

Framing of Attacks on Security Personnel and Government Institutions in Post Covid-19 Era in Southeastern, Nigeria: A Study of Select Newspapers in Nigeria

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Abstract

There is an upsurge in the spate of insecurity in Nigeria generally, although the pattern that has emerged in Southeast in recent times is particularly disturbing. It involves killing of security personnel, carting away their weapons and setting their stations ablaze as well as government institutions. This study examined framing of attacks on security personnel and government institutions in Post Covid-19 era in Southeastern Nigeria: A study of select Nigerian newspapers. The key objectives of the study were: To identify the genre of stories on attacks on security personnel and government institutions in post Covid-19 era in Southeastern Nigeria and ascertain the kind of frames the select newspapers used in their coverage of the attacks on security personnel and government institutions in post Covid-19 era in Nigeria. Content analysis method was adopted. The findings revealed that the select newspapers used straight news format mainly in the reportage of attacks and also the newspapers used frames such as: Unknown gunmen frame, hoodlums frame and bandits frame in the coverage of the attacks. It was recommended that detailed report that will educate the public more should be employed by the media and solution/positive frame should be used when covering crises related matters.

Keywords: *Framing, Attack, Security, Personnel, Covid-19, Newspapers, Unknown gunmen*

Introduction

The fear of unknown gunmen is the beginning of wisdom in the Southeast region especially among security personnel. It seems that the peculiar security situation in the southeast region of the country is not abating. Almost on a daily basis, the zone records cases of arson on security facilities and the killing of security operatives. Snuffing precious life out of innocent residents has also become a common thing. Njoku and Ogugbuaju (2021) observe that there is no security official anywhere to protect anybody. The officials themselves are not safe. They appear to have been cowed to submission. They now go to work on mufti and hole themselves in their stations until the close of duty. The unknown gunmen seem operating undeterred they set public institutions on fire; they seize arms and ammunition belonging to security officials and kill them in the process. From Enugu to Ebonyi, Anambra, Imo, and Abia state, residents now live and move about in great fear. In March 9, 2021, gunmen attacked a police station and burnt vehicles in Imo State. The police on its Twitter page, however, tagged the perpetrators of one of the “unprovoked” attacks as “hoodlums,” saying they were about 200 people armed with AK47 rifles and machetes. (Yusuf, 2021)

On February 23, 2021, two police officers reportedly lost their lives when some unknown gunmen attacked a police station in Aba, Abia

State. On February 24, hoodlums killed a police officer and razed down a patrol vehicle in Ekwulobia in Anambra State. On February 26, 2021, gunmen razed a police station in Imo State, the station that was just renovated after being razed down by hoodlums during the #ENDSARS protests. On March 18, one police officer was killed after unknown gunmen attacked a police checkpoint at Neni, Anaocha Local Government area of Anambra State. On April 5, 2021 a total of 1,844 prisoners were freed when unknown gunmen attacked a correctional facility in Owerri, Imo State. Francis Enobore, the spokesperson of the correctional centre said the attackers who stormed the facility at about 02:15 am on Monday 5th April, 2021, gained entrance into the yard by using explosives to blast the administrative block (Aytogo, 2021).

Also on April 19, there were twin attacks on police divisions in Abia and Anambra States. A divisional police station in Uzuakoli, Bende Local council of Abia State was razed in the early hours of that day. It was gathered that the armed group attacked the police station around 2.00 am and freed suspects in police custody before setting the station ablaze. The attack in Anambra, which happened about the same time, was on the zone 13 police headquarters in Ukpo, Dunukofia Local council of the State. Spokesman of Abia State Police Command, Geoffrey Ogbonna, had stated that the gunmen who razed the Uzuakoli

Police station used dynamite and rocket launchers, which frustrated the efforts of the policemen guarding the station to repel them. The police in Anambra confirmed that two police officers were killed during the attack on Zone 13 while some vehicles parked on the premises were set on fire.

Sadly, the attacks and death toll due to the activities of the unknown gunmen hit list keeps rising every day, it becomes necessary to examine how some select newspapers in Nigeria frame the crisis. Research shows that news dealing with unrest and crises, like the activities of unknown gun men Southeastern Nigeria, influence public perceptions and concerns. When such events cause destruction in the society, it severely affects members in that community. Generally, these events allow researchers to assess the degree to which media select news and shape its content (Brunken, 2004). When a crisis occurs, members of the public are often in great need of information in order to reduce curiosity and uncertainty. Media frames of crises are powerful mechanisms that may influence the public's thoughts and perceptions (Olutokun and Seteolu, 2001 as cited in Chime-Nganya, Ezeji & Ezegwu (2017), as they evaluate the cause, attribute responsibilities and understand consequences. Past studies have examined media framing of crises of different nature ranging from Boko Haram, herders crisis with farmers and other religious/political crisis.

