapping. They argue that the media's agenda-setting power can significantly impact public discourse and the framing of national development issues. Their findings underscore the importance of the media in emphasizing peace and development, which aligns with the goals of the 'Operation Safe Corridor' initiative by promoting narratives that support disengagement from violence. Aliede (2016) contributes to this discourse by reflecting on the broader implications of public relations strategies in addressing the Boko Haram crisis. He posits that sustainable peace requires not only military action but also effective communication strategies to reshape public attitudes towards terrorism. This perspective is crucial for understanding how the framing of 'Operation Safe Corridor' can be enhanced through public relations efforts that promote dialogue and understanding.

Tobor & Shajkovci, (2016) provide a comparative analysis of disengagement from violence, linking the Nigerian context to broader global narratives. Their examination of the amnesty initiative in the Niger Delta offers insights into how government-led programs can successfully encourage disengagement from terrorism. This comparative framework is essential for evaluating the effectiveness of 'Operation Safe Corridor' in facilitating similar outcomes. Santoprete & Xu, (2018) analysed de-radicalization programs, emphasizing the importance of non-coercive strategies in countering violent extremism. Their findings suggest that well-structured de-radicalization programs can be cost-effective and beneficial for national

security, providing a theoretical underpinning for the framing of 'Operation Safe Corridor' as a viable strategy for reducing violence.

Bowei, 2019) shifts the focus to the socio-economic impacts of terrorism and the role of various stakeholders in counterterrorism efforts. His study highlights the importance of understanding participants' perceptions and experiences, which can inform the framing of security initiatives like 'Operation Safe Corridor' to ensure they resonate with the public. Hassan, Azmi, & Abdullahi (2020) delve into the use language in Islam-related news, underscoring the role of framing in shaping public understanding. Their work emphasizes that the way news is presented can significantly influence audience perceptions, a critical consideration for framing 'Operation Safe Corridor' in a manner that fosters positive public engagement.

Ziems & Yang (2021) examine the effects of framing on public opinion, specifically regarding police violence. Their findings regarding the differential framing by liberal and conservative outlets provide a relevant parallel for understanding how varying media perspectives can shape public discourse around security programs. Again, Pan et al., (2023) explore the dynamics of framing in the context of social media versus traditional news outlets, highlighting the rapid dissemination of public crisis framing. Their insights into the interplay between media framing and public opinion are particularly relevant for understanding how 'Operation Safe Corridor' is perceived across different platforms (particularly, the online media) and how this affects public engagement with the initiative.

Abana (2019) studied media framing of Chibok girls' abduction by selected online newspapers (Daily Trust, Premium Times, Vanguard, Leadership, Guardian and Daily Post) and found out that geographical differences exist in the framing of the stories of Chibok Girls abduction with Northern based newspapers where Chibok is located recording highest number of reports and news stories recording the highest usage in unit of analysis. These implies that issues of national interest and concern such as the Operation Safe Corridor should be examined taking into consideration the geographical location of the selected newspapers and news category as an important unit of analysis.

Through this analysis of the literature, though not exhaustive, it is evident that there exists a number of researches on Boko Haram and media framing but a few on Operation Safe Corridor (International Crisis Group, 2021; Salihu, 2021; Olusegun & Matsilele, 2019; Bukarti & Bryson, 2019 & Monguno, 2022), and not much attention has been given to media framing of Operation Safe Corridor in Nigeria which suggests dearth of research on online newspaper framing of the Operation Safe Corridor programme. This study therefore attempts to fill this gap by examining the framing of Operation Safe Corridor by selected online newspapers from October, 2016 to January, 2023.

METHODOLOGY

This study employs content analysis as a method of data collection to investigate the framing of the Operation Safe Corridor Programme by selected online Nigerian newspapers. This method was adopted because of its relevance in examining the content of newspaper reports, which presupposes the nature of the investigation (Krippendorff, 2004; Cresswell, 2009; Wimmer & Dominick, 2011). While it is challenging to provide an exact number of online newspapers, according to data provided by SquirrelPR (2023) there are over 3000 digital news

publishers in Nigeria where more than 80% of them are focused on news and current affairs. Therefore, universe of this study is defined as all the online Nigerian newspapers and the study population covers the selected newspapers for the seven-year study period totalling 7,885.

