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Patterns of Nigerian Newspapers Reportage and Framing of the June 5, 2022 St. Francis Catholic Church, Owo Terrorist Attack

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Gabriel Sunday Afolayan (PhD)

Department of Journalism and Media Studies, Faculty of Social Sciences and Communication Studies, Rufus Giwa Polytechnic (formerly Ondo State Polytechnic), Owo, Ondo State, Nigeria.

Correspondence: Gabriel Sunday Afolayan, sungoldafolayan@gmail.com

Abstract

This study investigated the coverage of the massacre of over 50 worshipers at St. Francis Catholic Church in Owo, Ondo State, during the Pentecost Sunday service on June 5, 2022 by Nigerian newspapers. It examined the extent and nature of their coverage and explored such themes as terrorism, religious persecution and government security inadequacies. Adopting a content analysis design, the study, hinged on social responsibility and framing theories, analysed 25 editions each of the four selected national newspapers (Daily Trust, Leadership, The Punch and Vanguard) published between Sunday June 5 and June 5, 2022, using the systematic sampling procedure. Findings revealed that the newspapers framed the attack as a terrorist act, highlighting the brutality of the violence, while the tone of coverage was predominantly sympathetic and critical, condemning the attack and calling for justice. It was also found that though ownership influence was not pronounced, some of the stories were sensational, especially in framing issues relating to the incident, without jeopardising objectivity in the newspapers' coverage of the incident. The research provided insights into the complexities of media representation and its impact on public discourse and perception of terrorism and violent attacks in Nigeria. Among others, the study recommended that the government needs to be more proactive about security while the media should continue to be more responsible in their coverage of sensitive issues like this.

Keywords: Nigerian Newspapers, News Coverage, Terrorism, Story Framing, Pentecost Sunday

Introduction

The incident of June 5, 2022 in Owo, Ondo State, Nigeria, has been widely acknowledged as an act of terrorism. According to Wilkinson (1997), cited in Nwuneli and Ollima (2015), terrorism involves

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premeditated acts that create extreme fear; targeted at a broader audience as opposed to victims in the immediate environment; involves violent attacks on symbolic targets; violates societal peace and norms; and used, in most instances as a weapon to influence the political activities of particular social groupings, specific communities and or governments.

The Owo attack fits into this description enumerated above, with premeditated disruption of a Pentecostal Mass with explosives and sporadic shooting, resulting in the death of over 50 church worshippers and several sustaining different degrees of injuries, including children and mothers, brutally massacred, throwing the community, the state and the nation in serious mourning. The attacks, by intent and execution, was premeditated and organised, the choice of target, that is, the worshippers and priests during the church service, the particular day (Pentecost Day), which usually attract large congregation because of its significance to the Catholic world, as well as the place of the attack, were all symbolic.

The role of the media in the coverage of terrorism is very crucial, as it can either amplify or hinder terrorism activities. Hoffman (2006) and NACOS (2000) note that the impact of terrorism cannot be accurately estimated without adequate media coverage as the news of such attacks would remain narrowly confined to the immediate environment. Hence the media remain essential in disseminating the news of terror attacks to a wider audience. Since the media play a significant role in reporting terrorism, such ugly incident is sufficient motivation to investigate the role of the media vis-à-vis terrorism (Nwuneli, Ollima, 2015). In Nigeria, studies revealed that terrorism has evolved from sectarian conflicts, resulting from ethnic cum religious intolerance. (Oditta, 2010). However the trend has assumed a hydra-headed monster, leading to large scale killings and destructions with political networks cutting across national borders. Among these networks include the dreaded Boko Haram, Islamic State of West African Province (ISWAP), Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta (MEND) and others who have claimed responsibility or linked to many explosions, attacks and killings in several parts of the country. It is against this background, therefore, that this study is intended to explore the pattern of Nigerian newspapers' coverage of the St. Francis Catholic Church massacre of June 5, 2022, in Owo, Ondo State, Nigeria.