However, very little has focused on media framing, especially framing of attacks on security personnel and government institutions in post Covid-19 era in Southeastern, Nigeria. No study in recent time have attempted to examine frame patterns and dominant frames used in the coverage of attacks on security personnel and government institutions in post Covid-19 era in southeastern, Nigeria. This study seeks to fill the research gap

Statement of the Problem

The Southeastern Nigeria has witnessed unprecedented attacks on police formations in the last few months. From Anambra to Abia, Enugu to Ebonyi and Imo, there is no State that is spared of these horrendous attacks in the region. Not only have police properties been destroyed, but arms and ammunition were also looted, while unfortunately, some Police officers have paid the ultimate price in the process. Also, some government institutions such Courts and Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) offices and Nigerian Correctional Centre (in Imo state particularly) were not spared.

However, news report on the activities of unknown gunmen, especially their various attacks across southeastern Nigeria usually creates palpable fear, tension and anxiety across the region. In fact, it has led to untold hardship amongst the people as several economic activities have been paralysed, several events cancelled and night life has also reduced. It was a

case of the fear of “unknown gunmen” is the beginning of wisdom in Southeastern Nigeria. These attacks have brought concern and worry among the public. No wonder Ngwu, Ekwe, and Chiaha (2015), opine that reports of tragic incidents are put across to the news audience in different frames and journalistic colourations which ultimately may have a significant impact on the audience. The way these events or attacks are reported by the media might have lots of implications attached to it. It can create more fear in the minds of the people, encourage the attackers to commit more acts of destruction, terror, hinder socio-economic development, create negative image for the various State government in the region as can be seen in Imo State, and prevent foreign investment. The list of implications might be more than what has been mentioned. This study, therefore, examined framing of attacks on security personnel and government institutions in post Covid-19 era in Southeastern, Nigeria, with a study of select newspapers (*The Guardian* and *Punch*) in Nigeria.

Objectives of the Study

1. To identify the genre of stories on attacks on security personnel and government institutions in post Covid-19 era in South Eastern Nigeria
2. To ascertain the kinds of frames the select newspapers used in their coverage of the attacks on security personnel and government institutions in post Covid-19 era in Nigeria.
3. To determine the dominant frames the select newspapers used in their coverage of the attacks on security personnel and government institutions in post Covid-19 era in Nigeria.

Literature Review

News Framing

Framing refers to the way events and issues are organised and made sense of, especially by the media, media professional and their audiences. Tiung (2009) views framing as part of a skill used in producing effects or understanding a certain issue. Ofori-Birikorang (2010) contends that through news framing the media provide knowledge to their audiences, and such knowledge, in turn, exerts crucial influence in deciding the direction of citizens’ understanding and possible actions they take.

Lippmann (quoted in Papacharissi and Oliveira, 2008, p.52) notes that news is responsible for providing the “pseudo-environment” upon which people rely to experience and understand events they cannot observe directly and that news frames are important in how these events are reported since they reflect a process of recurring selection and emphasis in communicating perceived reality. They concluded that, frames in media are key components in the study of selection and interpretation of news.

Bullock (2001) observes that framing affects how a story is told and influences public perception. Norris, Kern and Just (2003 as cited in Chime-Nganya, Ezeji, & Ezegwu, 2017) opine that the idea of 'news frames' refers to interpretive structures that journalists use to set particular events within their broader context; they explain further, that news frames bundle key concepts, stock phrases, and iconic images to reinforce certain common ways of interpreting developments. The essence of framing is selection, to prioritize some facts, images, or developments over others, thereby unconsciously promoting one particular interpretation of events.

