



The Male as Terrorist: Gender Profiling in Nigeria's Insecurity News Reportage (2021-2023)

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ARTICLE INFO

Article History

Received: 10th June, 2023

Revised: 25th July, 2023

Accepted: 4th August, 2023

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ABSTRACT

Nigerian news media, especially print, are wont to categorise perpetrators of crime as male, establishing beyond animacy, the belief that these crimes are only committed by males. The present study investigated the gender profiling in Nigeria's insecurity news reportage in which males are seen as terrorist. The researchers hypothesized that females are perpetrators of terror act just as the stereotyped males are as reported by the Nigerian media. A total of 119 (73 males and 56 females) respondents in Abeokuta participated in the study. The sample age range between 18-65 years with mean age 30.43years. Instruments for data collection includes Bem Sex-Role Inventory (BSRI) and Biased Attitude Scale (BiAS). Regression analysis were used for statistical analysis. The results revealed that there was no statistically significant relationship between perceived perpetrator and masculinity, femininity and neutrality ($r = -.034$, $p < 0.522$; $r = -.018$, $p < 0.733$; $r = -.058$, $p < 0.272$). However, there were statistically significant differences in the mean scores of perceived perpetrator with masculinity, femininity and neutrality respectively ($t = -0.965$, $p = < 0.052$); ($t = -1.423$, $p = < 0.005$); ($t = -0.992$, $p = < 0.041$). It was recommended that the media should balance their reporting in referring to perpetrators of crime, so that their reports would be truly representative of the subsisting reality.

Keywords: *gender stereotype, insecurity, news, media reportage, psychological profiling, terrorism*

Introduction

A 2017 Reuters report submitted that from 2014, the Islamist terrorist group, Boko Haram had recruited 244 “women and girls in bombing attacks (which at least, at the time, was more) than any other insurgency in history.” An over 100% increase is revealed to have occurred in just a year (after), between June 2014 and February 2018, as 469 “women and girls (had) been deployed or arrested in 240 suicide attacks, (still) the most by any terrorist movement, killing roughly 1,200 and injuring some 3,000” others (Campbell, 2020). Fast forward to May 2023, and the Global Centre for the Responsibility to Protect reported that over “35,000 people (had) been killed since 2009 when Boko haram launched its insurgency.” These shooting figures are a result of what Pearson (2018) calls “female ‘suicide’ terrorism (FST)” which is exclusively Boko haram’s approach to extremism following the deployment of “its first female suicide bomber in an attack on a military barracks in Gombe State (Nigeria) in June 2014” (p.33). This is to say that FST has been with Nigeria for almost a decade.

However, it is important to note, as is usually the case with research that may involve minors that FST does not necessarily imply that female minors are conscious of the legal and humanitarian implications of acts of terrorism they get involved in or carry out. In fact, their affiliations with the terrorist groups are mostly involuntary, aligning with the findings of the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (2019) that in some cases, “fathers agreed to the marriage of their daughters to fighters as a result of pressure from Boko Haram” (p.18). What it proves is simply the participation – voluntary or otherwise – of the female gender in terrorism, and in this case, other crimes including banditry and kidnapping. What makes this note more important is the fact that, as Bigio & Vogelstein (2019) hold, media reports of crimes and other violent acts generally do not include the portrayal of the female gender as involved at all, let alone complicit.

On the other hand, records show that women have participated in extremist violence in different capacities such as “combatants, recruiters, and fundraisers” (ibid., p.3) as well as in logistics and less often, leadership roles (Ogundiwin & Adeyanju, 2023; Galehan, 2019), with a back-up of the reasons contributory to this. This of course, is why the United Nations (2016) for instance recommends the empowerment of women as a way to prevent

violent extremism, since they are usually denied socioeconomic opportunities and if Ola’s (2020) finding in the Lake Chad Basin is anything to go by, women in the region being majority of the poor are forced by their socioeconomic condition to join terrorist groups.