Research Problem

Until recently, media coverage of extreme terrorist acts and terrorism, was relatively new. The June 5, 2022, ISWAP-linked attack in Owo was one of the notable domestic incidents of such terrorism acts. Most of such incidents before the Owo massacre have been described as some of the nation's major brand of terrorism often linked to Middle East Muslim fundamentalist groups (Abati, 2010). The main concern of this research is, therefore, to examine the patterns of Nigerian newspapers coverage of the Owo attack with the intent to investigate the underlying trends associated with the media report of the incident. Equally important is to investigate the position of the selected newspapers, focusing on frequency and prominence of story placement, framing of stories, influence of ownership on reportage and publication patterns, of the newspapers.

Research Questions

The three research questions associated with the study were:

1. To what extent did the sampled Nigerian newspapers cover and give prominence to the attack and other terrorism related stories?
2. How sensational are the newspapers in framing issues relating to the massacre?
3. To what extent did ownership and or geographic location of the newspapers influence objectivity in the coverage of the attack?

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Theoretical Frameworks

The study is grounded on the fundamental essence of responsible media which keep the society adequately informed within the ambit of ethical precepts. In line with the above, the study is hinged on social responsibility and agenda-setting theories, emphasizing the media's role in informing society about terrorism while adhering to ethical standards, as noted by Zelizer and Allan (2003). According to McQuail (1987), the social responsibility theory of the press entails accepting obligations to society, meeting obligations through professionalism, truth, accuracy, objectivity, and balance, self-regulation within legal frameworks, avoiding content that incites crime, violence, or offends minority groups and reflecting societal plurality and providing access to diverse viewpoints.

The social responsibility theory emphasises in-depth reporting to foster public understanding of social issues. As the Hutchings Commission notes, merely reporting facts truthfully is insufficient; the media must provide context, analysis, and interpretation to convey the "truth about the fact" (Siebert et al., 1956). The social responsibility theory provides guidelines for assessing media performance, emphasising the press's role in serving society by informing the public, providing accurate information, protecting the public from harm and working for the greater good of the society (Lawson, 2000).

Iwuchukwu's (2001) study found Nigerian newspapers' coverage of the 1988 Zaria riots was sensational and reactive, contradicting social responsibility theory principles, which emphasize proactive, balanced, and responsible reporting. Ayoola (2001) linked social responsibility theory to agenda-setting, noting that media influence public discourse by determining prominent issues, shaping public thinking, and highlighting key topics in the public sphere. On the other hand, Mendelilson and Nwabueze (2005) found the British newspapers' photo coverage of the Iraq War as biased, aligning with Anglo-American propaganda, and deviating from social responsibility theory's standards of impartiality and balanced reporting.

Onyekachi (2011) used social responsibility theory to evaluate Nigerian newspapers' coverage of climate change by assessing their performance in reporting a critical global issue and highlighting their role in informing the public about environmental concerns. The study found that Nigerian newspapers failed to adequately cover climate change or provided insufficient space and therefore, lacked in-depth reporting, contradicting social responsibility theory's emphasis on thorough coverage of critical issues (Siebert et al., 1956).

Studies Related to Newspaper Coverage of Terrorism in Nigeria

Scholars and researchers across the globe have, over the years, devoted much attention to how news media cover terrorism, apparently making it a prominent area of interest in media and peace studies. This is arguably so because of the high profile dimensions that issues of terrorism have assumed in the contemporary world. Many studies in this regard have focused on how the media, as gatekeepers, cover and frame terrorism issues in their publications. For instance, Iwuchukwu (2001) sampled four Nigerian national newspapers, namely *The Nigerian Tribune*, *Daily Champion*, *Daily Times*, and *The New Nigerian* in his study, which investigated how the local dailies covered the 1988 religious riots in Zaria, Northern Nigeria and discovered that the local press were not only generally sensational in their reportage, but that some of them also whipped religious sentiments and ethnic bias in framing the issues surrounding the riots. *The New Nigerian* - a paper presumed to have northern cum Islamic sentiments was particularly accused of glaring evidence of bias in the way it covered the incidents by deliberately avoiding to provide background event on how some Muslim fanatics pulled down a 20-year old crucifix erected at Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria, which led to the bloody clash.