Empirical Review

Adisa (2016, as cited in Amannah and Nimaa, 2019) in his study examines the effect of media frames on ethnic conflicts. The study which specifically seeks to understand the extent to which media frames about ethnic issues contribute to fueling of volatile ethnic group in Nigeria utilized primary data generated from 26 ethnic group leaders in Nigeria. The study found that the way newspapers frame ethnic issues contributed towards inciting double standard, name calling, all of which stemmed from the ownership interest and these widens ethnic differences and eventually stimulate ethnic groups into conflict/crisis. The study recommended that the Nigerian government must shed its insensitivity and confront the problem with sincerity and purpose. Shehu (2017)

studied newspapers coverage of herder/farmers conflict in Nigeria. Content analysis method was used. The study found that the headlines in the papers content analysed suggested that Fulani groups are being framed by the newspapers as "conflict mongers".

In a study on media framing of conflicts and the Boko Haram insurgency in Nigeria, Ugondo (2015) argued that frames are created through continuous interaction between journalists, elite and social movements. He identified six framing strategies commonly used by the media. He noted that news frames could be in factual or visual form and could include the use of metaphor to give meaning to an idea or programme through comparisons with other things. Ugondo (2015) posited that stories of myths or legends frame the news in a memorable way through the use of anecdotes while traditions which include rites, rituals and ceremonies pattern and define an organization at regular time increments to confirm and reproduce organizational values. The study also revealed the use of slogans, jargons and catch phrase in the news to frame a subject in a memorable manner and identified artifacts and contrast as strategies to culminate corporate values and to describe a subject in terms of what is not negative connotation.

In related development, Okoli (2011 as cited in Chime-Nganya, Ezeji, & Ezegwu, 2017)) in his study of mass media coverage of the Niger Delta crisis revealed that Channels

Television gave a better report of the Niger Delta crisis than NTA. Okoli confirmed that unlike NTA, Channels Television was always reporting the crisis in their daily reports.

Ezegwu, Udoyo and ovuike (2017) examined newspaper framing of the Gambian political conflict and its influence on University of Uyo students' perception of the issue. The study set out to ascertain patterns of newspaper framing of the political conflict; to determine the dominant frame the newspapers employed in the coverage and ascertain the influence of newspaper framing of this political conflict on the audience. The researchers adopted survey and content analysis methods. The study found that the selected three newspapers used 8 frames in their coverage, and political frame dominated the frame pattern of the political conflict in The Gambia. It was recommended that political reporters should be frequently re-oriented towards effective and efficient framing practices of the media. This will ensure effective management of political conflict/crisis situations. The reviewed works showed that much has not been done in the area of unknown gunmen activities in South-eastern Nigeria, this study fills that literature gap.

Theoretical Framework

This study was anchored on the framing theory. The framing theory states that the volume of coverage devoted to a particular issue is not as important as the frame the media adopt

(Druckman 2001). According to the theory, people make sense of their experiences using interpretational packages called frames. To frame means to slant a story towards a particular direction. This theory suggests that the way an information is presented (framed) determines the way people understand such message. Baran & Dennis (2009 as cited in Ezegwu, Ezeonyejiaku, & Asodike, 2018) further explained that this theory examines the idea about how people use expectations to make sense of every life. Social constructivists have argued that at the heart of framing, is framing analysis (Ngwu, Ekwe and Chiaha, 2015). Here, a researcher is expected to construct and categorize frames identified in the course of the coding. In other words, the choice of words and sentences used in reporting a story may influence how audiences think about the issue, not by making aspect of the issue more salient, but by invoking interpretive schemas that influence the interpretation of incoming information". This theory is relevant to this study because it explains how media reportage of an event contributes in shaping the perception of the people. Thus, the way the media frame attacks on security personnel and government institutions in post Covid-19 era in South-eastern, Nigeria, the pictures they gather and present, the logical account of the event that transpired has some worth influence on the readers of the newspapers.

Methodology

The researchers adopted content analysis. Content analysis was used because of its appropriateness in dealing with press coverage of various issues. The use of content analysis to measure social and political trends has proven to be most effective. Wimmer and Dominick (2003), describe content analysis as an effective method for the study of social and political trends.

Two newspapers were selected for the study, they are: *Punch* and *The Guardian* newspapers. These newspapers were selected because they are listed among the major newspapers in Nigeria, with online versions. These papers have maintained visibility in print and online for a considerable period of time and are still active (Amobi, 2010; BBC, 2011; World Press, 2012; Nigeria Master Web, 2012, as cited in Ezegwu, Ezeonyejiaku, & Asodike, 2018).

1. They had sustained publication during the period of the study.
2. They were selected for what seemed like alarming headlines which ordinarily could create fear in the minds of audience.