However, this is what Okumagba & Ogisi (2023) call “the ‘feminisation of poverty’ thesis,” because it is apologetic to a gender. Other reasons put forward for Boko Haram’s penchant for women and girls include the greater ability of the gender to penetrate targets unsuspected, the cheaper cost of engaging them especially considering the likelihood of missing targets, availability for use as additional hands such as cooks and cleaners in cell settlements, and the greater chance for the group to stay relevant in social discourse (Galehan, 2019).

By the foregoing, it is clear that women and girls are involved in terrorism, at least in Nigeria and with Boko Haram. However, while there is not enough evidence in the literature to directly prove that women and girls are involved in violent acts perpetrated by organised Fulani militia, this essay relies on the Terrorism (Prevention & Prohibition) Amendment Act 2022 which categorises Fulani militia as “terrorists” on the basis that their acts are also intended to intimidate the people through violence and undermine the government, despite having a different root cause which may be any of “climatic and environmental change, depletion in natural resources in the extreme Northern parts of the country, as well as even political and religious reasons” (Usigbe & Ilo, 2019, p.12).

In its 2022 annual report, the International Society for Civil Liberties and Rule of Law accused in their submissions, “Fulani herdsmen and other jihadists of (perpetrating) no fewer than 410 open captivity killings and 600 abductions in Southeast Nigeria” in the year alone (Sahara Reporters, 2023). A corpus of Nigeria Security Tracker Weekly Updates by the Council on Foreign Relations (2023) put together by the researchers of this current study reveals that violence by Fulani militia mostly affects southeast and north central Nigeria, with repeated attacks and kidnappings in Benue, Plateau, FCT, Kogi, Ebonyi and Nasarawa.

The southeast is simultaneously bedevilled by what has come to be popularly known and in fact referred to by security agencies as “unknown gunmen.” This categorisation as “unknown” is due to the faceless nature of the group, whose objective – if not violence and intimidation – is unclear. The primary

mode of operation of these gunmen in the (southeast) is kidnapping, and there is growingly sufficient literature on the crime (Okwuwada, 2023; Akanu & Adedeji, 2021; Onwuatiegwu, 2020; Ibrahim & Mukhtar, 2017; Ugwoke, 2011).

Interestingly, unlike Fulani militia (so-called banditry) which, as discussed, has little evidence of the involvement of women and girls, the menace of kidnappings in the southeast has credible evidence. Available evidence shows very little perpetration of kidnappings by the female gender. According to an investigation conducted by Uchenna (2014) into kidnap cases with inmates in the prisons of Abakaliki, Ebonyi State and Umuahia, Abia State, “86.0% of the kidnap inmates interviewed in both...prisons were males whereas only 13.9% were females” (p.67). Uchenna goes further to give supporting evidence when he refers to Siegel’s (2007) research which revealed that “victims reported that their assailants were male in more than 80% of all violent personal crimes.”

Essentially, all three crimes identified in the foregoing discussion – traditional terrorism, banditry (Fulani militia), and kidnapping – are categorisable as “terrorism” by the established reasons of intimidation of the people and undermining of the power of the state, and more similarity may be established by a comparison of their common causes which include an imbalanced armed forces/civilian ratio, ethno-religious neglect and economic isolation, unemployment and poverty, nepotism and failure of the political class, as well as lack of government visibility in remote areas (Okwuwada, 2023; Onwuatiegwu, 2020).

Discussions of these acts of terrorism visibly ignore the involvement of the female gender. Even though Nigeria’s criminal justice system does not pamper the female gender with less severe punishments except in the case of manual labour (Oluwadare & Agboola, 2011), criminology and the administration of justice are influenced by male experiences (Aborisade, 2022). In the case of academic literature, female crime involvement was evidently ignored and only referenced in footnotes (Oluwadare & Agboola, 2011) but the foregoing discussion shows glaringly recent yet increasing attention being given to the discourse post-2019 (for reasons yet to be investigated). However, the reportage of these crimes in the media does not sufficiently capture female involvement, and this is what this study investigates alongside its effects on readers.