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In a related study by Iwuchukwu (2001), the same national dailies namely *The Nigerian Tribune*, *Daily Champion*, *Daily Times*, and *The New Nigerian* were sampled to investigate patterns of reportage of the 1991religious crisis in Maiduguri, Bornu State. Findings by the researcher indicated that the sampled newspapers, which tended to be sensational, underplayed the role played by government, security agencies and other stakeholders to stop the carnage and restore peace in the affected parts of the town, but emphasise use of explosives. The study, instead, claimed that most of the newspapers' reports were "more reactive than proactive" as little efforts were made to report the build-up of tensions that led to the final outbreak of the sectarian bloody clashes.

How the Nigerian press covered the 2000 Kaduna Sharia was the focus of Emekwue (2001), who anchored his study on four national newspapers namely *The Nigerian Tribune, Daily Trust, The Guardian* and *National Mirror*; and found that the newspapers devoted substantial portions of their news spaces to the riot. The stories, according to the researcher, focused majorly on the widespread destruction, wanton killings, as well as the spread of the crisis to the neighbouring states and the possibility of retaliation by Christians, who suffered more casualties during the riots. The study also claimed that the papers unexpectedly did not give adequate attention to the post-disturbance challenges faced by the internally displaced persons and the need for their rehabilitation in the face of massive loss of their properties and massive destruction of public infrastructure during the riots.

The globally condemned 9/11 terrorist attacks in the US was the interest of Ndu (2004) in which he studied *The New Nigerian, The Punch* and *Daily Champion* – three popular Nigerian newspapers' reportage of the heinous act. In all, 82 issues of the newspapers were sampled by the researcher. The study discovered that apart from the fact that the Nigerian newspapers did poor reporting of the event compared to those in Europe and America, only a few of the editions of the papers had stories on the attacks two weeks after the incident and that majority of the reports were obtained from foreign news agencies and other media outlets. Gukas (2005) sampled 72 editions of *Daily Champion*, *The Guardian* and *The Punch* to examine how Nigerian press covered the Jos in 2004 – a widespread chaos that led to the declaration of a state of emergency in the state. His findings revealed that as soon as the rioting was over, the newspapers virtually turned away their attention from the high scale humanitarian crisis which the disturbances had left behind, particularly in the capital. According to him, the said papers were found to be highly sensational in the way they framed their stories, particularly the headlines and photographs used for accompanying the stories. The challenges of the internally displaced persons (IDP) and the suffering of the refugees were virtually under-reported locally, even though the importance of such humanitarian issues did not escape the attention of foreign media, particularly the Radio France VOA and BBC.

Momoh and Olokor (2010) carried out a study on the Nigerian newspapers coverage of the attempted bombing incident involving the Nigerian-born Umar Farouk Abdul Mutalab on the Christmas Day of 2009. Sampling 112 copies of four Nigerian newspapers namely: *The New Nigerian, The Sun, The Nigerian Tribune* and *The Guardian*, the investigation revealed extensive reportage of the incident by newspapers in Nigeria by devoting a considerable amount of news space to the incident. It was also discovered that while *The New Nigerian* - the northern newspaper was more critical by not being judgmental, *The Sun, The Guardian* and *The Tribune* were "pandering to the security interest of the West and their so-called 'war on terror'. The researchers saw the case of *The New Nigerian* as one of the tendencies of a paper with presumed Islamic sentiments being sympathetic to the Arab course rather than condemning efforts attempting to frustrate ideological war on terror, which the paper regarded as "the Western interests".

The above reviews suggest mixed outcomes on how the Nigerian newspapers covered ethno-religious conflicts and terrorism related stories. Stories on terrorism external to the Nigerian environment were

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obtained largely from international news agencies. The Nigerian Press Coverage of the Guinea Invasion by Nwuneli (1971) affirmed that Nigerian newspapers' dependency on foreign media for the coverage of major events outside of Nigeria's geographical space has not really changed over the last 40 years. However, most of the newspapers that cover local conflict situations, such as banditry or terrorist acts lacked some form of consistency, because it is observed that the newspapers angle of coverage and framing of terrorism stories seem to be directly related to the region where the newspapers are domiciled; giving their reports obvious regional colouration. In addition, the incidents are generally well covered when the crises are at their peak but disappear from the pages of the newspapers as soon as the mayhem seems to be over. Many of the papers are also found guilty of sensationalism in their approach, while most of the reports are straightforward, providing answers to the 5Ws&H and therefore lacking perspective, background or follow-up, especially on the destruction of property and loss of human lives that follow.