Purposive technique, a non-probability sampling method was employed to select the study period of October 6th, 2016 when the OSC programme was launched to January 6th, 2023 which witnessed mass surrender of the Boko Haram militants. Purposive technique was used to select privately owned HumAngle, Premium Times, Yerwa Express, and PRNigeria online newspapers because of their editorial independence and policies which focused on conflict and peacebuilding reporting. This study however, adopted census technique and sampled all editions of the publications during the period under review and all stories related to the Operation Safe Corridor programme published by the selected online newspapers. Census technique was used due to possibility of scarcity of news reports and feature articles about the Operation Safe Corridor programme Nigeria in order to give all news stories and feature articles published by the various online newspapers a chance to be examined for effective interpretation of the phenomena. A total of 802 news stories and features were generated from the online newspapers.

The units of analysis for this research are news stories and feature articles that mentioned repentant Boko Haram and the Operation Safe Corridor. However, news and headlines are treated as one story. This means frames in the headlines and the leads will be counted as one in data analysis. The content categories for this research include: age, national interest, public view, safety of host communities, return of the repentant, welfare of the repentant, call for surrender, human rights protection, origin of the repentant, empowerment, attack on Boko Haram, reintegration and others which will take care of the contents that do not fall into any of the categories listed. Data was searched from the websites of the sampled newspapers and identified, categorised and coded using the coding sheet created for that. Data was extracted and synthesised manually to reveal how the selected online newspapers framed Operation Safe Corridor. Reliability test was conducted with 10% of the population and yielded 99% co-efficiency of reliability. Data was presented using simple statistics of frequencies and percentages.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

The data collected from *HumAngle*, *Premium Times*, *Yerwa Express News*, and *PRNigeria* online newspapers from 6th October, 2016 to 6th January, 2023, revealed a total of 802 news stories and feature articles on the Operation Safe Corridor Programme. Based on the cumulative data from individual newspapers findings, data is presented, analysed and discussed based on objectives of this study. The first objective of this study is to find out the types of frames used in reporting Operation Safe Corridor. Table two provides data that will meet this objective and also objective two on the dominant frame used. Data on table one provides background data that will form the basis for further discussion.

Table 1 Distribution of Publications across units of analysis

S/N	Publication	No. of Days	Units of Analysis		Total number of Operation Safe Corridor Stories
			News	Features	
1.	PRNigeria	2,283	260 (32%)	100 (12%)	360 (45%)
2.	HumAngle	1,036	160(20%)	80(10%)	240 (30%)
3.	Yerwa Express News	2,283	77(9.6%)	26 (3.2%)	103 (13%)
4.	Premium Times	2,283	96(12%)	3(0.37)	99 (12%)
Total		7,885	593(74%)	209(26%)	802 (100%)

Source: Content Analysis, 2023

The table above sums up the distribution of stories by publications across units of analysis. Data extracted from HumAngle, Premium Times, Yerwa Express News, and PRNigeria online newspapers revealed a total of 802 news and features articles on Operation Safe Corridor Programme. A breakdown revealed that PRNigeria recorded the highest number of reports with 360 (45%) of the total reports. This is followed by HumAngle, then Yerwa Express with Premium Times recording the least issues. Perhaps, PRNigeria's high number of reports might have been influenced by the subsidiary services provided through Press Releases of the Nigerian military to the newspaper. Similarly, on the type of reports, news has the highest number of newspaper contents. This suggests that the online newspapers focused more on timely and fact-based reporting, emphasising breaking news and current issues. This might also be attributed to government's deliberate efforts to provide information on the programme in ensuring its success or perhaps, the demand for real-time information in today's fast-paced digital age, where the public seeks immediate updates on government initiatives such as Operation Safe Corridor.

Distribution across Framing categories

Table 2: Framing of Operation Safe Corridor From 2016 – 2023					
Identified Frames	HumAngle	Premium Times	Yerwa Express News	PRNigeria	Total
Age	15	0	2	3	20 (2%)
National/Regional interest	14	7	5	35	61 (8%)
Public view	17	11	0	17	45 (6%)
Safety of host communities	10	19	2	19	50 (6%)
Return of the repentant	59	22	39	91	211 (26%)
Welfare of the repentant	16	6	1	21	44 (5%)
Call for surrender	11	3	13	19	46 (6%)
Human Rights protection	20	9	8	35	72 (9)
Origin of the repentant	17	0	0	17	34 (4%)
Empowerment	21	11	13	53	98 (12%)
Attack on Boko Haram	12	0	9	14	35 (4%)