Research Problem

The current study investigated the penchant for masculine-gender terms and proforms by journalists and the Nigerian media when referring to perpetrators of crime, ignoring the evidential role of women in crime and terror. What the present study examines include the reasons for this glaring choice, the psychosocial effects of the choice on the perception of readers, and remedies for this choice that has alienated the female folk from contemporary media discourse. Having established this evident leaning of the media, this paper goes further to investigate the following question:

- What are the reasons for the choice of masculine-gender terms by journalists and the Nigerian media when referring to perpetrators of crime and terror in news reports?

Theoretical Underpinning

This paper finds its baseline in five theories: the agenda setting theory, the framing effect, social construction theory, the feminist muted group theory, and the fuzzy-trace theory.

The agenda setting theory is Lippmann’s (1922) classic brainchild, which set out to explain how the media, through conscious efforts, influences the perceptions of readers about entities in their news reports (in Aladi & Okoro, 2021). This is done by systematically giving prominence to or favouring a choice of certain entities, concepts and ideas over others. In explaining this view of the method, Ajakaiye et al. (2021) highlight the attribute of framing in media advocacy as what happens when journalists beam their “searchlight on an issue and pointing out its causes as well as delineating other people’s reality by highlighting one interpretation while de-emphasizing a less favoured one” (p.133). Essentially, the implication for this study is that the preferred choice of journalists for masculine-gender terms in portraying referents deemed perpetrators of terrorism and crimes across Nigeria is a result of an undocumented agenda being set by a choice of words. This is not unconnected to the dominance of the practice of journalism by the male gender and the consequential, counterproductive preference for the dominance of news items by the male gender as fighters, heroes and martyrs (Ndinojuo, 2021), leaving women with domestic and objectified roles (Aladi & Okoro, 2021; GMMP, 2020).

The framing effect which of course is closely related to the agenda setting theory, is a cognitive bias in which our decisions and/or choices are

influenced by the way information is presented or the way through which the information are framed using different wordings, settings, and situations. In other words, equivalent information can be more or less attractive depending on what features are highlighted. It is imperative to state that framing effect propose that individuals or audience makes decision based on how issues are presented or framed rather than facts presented (Dolan, 2023; Decision Lab, 2023). The implication of this is that male could plausibly be seen as offenders in news reportage even though reports have it that there are female offenders as well.

The social construction theory, or social constructionism, sets out to give an understanding of knowledge as constructed and continuously influenced by social processes (Zhao, 2020) as opposed to other processes including biological. Essentially, how human beings conduct themselves and how they relate with others is a direct reflection of their interpersonal history. This theory is adequate in that it is connected to the theory discussed earlier and also to the core of this paper. The social construction theory goes to corroborate that idea that the media and journalists construct select mental images of women in the psychology of their readers due to their own subjective, social experiences – even as they may be true or not (Aladi & Okoro, 2021). On the other hand, it goes to explain that there is no significant connection (as there is no evidence of same) between the social choices of individuals and other factors but primarily social processes. In explaining how many female perpetrators of crime consider themselves tougher than their male counterparts, Omoera & Ebobo (2022, p.2) present the corroborative position of “liberalist feminists’ argument that gender differences are not based on biological composition and so females should not be treated differently.”

The feminist muted group theory, an offshoot of the muted group theory credited to the Ardeners (1975), sets out to explain how and why the voices of women are silenced because of an existent power gap between them and the “dominating” male gender (Ndinojuo, 2021), as this silence “within a feminist culture...symbolizes powerlessness and passiveness” (Larson, 2019, p.38). This accounts for the significantly less presence of the female gender in the reportage of terrorism and its perpetrators, which is supported by data presented in the 2020 report by the Global Media Monitoring Project, GMMP that the overall employ of the media industry in Africa captures only 39%

population of female presenters and reporters – a meagre 3% increase from two decades earlier. This opines that the dominance of the media industry by the male gender directly translates into the dominance of the negative reportage by the same gender.