Similarly, related human interest stories such as issues of displaced persons, sufferings or rehabilitation of the victims also get very little attention. These not-withstanding, in assessing the Nigerian press coverage of the Owo Catholic Church killings, the social responsibility theory would serve as a theoretical framework within which to explore the performance of the newspapers.

Research Design

For this study, content analysis was adopted as the study design. The population of the study was the entire issues of selected Nigerian daily newspapers published between Sunday June 5th and July 5th 2022, which is the time frame of the analysis, covering about four weeks after the attack.

Sample Size and Sampling Technique

The sample size was conditioned by the time frame of the study. The researcher had about 30 days of publication to cover. The weekend editions were excluded; hence, 20 editions were chosen for each of the selected four newspapers, giving a total of 80 editions as the sample size. The sampling was conducted at two levels: sampling of the newspapers and sampling the editions of the newspapers. The researcher purposely selected the four newspapers to reflect the ethnic cum geopolitical distribution of ownership of the mainstream print media in the country. This is because it was relatively difficult to estimate the total number of newspapers published in Nigeria at this period. Thus the newspapers selected were enumerated below.

i. *Daily Trust* has Hausa-Fulani (Northern) ownership. Published by Trust Media, it started as a weekly in 1998 in Kaduna and came on stream as a daily newspaper in 2001 when it was moved to Abuja. Founded by Alhaji Kabiru Yusuf, the newspaper publishes in English for the general readership while its Hausa edition, named *Aminiya*, is designed to cater for the interest of the Hausa-Fulani speaking community. *Daily Trust* has been involved in several controversial reports, making a lot of people tag the newspaper as both "sensational and pro-North" (https://dailytrust.com).
ii. *Leadership* newspaper, published in Abuja by Leadership Newspaper Group, was established in 2001 by Samuel Nda-Isaiah – a pharmacist cum businessman and politician turned journalist. It is published in English and Hausa languages. The English edition is for the general readership while the Hausa language edition serves the interest of the Hausa-Fulani ethnic group, particularly for those who do not understand or are not vast in English.
iii. *The Punch* has Yoruba (South-Western) ownership. It is published by The Punch Newspapers Limited, founded in 1971. Its head office is in Lagos. It is particularly popular in South-West Nigeria with a large proportion of its editors and managers, past and present, being indigenes of the region (Nosa, 2009, p.23). *The Punch* has a daily print run of 145, 000 with an average daily sale of

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138, 000 (Wikipedia, 2012).

iv. *Vanguard* is of South-South (Niger Delta) by ownership, established in 1984, the paper devotes a considerable number of pages to Niger Delta issues daily and is perceived to have some soft spot for the region and its aspirations (Nosa, 2009, p.41). The paper's circulation figures total 120,000 copies with a print run of 130,000 copies (Vanguard Media Limited, n.d.).

While one may not be so certain as to whether or not these newspapers would always reflect the dominant sentiments of the ethno-regional backgrounds of their respective ownership, this sort of selection remains justifiable in the light of the past experiences as noted by Adedeji (2009) that the role of ethno-regional sentiments in shaping the content of our national discourse has always remained too visible to be ignored. The press itself has not been left out. From the onset, in the earliest era of our post-independence press, this scenario has made itself clear. For instance, studies have shown that *The West African Pilot, The Nigerian Tribune* and *New Nigerian* have all exhibited glaring evidence of ethno-regional sentiments in their handling of national issues. Since the owners of these papers wielded significant political powers in their respective regions and were equally popular among their kinsmen, their papers equally served as a platform for reinforcing ethno-regional interests and solidarity as well as consolidating their regional powers and influence.

Sampling Editions of the Newspapers

Twenty editions of the publications from Monday to Friday were selected from each of the newspapers across the four weeks of study. The selected dates excluded the weekend editions of the newspapers. For the last two weeks of the study, the dates covered were from June 5th to 5th July 2022. A total of five editions per week and per newspaper, making a total of 20 editions for each of the four newspapers studied. The unit of analysis were the news story, features, editorials and pictorials about or related to the killings within the time frame of the study. The instrument of data collection was the data coding sheet designed specifically for the study.