Reintegration	28	11	11	36	86 (11%)
Total	240 (30%)	99 (12%)	103 (13%)	360 (45%)	802 (100%)
Grand Total					

Source: Content Analysis, 2023

The table above shows data on framing categories used by the selected newspapers. A total of twelve (12) framing categories have been identified across 802 stories recorded for the period under study. Return of the Repentant frame has the highest frame usage recording 211 (26%) of the total reports followed by Empowerment frame. Age frame had the least usage in the framing of the Operation Safe Corridor by the newspapers. This means that the Return of the Repentant frame is the dominant frame in reporting the Operation Safe Corridor programme. This suggests significant emphasis by the publications on the return of the former insurgents into the society. This framing might reflect the newspapers' recognition of the role of operation safe corridor's programme of encouraging surrender of the ex-militants back into the society. By prioritising this frame, the newspapers likely aim to provide an understanding of the rehabilitation process, thus contributing to the broader conversation surrounding national security and stability. However, the relative underrepresentation of other frames, such as public view, age, human rights protection, and national/regional interests, may indicate areas where the newspapers could provide well-rounded and more comprehensive perspective on the program and its implications for Nigeria.

In revealing the frequency of usage of framing categories by individual publications, data showed that PRNigeria mostly used all the different framing categories recording 360 (45%) of the total frames used. This is followed by HumAngle and Yerwa Express News. Again, Premium Times used the least frames in reporting the Operation Safe Corridor Programme with 99 which is equivalent to 12% frame usage. Therefore, these frames revealed issues that surrounded the Operation Safe Corridor Programme through the online newspapers.

Findings also indicated that, differences exist in the use of some frames by the newspapers. For instance, Yerwa Express did not employ the use of public view and origin of the repentant terrorist's frame in their coverage of the Operation Safe Corridor programme, whereas, Premium Times, HumAngle and PRNigeria did. Similarly, Premium Times did not employ the use of age, origin of the repentant and attack on Boko Haram frames in their coverage of the programme but HumAngle and PRNigeria did. Therefore, these differences in newspapers usage of frames in reporting the Operation Safe Corridor programme may be attributed to news selection processes and reporting style of individual newspapers.

Similarly, the of dominance of the return of the repentant frame could be attributed to goals of the operation safe corridor programme of disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration (DDR) (Olagunju, 2020). That is to return, rehabilitate and reintegrate the ex-Boko Haram militants back into the society as law-abiding and productive citizens. A sample newspaper report published by Yerwa Express News of November 29, 2022 on return of the repentant may also explain the above submission: "In the past four years, a lot of milestones have been recorded in the fight against terrorism in the North East. These milestones, which

may have been taken for granted, constitute the ultimate evidence that the war has been won.” More than 1,000 Boko Haram fighters and their families have handed themselves over to army units in recent weeks in the southern Borno state towns of Konduga, Bama, and Mafa – including what the military has described as the group’s “chief bomb expert”. And hundreds more fighters have reportedly surrendered across the border in neighbouring Cameroon.”

Similarly, another report published on August 6, 2021 by Premium Times reveals how the newspaper used its content to frame stories on the return of the repentant Boko Haram members. It states that “At least 56 Boko Haram/Islamic State of West Africa (ISWAP) terrorists have laid down their arms and embraced peace, the Nigerian Army said on Thursday in a statement. According to army spokesperson, Onyema Nwachukwu, a Brigadier General, the terrorists turned themselves in after suffering casualties as a result of bombardments of their camp by the troops. This report came about 24 hours after the army announced that some Boko Haram fighters and their families which consist of 19 male fighters, 19 adult females and 49 children surrendered. This could also be as a result of sustained and well-coordinated military operations which have exerted pressure on the terrorists to desert their various hideouts and camps, while their members who felt they are being misled are surrendering with their families to the Nigerian troops.

Similarly, On January 6, 2022, another news story by PRNigeria reported that “How Troops Rescued 729 Abductees, Nabbed 2,397 Terrorists – DHQ. A total of 24,059 terrorists and their families comprising 5,326 adult males, 7,550 adult females and 11,183 children have so far surrendered to own troops in the Northeast. All surrendered elements have been properly profiled and handed over to appropriate authorities for necessary actions.” During profiling, some of the Commanders who surrendered to troops admitted that their various enclaves are bedevilled by hunger, disease, and the perpetual fear of military offences. This exposes some of the reasons why the Boko Haram fighters have continued to surrender to the Nigerian government through Operation Safe Corridor programme. Other reports variously revealed how Boko Haram members have continuously surrendered in large numbers.