The population of the study was all the editions of the *The Guardian* and

Punch newspapers published between January 1st and June, 30th, 2021 bringing the total to 362. Krejcie and Morgan's (1970) table for determining the sample size was established at 95% confidence level and 5% sampling error. According to Krejcie and Morgan, when the finite population is between 360 and 380, the required sample is 186. A total of 186 editions of the two newspapers were studied; 93 editions of each newspaper.

Multistage sampling technique was used for the sampling procedure. To get at the exact editions to be studied, 12 and 13 editions were picked from the first two months, while 17 editions of each newspaper were picked monthly from the remaining 4 months in-between. Each month was divided into 4 weeks, and from each week 3 or 5 editions were selected. The researchers purposively picked the days within the week, considering the newspapers' editions that contain stories relating to attacks on security personnel and government institutions. From the 186 editions of the two newspapers studied, there were 52 stories that were published about attacks on security personnel and government institutions in South-eastern Nigeria.

Table 1: Indicating selection of sample editions/days per newspaper

Months	1 st Week	2 nd Week	3 rd Week	4 th Week	Total
January	3, 5, 6	10, 11, 13	16, 17, 19	22, 26, 29	12
February	1,2, 4, 5	7, 9,10	14, 16	23, 24, 25, 27	13
March	1, 3, 5, 6	11, 12, 13, 14	15,16,18, 19, 20	27, 29,30, 31	17
April	3,5,6,7	8, 10, 12, 13, 14	16, 19, 20 21,	22, 27, 29, 30	17
May	1,2,6,7	9,8,10,12,14	18, 20, 21	22, 23, 24, 26, 30	17

June	3, 4, 5, 6	10,12,13,14,	15, 16, 18, 19, 20	22, 23 , 25, 27	17
Total	23	24	22	24	93

Source: Field Work, 2021

Research instruments

The coding sheet and coding guide were used to collate data from manifest content of select newspapers.

Inter-coder Reliability

The inter-coder reliability for the study was calculated using Nwodu formulae (2017, p.99).

$$\text{Where: } A = \frac{Po - Pe}{100 - pe}$$

Where Po = Observed percentage agreement.

Pe = Expected percentage agreement by chance

A= Internal coder agreement

In this study, the observed percentage agreement is 80 and the expected percentage is 50. Below is the calculation:

$$\text{Therefore; } \frac{80-50}{100-50} = \frac{30}{40} = 0.75$$

This shows that the instrument has internal consistency.

Unit of Analysis

The units of analysis for this study were the newspapers' articles in the form of news, features, editorials, pictures, opinion articles and letter to the editor that showed the kinds of frames and themes used by the two newspapers studied, in framing of attacks on security personnel and government institutions in post Covid-19 era in southeastern within the period under study.

Content Categories

The frames that were identified in the coverage of attacks on security personnel and government institutions in post Covid-19 era in south-eastern were: **Unknown gunmen frame, Hoodlums frame, Bandits frame, Insurgent frame, ESN/IPOB frame**

Data Presentation and Analysis

Table 2: The genre of stories on attacks of security personnel and government institutions

Genre of stories	<i>The Guardian</i>	<i>Punch</i>	Total	%
Straight News	11	9	20	38.4
Opinion articles	4	3	7	13.4
Feature	5	4	9	17
Editorial	0	1	1	2
Pictures	6	4	10	19.2

Letters to Editor	2	3	5	10
Total	28	24	52	100

Source: Field Survey, 2021

The data on table 2 show that the most predominant genre of report on framing of attacks on security personnel and government institutions in post Covid-19 era in southeastern was reported mainly as straight news, with 20 items (38.4%). This reveals that framing of attacks on security personnel and government institutions in southeastern Nigeria was reported mainly as straight news.