Content Coding Scheme

This is defined and classified as stories published within the four weeks after the June 5, 2022 incident.

- **Story Headline:** The title of the story is defined as the headline in a news story
- **Terrorism Related Story:** These are stories whose content is largely related to the June 5, 2022 Owo church tragedy and similar local and international insurgencies, including ethnic, religious or politically motivated violence.
- **Type of Story:** Defined as straight news story, features and background stories, editorial or pictorial.
- **Position of Story:** Defined as page the story was published, either in the front page, back page or inside pages
- **Direction of Story:** Defined as to whether the story is positive, negative or neutral towards terrorism and terrorists.
- Sensational Report: Defined as whether the content of the body of a story matches its headline; whether the headline is mere exaggeration of the subject of the report with the likely intent to stir unnecessary shock, euphoria, fear or outrage.
- **Objectivity of Story:** A story is seen as objective if up to 60 percent of all the stories reported are able to balance views, positions and interests within the context of a particular terrorism incident reported.

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Data Analysis

An attempt was first made to establish the total number of stories published by each of the newspapers studied within the sampled time frame for the study. As can be seen from Table 1 below, the four selected newspapers for the study were *Daily Trust, Leadership, The Punch* and *Vanguard.*

Table 1: **Number of stories related to terrorism, published in the selected newspapers during the study period in percentages**

Newspapers	**Frequency**	**Percentage (%)**
Daily Trust	66	14
Leadership	104	23
The Punch	110	24
Vanguard	180	39
Total	**460**	**100**

Vanguard and *The Punch* published a total of 290 news stories related to terrorism during the period under study. The table similarly shows that out of a total of 460 news stories, the *Vanguard* published the most news stories with a total of 180 news stories representing 39 percent of the news stories. *The Punch* published 110 (24%) of the news stories; *Daily Champion* published 104 news stories representing 23% of the entire publication for the period under study. *New Nigerian* printed the least number of news stories (66 stories) representing only14% of the whole news stories published.

Table 2: **Number of stories on terrorism and terrorist attacks in newspapers studied during the Owo church attack**

Period of Publication	**Daily Trust**	**Leadership**	**Vanguard**	**The Punch**	**No of story per week/NP**
1st week	14 (16.5%)	20 (23.5%)	30 (35.3%)	21 (24.7%)	85
2nd week	23 (23.5%)	29 (29.6%)	24 (24.5%)	22 (22.4%)	98
3rd week	19 (25.0%)	17 (22.4%)	21 (27.6)	19 (25.0%)	76
4th week	14 (25.9%)	12 (22.2%)	15 (27.8%)	13 (24.0%)	54
Total	**52 (16.6%)**	**64 (20.4%)**	**98 (31.3%)**	**71 (22.7%)**	**313**

As can be seen in Table 2 above, the four newspapers studied were actually tracking the news stories associated with the church attack and similar terrorist activities across the country during the time frame of the study. For example, within the first two weeks after the incident, the four newspapers published the largest number of stories on the incident, obviously because of the freshness of the incident in the first week and the widely reported mass burial given to the victim the second week, that is, on June 17, 2022 at the new cemetery of the church, which was attended by the late Governor of Ondo State, Rotimi Akeredolu, Bishop Jude Arogundade of the Roman Catholic Diocese of Ondo and other eminent

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personalities across the country. The third week showed a general decline in the number of stories published by the sampled newspapers. *Vanguard* published 98 news items representing 31.3% percent for the studied period, followed by *The Punch* with 71 items (22.7%). *Leadership* occupied the third on the scale with 64 items, representing 20.4%, while *Daily Trust* reported the least number of stories with 52, that is, 16.6%. The data also show that *Vanguard* out-performed not only the other newspapers but also the *Daily Trust* and *Leadership* that are based in the North where similar incidents have occurred at different times before the period under study. The findings tend to suggest that even though *Daily Trust* and *Leadership* are based in the North where terrorism is very active, the paper seemed to have really reported the issue like the other newspapers sampled. In order to assess the importance given to terrorism activities in Nigeria by the Nigerian newspapers, an attempt was made to see in the following table, how the newspapers studied accorded prominence to news stories related to terrorism.