By this findings, the submission of Goffman (1974) titled *Frame Analysis: An Essay on the Organization of Experience* comes to mind. The emphasis on the return of the repentant frame may have been employed to organize public understanding of Operation Safe Corridor, whereby achieving the goals of program is dependent on the return of the repentant. Similarly, the framing theory emphasize selection and salience as factors that promote perception and interpretation (Entman, 1991). Additionally, Vreese (2005) states that “one influential way the media may shape public opinion is by framing events and issues in a particular way”. So, the usage of the frame may shape public attitudes toward the ex-combatants and the reintegration process.

However, it is noteworthy to state that reintegration frame, did not receive much attention as the return of the repentant frame. Reintegration is an important and integral part of the Operation Safe Corridor programme.

Tone of frames on OSC from 2016 – 2023

Tones	HumAngle	Premium Times	Yerwa Express News	PRNigeria	Total
Positive	172	60	80	269	581 (72%)
Negative	15	4	8	13	40 (5%)
Neutral	53	35	15	78	181 (23%)
Total	240 (30%)	99 (12%)	103 (13%)	360 (45%)	802 (100%)
Grand Total					

Source: Content Analysis, 2023

Tones Frames used by the selected newspapers is the third objective of this research. The table above provides statistical summary of the tones used by the four selected online newspapers in framing the Operation Safe Corridor Programme. It reveals that positive tone dominate the framing of the programme recording 581(72%) of the total frame usage. This is followed by neutral tone while negative tone was the least used. This finding suggests a strong emphasis on the success and achievements of the OSC programme. PRNigeria which has the highest number of stories among the four newspapers that framed the Operation Safe Corridor programme also has the highest number of positive frame usage. This direction of framing is crucial for the success of Operation Safe Corridor in countering terrorism in Nigeria. The newspaper regularly reported on the return of the ex-militants, graduation ceremonies of former terrorists who completed the rehabilitation programme, emphasising the importance of forgiveness and reconciliation in achieving peaceful coexistence. Many of the articles also featured interviews with military officials and government representatives who praised the programme as an important strategy for peace and stability of the country. For example, a news story published by PRNigeria on September 1, 2021 reported that At least 5,890 Boko Haram Commanders, Foot soldiers Surrender to Nigerian Troops. The Armed Forces of Nigeria have sustained their operational engagements across the country. These operations yielded significant results. Another news story published on August 4, 2021 by the same PRNigeria that “In continuation of the ongoing intensive clearance operations across the theatre of Operation Hadin Kai (OPHK), more Boko Haram Terrorists (BHTs) and elements of Islamic State of West Africa Province (ISWAP) and their families, who have hitherto hibernated around the fringes of Sambisa forest have yielded to troops’ heavy artillery and air bombardments and surrendered to troops at Forward Operational Base (FOB) Banki Junction... A former student of Government Secondary School (GSS) Chibok, in Borno State, and her

husband, a Boko Haram-ISWAP terrorist, have surrendered to troops of the Nigerian military, PRNigeria authoritatively gathered.”

A similar positive story by Premium Times published on August 29, 2021 reports that Community leaders in Borno State, on Sunday, agreed to the return of repentant Boko Haram terrorists into their communities. The decision was taken at a stakeholders meeting to discuss the prevailing security situation in the state. The meeting was organised by the government of Borno State”. Perhaps, this might be influenced by the decision of the Reporters because Yerwa Express News editorial policy clearly spelt out that voices of the people will be reported and the medium will serve as watchdog to the government and the society through its reportage.

Hence, this dominance of positive tone can be interpreted to mean the media’s recognition of the importance of portraying the successes of the rehabilitation and reintegration of the former Boko Haram fighters. It also indicates efforts to showcase the potentials for individuals to reform and reintegrate into the society, which aligns with the broader goal of promoting peace and stability of the OSC programme. Again, the frame may have become dominant due to several factors, such as the government’s effort to depict Operation Safe Corridor as a successful initiative that offers hope for both former militants and the society they once threatened as well as the media’s inclination to report press releases and statements by those overseeing the programme on the update of repentant insurgents.