Table 3: kinds of frames used by select newspapers in reporting attacks of security personnel and government institutions in Southeastern Nigeria

Kinds of Frames	<i>The Guardian</i>	<i>Punch</i>	Total	%
Unknown gunmen	10	8	18	35
Hoodlums	6	6	12	23
Insurgents	4	3	7	13
Bandits	3	2	5	10
ESN/IPOB	5	5	10	19
Total	28	24	52	100

Field Survey: 2021

The Table 3 above reveals the kinds of frame used by select newspapers in their coverage of the attacks on security personnel and government institutions in post Covid-19 era in Southeastern Nigeria. The frames were: Unknown gunmen, Hoodlums, Bandits, Insurgent, ESN/IPOB members

Table 4: Dominant frames used by select newspapers in reporting attacks of security personnel and government institutions in Southeastern Nigeria

Kinds of Frames	<i>The Guardian</i>	<i>Punch</i>	Total	%
Unknown gunmen	10	8	18	35
Hoodlums	6	6	12	23
Insurgents	4	3	7	13
Bandits	3	2	5	10
ESN/IPOB	5	5	10	19
Total	28	24	52	100

Field Survey: 2021

The table four above reveals that out of the five frames used by the two national dailies studied, unknown gunmen frames was dominant, accounting for 35% of the total report, while bandits frame was less dominant (10%).

Discussion of Findings

This study examined newspaper framing of attacks on security personnel and government institutions in post covid-19 era in Southeastern, Nigeria. In actualising this, attention was paid to genres of stories, kinds of frames and dominant frame used in the coverage. The result revealed that framing of attacks on security personnel and government institutions in Southeastern Nigeria was reported mainly as straight news. The dominance of straight news shows a lack of emphasis on interpretative reporting. This is in line with Alfred, Ogwo and Ekwueme (2017) assertion that the dominance of straight news in newspapers coverage implies that the correlation function, which is the interpretative role of the press was not really dealt with because interpretative genres such as features, opinions and in-depth news analysis were not recognized.

The result of this study also revealed that the select newspaper used various frames to report the issue. Such frames were: Unknown gunmen, Hoodlums, Bandits, Insurgent, ESN/IPOB members. The used above frames by the select newspapers are frightening, scaring and it is capable of creating tension and fear among the residents of the Southeast and other Nigerians. The use of mainly frightening/fear frame in reporting unknown gunmen attacks in Southeastern Nigeria justified the use of framing theory in the study. The theory states that the way in which

newspapers present the news creates a frame for that information and significantly influences readers' perception, interpretation and understanding of the phenomenon. Kostadinova (2012) observes that frames influence people's understanding, opinions and attitudes toward issues, institutions and events.

Further findings showed that unknown gunmen frames was dominant, accounting for 35% of the total report. This agrees with Ugondo (2015) as reviewed in the literature that the news media use different frames in their coverage of conflict and terrorism. The dominant use of unknown gun men were observed in studied newspapers. For instance: 'Gunmen renew attacks in Imo', (June 14, 2021), *The Guardian*; 'Unknown gunmen again raze police station, kill 2 officers in Anambra' (6th, May, 2021). 'Inside story of arson, killings as unknown gunmen terrorise southeast' (*The Guardian*, May 1, 2021). 'Again, unknown gunmen raze Abia police station, kill two cops in Akwa Ibom' (*The Guardian*, April, 29th, 2021). *The Guardian* newspaper May 27, 2021: 'fear grips southeast Nigeria after wave of attacks', From *Punch* editorial, June 6, 2021: 'Before South-East glides into full-blown terrorism', *Punch* column June 23, 2021: 'Nigeria's 'unarmed gunmen'.

Conclusion

The study concludes that framing of attacks on security personnel and government institutions in

Southeastern Nigeria was reported mainly as straight news. The study has revealed evidence on the different frames used by *The Guardian* and *Punch* newspapers in framing of attacks on security personnel and government institutions in Southeastern Nigeria. The studied newspapers used unknown gunmen frames more in reporting the issue in the South-eastern Nigeria. The studied affirmed that framing plays important role in media coverage of an event and the use of framing can influence the perception of the news audience during a crisis.

Recommendations

Based on the findings and conclusion of the study, the researchers recommends among the followings:

1. Nigerian newspapers should emphasise in-depth, investigative and interpretative coverage of crisis or conflict issues.
2. Nigerian newspapers should give detail report that will educate the public more and positive/solution frame should be used when covering crises related matters like the unknown gunmen attacks in Southeastern Nigeria.
3. Further study should investigate framing of attacks on security personnel and government institutions in post Covid-19 era in Southeastern Nigeria and in-depth interview/Focus group discussion could be combined to know how the audience feel about such issue.

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Appendices

Pictures of unknown gunmen attacks in South-eastern Nigeria



Abaiyi attack in Abia, State



Owerri Correctional Centre attack on April 5, 2021



Zone 13, Ukpo Police headquarters
The Anambra attack by unknown gunmen