Table 3: Showing the percentages of prominence given to stories on terrorism and terrorist attacks by the newspapers studied during the period

Position of story	***Daily Trust***	***Leadership***	***Vanguard***	***The Punch***
Front page	12 (23.0%)	11 (17.2%)	20 (20.4%)	19 (26.8%)
Back page	07 (13.5%)	19 (39.7%)	19 (19.4%)	10 (14.1%)
Inside page	30 (57.7%)	28 (43.8%)	51 (52.0%)	32 (45.1%)
Editorial page	03 (5.8%)	06 (9.4%)	08 (8.2%)	10 (14.1%)
Total	**52 (100%)**	**64 (100%)**	**98 (100%)**	**71 (100%)**

As can be seen in Table 3 above, all the newspapers studied, especially *Vanguard* and *The Punch,* seemed to have viewed these stories important enough to allow one-quarter or more of their stories on the church massacre incident and similar acts of terrorism to be placed in their front and back pages – being the two most prominent pages of every newspapers. However, the number of news items placed in the front pages tell more about the attention the various newspapers tried to draw to the issue of terrorism. The data show that *Vanguard* placed about 20 news items in its front page compared to only 12 and 11 for Daily *Trust* and *Leadership* newspapers respectively. When the front and back pages are pooled together to establish the level of attention given to news stories by the various newspapers, the data in Table 3 show that *Vanguard* published more news items in its front and back pages, followed by *The Punch*. In spite of the fact that the four newspapers circulate nationally, the trend found from the data tends to suggest that the two newspapers gave more attention to the issue of terrorism than those newspapers published in the Northern geopolitical zone of the country. The data also show that a large number of the news stories was generally embedded in the inside pages of the selected newspapers. Out of the 141 news stories published in the inside pages of these newspapers, *Vanguard* emerged on top with 51 news stories representing 36.2% of its news stories. On the other hand, *The Punch* placed second with 32 news items representing 22.7% of its news stories, followed by *Daily Trust* and *Leadership* with 30 and 28 or 21.3% and 19.9% respectively. As expected, a number of editorials were published in the newspapers. A breakdown based on the individual newspapers shows also that *The Punch* presented 14.1 of its stories in the editorial page, 8.2% went to *Vanguard*. 9.4% of the news stories appeared in the Leadership editorial page and Daily Trust also featured 5.8%. Some samples of the headlines used by the newspapers to catch attention of the readers on the front and back pages on this issue of terrorism and terrorist activities include the following:

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"Owo church attack: 50 killed, 100 injured" - *The Punch*, "Gunmen attack Catholic Church in Owo, kill 40" - *Vanguard*, "Owo church massacre: Government vows to track down perpetrators" - *This Day*, "Terrorists kill 50 in Owo church attack" - *Leadership*, "Owo church attack: Pope Francis expresses condolences" – *The Punch,* "Owo massacre: Akeredolu vows to hunt down attackers" – *Vanguard*, "Owo church attack: survivors recount horrific experience" - *Daily Trust*, "Owo attack: DSS arraigns five suspects" - *Leadership*, "Owo church attack: suspects arrested, says military" - *The Punch.*

Table 4: Types of stories published on terrorism and terrorist attacks by the Nigerian newspapers studied

Type of story	Daily Trust	Leadership	Vanguard	The Punch
News story	26 (50%)	36 (56.3%)	54 (55.1%)	38 (53.5%)
Feature	14 (26.9)	12 (18.8%)	19 (19.4%)	18 (25.4%)
Editorial	03 (5.8%)	06 (9.4%)	08 (8.2%)	10 (14.1%)
Pictorial	9 (17.3%)	10 (15.7%)	17 (17.4%)	14 (19.7%)
Total	**52 (100%)**	**64 (100%)**	**98 (100%)**	**71 (100%)**