Despite the generally positive framing of Operation Safe Corridor programme, the newspapers also published stories critical of the programme. Some of these stories have focused on concerns that the programme may not be effective in preventing rehabilitated militants from regrouping and returning to their terrorist activities. For example, a feature article published by HumAngle on January 14, 2021 titled Deradicalised Boko Haram members still not genuinely accepted by locals. Former Boko Haram members who have gone through the Nigerian government’s deradicalisation programme are continuously being reintegrated to their communities amidst passive rejection by locals. This is unfolding on the background of rejections on the grounds that many of them are going back to join their brethren in the bush, which indicates an underlying problem in the deradicalisation process.”

Other articles include a news story published on November 6, 2021 that “Military authority in Northeast Nigeria have sought help from the Northeast Development Commission (NEDC) in managing over 17,000 repentant Boko Haram terrorist currently in government custody.” These stories have criticised the government’s decision to allocate resources to the programme as there are a lot of problems being faced in the deradicalisation programme, the Operation Safe Corridor.

These findings agree with the study of Bashir (2021) that despite the numerous interventions to improve civil-military relation and protection of the rights of civilians in the insurgency ravaged northeast by Boko Haram and ISWAP fighters, more needs to be done in terms of active cooperation and massive education by both the military and the government. It also agrees with Arendth, Forrai and Mestas (2023) that the media (newspaper) use affective techniques to frame stories and feature articles by assigning either positive, negative or neutral tones to the content of reportage which in turn, may evoke a specific, and possibly constricted, perspective in the audience. The implication of this here means that media can make and or mar the initiative of encouraging the voluntary surrender of the Boko Haram fighters, which invariably, revalidates the framing theory that the media selects and decide what and what

should be included in its news content as well the direction of stories which may affect perception, reception and interpretation.

CONCLUSION

This study analysed the frames employed by the four selected online newspapers (HumAngle, Premium Times, Yerwa Express News, and PRNigeria) in the framing of the Operation Safe Corridor Programme of the Federal Government of Nigeria. This study identified twelve frames used by the newspapers in reporting the programme such as return of the repentant, empowerment, human rights protection, reintegration, national/regional interest, call for surrender, safety of host communities, welfare of the repentant, attack on Boko Haram, origin of the repentant, age, and public view. Hence, the study concludes that the dominant frame is return of the repentant, which emphasized increased number of former Boko Haram members who renounced violence and surrendered to the military. It is also the conclusion of this study that the tone of framing of Operation Safe Corridor is mostly positive, depicting the programme as a successful initiative that offers hope for both former militants and the society.

Based on the findings of this research, it is recommended the selected online newspapers should diversify their framing strategies when reporting on government initiatives like Operation Safe Corridor. While the Return of the Repentant frame is significant, they should also incorporate more of other frames, such as Public view and integration frame to provide a more balanced and comprehensive view of the initiative. Additionally, it is the recommendation of this study that further studies should be conducted to ascertain how these frames influence public perception regarding Operation Safe Corridor programme.

Corresponding Author

Dr Amina Abana, University of Maiduguri, miiinat99@unimaid.edu.ng

ACKNOWLEDGMENT

We acknowledge the contributions of our families, friends and colleagues, particularly from the Department of Mass Communication, University of Maiduguri

REFERENCES Aborisade, S. (2021, August 27). National Assembly has to approve repentant terrorists' amnesty – Ndume. Punch. <https://punchng.com/national-assembly-has-to-approve-terrorists-amnesty-ndume/?amp>

Ada, J. E. & Abdullahi, M. (2022). The impact of humanitarian aid on post conflict development in Borno State. International Journal of Peace and Development Studies,13(1), 1. DOI: 10.5897/IJPDS2021.0409

Adebajo, K. (2021 January, 6). The deradicalised (2): How a non-terrorist ended up at Operation Safe Corridor. HumAngle. <https://humanglemedia.com/the-deradicalised-2-how-a-non-terrorist-ended-up-at-operation-safe-corridor/>

Afomachukwu, O. J. (2020). Newspaper framing of the Nigerian armed forces operation python dance II in South-East Nigeria. Global Journal of Human-Social Science, 20(3), 32.