Table 4 shows that all the newspapers studied published about one-half (154 news items out) of all their news items (313) on terrorism and terrorist attack as straight news stories. A look at the individual newspapers reveals that *Vanguard* presented 54 news stories or 55.1% of its stories under this category followed by *The Punch* 38 news items or 53.4% as straight news stories. *Leadership* and *Daily Trust* had 36 and 26 or 56.3% and 50% respectively as straight news. The table also shows that the newspapers under study published a total of 63 stories as 'features' or background stories. *Vanguard* newspaper had the greatest number of feature and background stories embedded in its pages for the period under study with 19 features, representing 30.2% of total feature stories while *Leadership* published the least feature stories, that is, 12, representing 18.8%. While *The Punch* newspaper published 18 features, *Daily Trust* had 16 features. The table also shows that the newspapers under study devoted a good number of news holes to pictorials, probably as a way of creating intensity and or emotions to the stories related to the June 5, 2022 heinous attack in Owo Catholic church.; that is to say that these pictures were given extraordinary treatment in space allocation. *Vanguard* published 17 pictorials or 17.4% of its news items to this effect; *The Punch* published 14 pictorials or 19.7% of its news items on this issue. While *Leadership* showcased 10 pictorials or 15.7 of its news items to the issue, Daily Trust printed only 9 pictures or 17.3 percent of its news items.

Direction and slant of stories

Table 5 below illustrates the direction or slant of stories on terrorism published in the newspapers. A story was considered positive if it is critical of terrorist activities; a story is considered negative if that story is favourable to the terrorists and a story is considered neutral if its presentation is indifferent or does not take any position on issues related to terrorist activities.

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Table 5: Direction of stories on terrorist attacks published in the sampled newspapers in percentage

Direction of story	Daily Trust	Leadership	Vanguard	The Punch
Positive	22 (42.3%)	27 (42.2%)	63 (64.3%)	52 (73.2%)
Negative	17 (32.7%)	22 (34.4%)	12 (12.2%)	3 (4.2%)
Neutral	13 (25%)	15 (23.4%)	23 (23.5%)	16 (22.5%)
Total	**52 (100%)**	**64 (100%)**	**98 (100%)**	**71 (100%)**

From the above table, a total of 313 news stories were published by the four selected newspapers. 164 stories or over half of the total stories took a positive slant, that is, unsympathetic to terrorists and their cause; 54 stories or 17.3% of the stories appeared as negative, meaning sympathetic of terrorists and their cause. The remaining 67 news stories or 21.4% took the neutral slants. Out of the four newspapers, *Vanguard* presented terrorism related matters mostly as positive news stories that are unfavourable to terrorist acts with 63 (64.3%). *The Punch* followed closely with a total of 52 or 73.2% of its news stories, while *Daily Trust* which recorded a total number of 22 (42.3%). *Leadership* featured 27 (42.2%) of its news stories in positive slant. An attempt was similarly made to establish if the newspapers were objective in their coverage of the bomb blast. Objectivity of a story is here seen as where up to two-thirds of published news stories are able to achieve a balanced view within the context of the story.

Table 6: Objectivity of Stories on Terrorism and Terrorist Attacks Published in the Newspapers Studied in Percentages

Objectivity of story	Daily Trust	Leadership	Vanguard	The Punch
Objective	35(42.3%)	42 (42.2%)	86 (64.3%)	68 (73.2%)
Not objective	17 (32.7%)	22 (34.4%)	12 (12.2%)	3 (4.2%)
Total	**52 (100%)**	**64 (100%)**	**98 (100%)**	**71 (100%)**

In the instance of this study, objective reports are considered to be a combination of stories that expressed both positive and neutral positions over terrorism and terrorist attack. Stemming from the above, the data in Table 6 above clearly show that the selected newspapers were largely objective in their reportage of the incident. The data thus tend to suggest that the newspapers studied were not in favour of terrorism in the country with varying degrees of objectivity. While *The Punch* and *Vanguard* top the list with 95.8% and 81.7% respectively. *Leadership* and *Daily Trust* also had 65.6% and 67.3% respectively. To further determine if the published stories about the incident were sensational or not, the data seen in Table 7 below were utilized. Sensational framing in this context is defined as whether the content of the body of a story matches its headline; or a mere exaggeration with the likely intent to stir unnecessary euphoria, shock, outrage and fear.