- Ali, A. D. (2013). The role of the media in national security in Nigeria 1960-1999. *Arabian Journal of Business and Management Review (OMAN Chapter)*, 2(12), 55-62.
- Aliede, J. E (2016). Public Relations, quest for sustainable peace and security: a reflection on the boko haram impasse in Nigeria 6 (19), *Research On Humanities and Social Sciences*. ISSN 2225-0484.
<https://www.iiste.org/Journals/index.php/RHSS/article/view/33538>
- Arendt, F., Forrai, M., & Mestas, M. (2023). News framing and preference-based reinforcement: Evidence from a real framing environment during the Covid-19 pandemic. *Communication Research*, 50(2), 179-204
- Bowei, B. S (2019). Evaluating the effects of counterterrorism strategies on insurgency in Nigeria. <https://docslib.org/doc/1916263/evaluating-the-effects-of-counterterrorism-strategies-on-insurgency-in-nigeria-bowie-sonnie-bowei-walden-university>
- Bukarti, B. (2021, August 18). A few more thoughts on 'repentant' Boko Haram members. *Daily Trust*. <https://dailystust.com/a-few-more-thoughts-on-repentant-boko-haram-members>
- Bukarti, B. A. & Bryson, R. (2019). Dealing with Boko Haram defectors in the Lake Chad Basin: Lessons from Nigeria. *Tony Blair Institute for Global Change*
- Buratai, T. Y. (2020). Leadership in counter insurgency and counter terrorism environment. *The Wolf*, 106-113. 7 Division Nigerian Army
- Cresswell, J. W. (2009). *Research design: Qualitative, quantitative and mixed methods approaches* (3rd ed.). SAGE Publications
- Demarest, L. & Langer, A. (2021). Peace journalism on a shoestring? Conflict reporting in Nigeria's national news media. *Journalism*, 22(3), 671 – 688. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1177/1464884918797611>
- Ebiede, T. M., Langer, A. & Tosun, J. (2020). Disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration: Analysing the outcomes of Nigeria's Post-Amnesty Programme. *Stability: International Journal of Security and Development*, 9(1), 4. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.5334/sta.752>
- Entman, R. M (1991) Framing united states coverage of international news-contrasts in the narratives of kal and iran air incidences. *Journal of Communication*, 43(4), 6-27
- Entman, R.M., (1993) Framing: Toward clarification of a fractured paradigm. *Journal of communication*, 43(4), 51-58
https://www.communicationcache.com/uploads/1/0/8/8/10887248/framing_toward_clarification_of_a_fractured_paradigm.pdf
- Ette, M. & Joe, S. (2018). 'Rival visions of reality': An analysis of the framing of Boko Haram in Nigerian newspapers and Twitter. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1177/1750635218776560>
- Felbab-Brown, V. (2018). "In Nigeria, we don't want them back": Amnesty, Defectors' Programs, leniency measures, informal reconciliation, and punitive responses to Boko

- Haram. Report to the United Nations University.
<https://www.brookings.edu/research/in-nigeria-we-dont-want-them-back/>
- Gamson, W. A (2001) Forward in Reese, S. D, Gandy, O. H & Grant, A. E (eds) Framing public life: perspectives on media and our understanding of social world. Mahwah, N. J: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates. Retrieved from <http://magik.gmu.edu/cgi-bin/pwebrecon.cgi?bbid=1086660>
- Gapsiso, N. & Garba, H. I. (2023). The media in the times of the Coronavirus (COVID-19) Pandemic. The Journal of Society and Media, 7(1), 250. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.26740/jsm>
- Goffman, E (1974) Frame Analysis: An essay on the organisation of experience. Boston: Northeastern University Press
- Hassan, I. A, Azmi, M. N. L, & Abdullahi, A. (2020). Investigating the Use of Language in Islam-related News: Evidence from Selected Non-Western Online Newspapers. Arab World English Journal 11(1). Retrieved from <https://dx.doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.3581380>
- Ikelegbebe, A. & Umukoro, N. (2016). Exclusion and peacebuilding in the Niger Delta of Nigeria: An Assessment of the Presidential Amnesty Programme. Journal of Peacebuilding & Development, 11(2), 26
- Ireju, A. P; Nwigoh, M, Nwigoh, E & Ojo, L. I.(2014) The mass media coverage of the kidnap of the chibok school girls News Media and mass communication ISSN 2224:3275 <https://www.iiste.org/Journals/index.php/NMMC/article/view/17709>
- Itodo, Y. (2020, November 13). Boko Haram can never repent – APC Chieftain, Gololo supports Ndume on de-radicalization. Daily Post. <https://dailypost.ng/2020/11/13/boko-haram-can-never-repent-apc-chieftain-gololo-supports-ndume-on-de-radicalization/?amp=1>
- Kanason (2020) titled “No peace without forgiveness: Scanning ‘Operation Safe Corridor’ in Northeast Nigeria. <https://uilspace.unilorin.edu.ng>
- Kperogi, F. (2020 August, 1). “Deradicalisation” of terrorists doesn’t work. Tribune. <https://tribuneonlineng.com/de-radicalisation-of-terrorists-doesnt-work>
- Krippendorff, K. (2004). Content analysis: An introduction to its methodology (2nd ed). Sage Publications
- Maina, M. B., Abba, B. M., Isa, M. M. & Umar, N. K. (2022). Community Perspective of Boko Haram Repentant Terrorist in Maiduguri Metropolitans Council Borno, Nigeria. FUDMA Journal of Sciences (FJS), 6(4). DOI: <https://doi.org/10.33003/fjs-2022-0604-1070>
- McQuail, D. (2010). McQuail’s mass communication theory (6th ed.). SAGE Publications
- Monguno, S. L. (2023, March 16). Starvation is driving thousands of surrendered insurgents to return to the fighters in the forest. Radio Ndarason International.

<https://ndarason.com/en/starvation-is-driving-thousands-of-surrendered-insurgents-to-return-to-the-fighters-in-the-forest/>

- Ndume, M. A. (2020, November 12). Senate committee rejects rehabilitation of repentant Boko Haram members [Video]. YouTube. <https://youtu.be/ZLvwGiRq40g>
- Nwabueze, C. & Ekwughe, V. (2014) Nigerian newspapers' coverage of the effect of Boko Haram activities on the environment. *Journal of African Media Studies*, 6(1). DOI: 10.1386/jams.6.1.71_1
- Obaje, C. E. (2017). News frame patterns: An evaluation of newspaper coverage of Boko Haram attacks in Nigeria. *Covenant Journal of Communication*, 4(1). <https://journals.covenantuniversity.edu.ng/index.php/cjoc/article/view/512>
- Okoro, N. & Christian, C. O (2013). Print media framing of Boko Haram insurgency in Nigeria: A Content Analytical Study of the Guardian, Daily Sun, Vanguard and Thisday Newspapers. <https://www.bing.com/search?q=Okoro%2C+N.+%26+Christian+Odoemelam%2C+C.+%282013%29.+Print+Media+Framing+of+Boko+Haram+Insurgency+in+Nigeria%3A+A+Content+Analytical+Study+of+the+Guardian%2C+Daily+Sun%2C+Vanguard+and+Thisday+Newspapers&form=ANNT11&refig=d041da74708f4065ae57320fa4d50173&pc=U531>
- Olagunju, D (2020) How does “Operation Safe Corridor” work? Citizen, Zikoko. <https://www.zikoko.com/citizen/how-does-operation-safe-corridor-work/#:~:text=The%20goal%20of%20the%20programme%20was%20to%20rehabilitate,incorporating%20Boko%20Haram%20militants%20back%20into%20the%20society>
- Olusegun, J. A. & Matsilele, T. (2019). Nigerian experience with post-conflict peacebuilding. *Journal of African Union Studies*, 8(3), 135-156. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/26890429>
- Onuoha, F. C., Ikechukwu, U. M. & Ngwu, E. (2021). Operation Safe Corridor programme and reintegration of ex-Boko Haram fighters in Nigeria. *Journal of Asian and African Studies*. DOI: 10.1177/00219096211047996
- Onwe, E. C., Chukwu, J., Nwamini, S. C., Nwankwo, S. U., Elem, S., Ogbaeja, N. I., Nwasum, C. J., Nwakpu, E. S. & Ogbodo, J. N. (2020). Analysis of online newspapers' framing patterns of COVID-19 in Nigeria. *European Scientific Journal*, 16(22), 227. DOI: 10.19044/esj.2020.y16n22p217
- Owolabi, F. (2021, September 1). Falana to Buhari: If insurgents can be forgiven, soldiers jailed for mutiny should be pardoned. *TheCable*. <https://www.thecable.ng/pardon-them-like-repentant-insurgents-falana-writes-buhari-over-soldiers-jailed-for-mutiny>
- Owonikoko, S. B. (2022). “Take them to Government House or Aso Rock”: Community receptivity to reintegration of Operation Safe Corridor's deradicalised ex-Boko Haram