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Table 7: Sensationalism of stories on terrorism and terrorist attacks published by the newspapers Studied in Percentages

Sensationalism of story	Daily Trust	Leadership	Vanguard	The Punch
Not sensational	48%	52%	64%	68%
Sensational	52%	48%	36%	32%
Total	**52 (100%)**	**64 (100%)**	**98 (100%)**	**71 (100%)**

Analysis of the data generated for the four newspapers as shown in Table 7 indicates an almost even distribution between sensational and non-sensational framing of stories for *Daily Trust* and *Leadership* newspapers. *Vanguard* and *The Punch* newspapers had more than three-fourth (64% and 68% of its stories as not sensational compared to the other newspapers' studies which recorded about one-half or less of its news stories as sensational. This suggests that except for the *Vanguard* and *The Punch,* the other two newspapers were striving to have a relatively even balance between sensational and non-sensational framings of their news stories related to the terrorist incident.

Research questions versus findings

Presented below are the three research questions generated for this study:

RQ1: To what extent did the selected Nigerian newspapers give prominence to terrorism related stories after the 2022 June 5 Owo Catholic Church Pentecost Day attack? The data presented in tables 2 and 3 in this study showed that the newspapers studied gave reasonable prominence to stories related to the attack. This is evident in the positioning and placement of the stories as nearly all the newspapers published the said stories in the most prominent pages, that is, the front and back pages of their papers. However it could be said that *Daily Trust* and *Leadership* published the least amount of stories on the front pages of their editions about the attack.

RQ2: How did the Nigerian newspapers frame issues relating to the June 5, 2022 Catholic church massacre? The data generated from the four newspapers in respect of framing parameters as shown in Table 7 indicate that there was almost even distribution between sensational and non-sensational framing of stories among the newspapers. However *Daily Trust* and *Leadership* newspapers had more sensational stories compared to other newspapers studied.

RQ3: To what extent did ownership and or geographic location of the newspapers influence objectivity in the coverage of the June 5, 2022 Owo church massacre? It can be noted from table 6 that out of a total of 313 news stories published by the four newspapers studied, only 54 stories were found not to be objective. This suggests that, regardless of ownership or location of published stories, the newspapers studied were sympathetic to the victims of terrorism by condemning terrorism acts in their reports. This is in line with the social responsibility theory on which this study is anchored, that is that media, according to Denis McQuail (1987, p.117-118) have certain obligations to the society such as publishing the truth, ensuring accuracy, objectivity and balance of reportage. To a reasonable extent, the four sampled Nigerian newspapers exhibited these social responsibility tenets.

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Discussion of findings

The findings from this study indicate that the church attack had adequate coverage and reasonable prominence from the newspapers examined, and the reports were largely objective in their presentation of the attack. Contrary to expectations, the newspapers' reports showed an almost even distribution between sensational and non-sensational reporting. This seems to be contrary to some of the earlier findings of similar studies in the country. Among such studies include the findings of Nwuneli and Olimma (2015) in their investigation of the Nigerian newspapers coverage and framing of 2010 Jubilee Day bomb blast in Abuja; Iwuchukwu (2001) in his investigation of local press' coverage of the 1988 religious riots in Zaria, Nigeria found a higher tendency towards sensational reporting. In a similar study by Iwuchukwu (2001) examined how Nigerian newspapers covered the 1991 religious crisis in Maiduguri and found that the press tended to emphasise on sensational elements and explosive nature of the crisis. Contrary to the above, this study's findings suggest that the selected newspapers were not over sensational, were balanced and relatively objective and factual in their presentation of the incident.

Conclusion

The findings of this research showed that the examined newspapers manifested a reasonable measure of social responsibility in their coverage and framing of the Owo church massacre incident. These findings, according to (McQuail 1987, p.117-118), are consistent with the tenets of social responsibility theory. In line with the people's right to know, the newspapers gave prominent coverage to the massacre, even though the newspapers did not perform adequate surveillance function of the community as expected of the press, as they failed to sufficiently alert the people, especially law enforcement agencies, on the impending insurgency and terrorist acts prior to the actual attack. The implication here is that even though the press performed commendably in reporting the incident but failed to assume their watchdog role before the havoc was executed.

Consequent upon the foregoing, this study suggested that future studies relating to terrorism should not only adopt a triangulated design combining survey methods and content analysis, but also involve both the traditional print and electronic media. Such a complementary design is likely to give valuable insights into the actual societal impact of media coverage of such incidents and also yield more generalizable results that will be more applicable to the entire media industry, than working with only an arm of the media industry.

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