- members in Northeastern Nigeria. *Cogent Social Sciences*, 8(1), 1-26.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/23311886.2021.2015884>
- Pan, J., Wang, Z., Qi, W., Lyu, H., & Luo, J. (2023). Understanding divergent framing of the Supreme Court controversies: Social Media vs. News Outlets. *Social and Information Networks*. Retrieved from <https://doi.org/10.48550/arXiv.2309.09508>
- Pate, U. & Ibrahim, A. M. (2021). Fake news, hate speech and Nigeria's struggle for democratic consolidation: A conceptual review. *Research Gate*. DOI:10.4018/978-1-7998-7291-7.ch022
- Price, V. & Tewksbury, D. (1997) News values and public opinion. a theoretical account of media priming and framing. In G. A. Barnett & F. J. Boster (eds.), *Progress in communication sciences* (13, pp. 173-212). Ablex
- Salihu, M. & Yakubu, Y. (2021). Beyond the battlefields, non-militarized approach and management of armed conflict in Nigeria: Takeaways from Operation Safe Corridor. *African Journal of Peace and Conflict Studies*, 10(1), 123 – 145. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.31920/2634-3665/2021/v10n1a6>
- Santoprete, M. & Xu, F. (2018). Global stability in a mathematical model of de-radicalization. *Elsevier*, Vol 509. PP 151-161. Retrieved from <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S0378437118307519>
- Scheufele, D. A. (1999). Framing as a theory of media effects. *Journal of Communication*, 49(1), 103. DOI: 10.1111/j.1460-2466.1999.tb02784.x
- Scheufele, D. A. & Tewksbury, D. (2007). Framing, agenda setting and priming: The evolution of three media effects models. *Journal of Communication*, 57, 9-20. DOI: 10.1111/j.1460-2466.2006.00326.x
- SquirrelPR (2023) Media planning guide. <https://www.squirrelpr.com/blog/post/10/nigerias-10-most-influential-digital-news-publishers-in-news-and-current-affairs>
- Tobor, J. O & Shajkovci, A. (2016). Disengagement from violence and terrorism: A comparative analysis of the Niger Delta, Nigeria, and the Balkans. *Mediterranean Journal of Social Sciences*. 7 (10) 5901/mjss.2016.7(4) p237. https://www.researchgate.net/publication/305272666_Disengagement_from_Violence_and_Terrorism_A_Comparative_Analysis_of_the_Niger_Delta_Nigeria_and_the_Balkans/citation/download?tp=eyJjb250ZXh0Ijp7ImZpcnN0UGFnZSI6InB1YmxpY2F0aW9uIiwicGFnZSI6InB1YmxpY2F0aW9uIn19
- Tucker, D. & Mohammed, J. A. (2018). Through our eyes: People's perspectives on building peace in northeast Nigeria [Policy brief]. The Kukah Centre. <https://www.thekukahcentre.org>
- Udoh, G. (2017). An aesthetic appraisal of newspaper coverage of Boko Haram activities. *Journal of New Media and Mass Communication*, 4(1), 16. <https://doi.org/10.18488/journal.91.2017.41.16.32>

- United Nations (2018). Introduction to international terrorism. https://www.unodc.org/documents/e4j/18-04932_CT_Mod_01_ebook_FINALpdf.pdf
- United States Institute of Peace (2021, May 27). Leaving Boko Haram behind [Video]. YouTube. <https://youtu.be/JcsK-NooYTI>
- Vreese, C. H. de (2005) News framing: theory and typology. *Information Design Journal + Document Design* 13(1) 51-62
- Weaver, D. H. (2007). Thoughts on agenda setting, framing and priming. *International Communication Association*, 57, 143
- Wimmer, R. D. & Dominick, J. R. (2011). *Mass media research: An introduction* (9th ed.) Wadsworth
- Yakubu, Y. A. (2021, September 1). Why I cannot forgive repentant Boko Haram. *The Metro Times*. <https://metrotimesng.com/2021/09/why-i-cannot-forgive-repentant-boko-haram/>
- Yakubu, M. J., Aiguobarueghian, O. V. & Orobator, A. D. (2016). Economic terrorism in Nigeria: An analysis of the impact of Boko Haram insurgency and Niger Delta militancy on national development, *JORIND*, 14(2), pp10-16
- Ziems, C. & Yang, D. (2021). To protect and to serve? analyzing entity-centric framing of police violence. <https://doi.org/10.48550/arXiv.2109.05325>
- Zulum, B. U. (2021, March 3). Full speech: calls for synergy in tackling insecurity menace in North-East [Video]. YouTube. <https://youtu.be/GZhQ5o3YGJM>