Fuzzy-trace theory suggest that when people often make decisions or judgements; they focus on general idea or gist of information stored in memory and not the information itself. Thus, making people remember information consistent with gist of the real memories even though it is false. This implies that the that the more often we are exposed to the information we wish to remember, the more false memories about it we will have (Baron, Branscombe & Bryne, 2009).

From a psychological point of view, it is instructive to state that no single theory or model can fitly explain reasons people engage in violent behaviours such as terrorism. According to Borum (2004) terrorist violence is often deliberate not impulsive as explained by innates or psychoanalytic approach, but it however strategic, well planned and instrumental with political, religious ideologies and/or objectives. Thus, suggesting that people become terrorists in different ways, in different roles, and for different reasons. The reasons include perceived injustice, need for identity and need for belonging are common vulnerabilities among potential terrorists. The implication of this is that there is no accurate psychological profile of a terrorist. From Boko haram, Issis, Al Qaeda to Hamas that appears as though no end to its rising conflicts Israel reveals that there is no particular personality trait of a terrorist. This social perception has plausibly shaped the social realities of news reportage. Men are often reported as terrorist by all and sundry even though women and/or girls notably get involved directly or indirectly in terror acts.

According to Bigio and Vogelstein (2019) extremist groups rely upon women to gain strategic advantage, recruiting them as facilitators and martyrs while also benefiting from their subjugation. The implication of this is that women are actively involved in terrorist acts. They are used as suicide bombers by terrorist group such as Boko Haram in Nigeria. Laster and Erez (2015) further affirms that new terrorism is increasingly deploying women in the field as combatants. Undoubtedly, these female suicide bombers have been used effectively by different extremists’ groups yet the media report these female terrorists as tool of victimizations as the case of some Chibor girls kidnapped in northern

Nigeria and later indoctrinated to becoming terrorists themselves. Of course, there are several explanations to the above assertion however the fact remains that gender stereotypes and benevolence sexism are still at play in the media reports.

For a proper understanding of media representation of gender, studies focus on “the choice of words, manner of presentation, location of stories, and choice of pictures and illustrations, among others” of media reports (Aladi & Okoro, 2021, p.441).

Hypothesis

It is hypothesized that females are perpetrators of terror act just as the stereotyped males are as reported by the Nigerian media

Method

The present study adopted both qualitative and quantitative approach. This quantitative research undertakes a content analysis of twenty-seven (27) selected news reports from three mainstream print media, namely Punch, Vanguard and Guardian. The media outfits were selected because they have both print and online options, providing easier access to a wider audience, including persons without access to smartphones and the internet. This provides for a more robust and richer set of respondents for the subsequent analysis. Three (3) reports were taken from each of 2021, 2022 and 2023 for each newspaper, giving a share of nine (9) reports out of the total 27. The qualitative data analysis began with an in-depth reading of all selected newspaper by identifying running themes and patterns

Design/Statistics

The study adopted cross sectional survey design. Data collected were analyzed using regression analysis and Pearson’s correlation.

Table 1: Pearson’s correlation between perceived perpetrator with masculine, feminine and neutral

	1.	2.	3.	4.
1. Perpetr	1	.034	-.018	-.058
2. Mascul		1	.621**	.412**
3. Femin			1	.413**
4. Neutra				1

** $p < .01$ (2-tailed) Pearson correlations between the variables (N=119)

* $p < .05$ (2-tailed) Pearson correlations between the variables

Table 1 shows the result of Pearson’s correlation indicating the relationship between perceived perpetrator of terror act with masculinity, femininity and neutrality. It revealed that there was no statistically significant relationship between perceived perpetrator and masculinity, femininity and neutrality ($r = -.034$, $p < 0.522$; $r = -.018$, $p < 0.733$; $r = -0.058$, $p < 0.272$).

particularly gender stereotype in the terror acts. Subsequently, quantitative approach was employed.

Instruments

The study then goes further to examine the perception of respondent using a quantitative approach to the study as participants responded to the following psychological scales: BSRI and BiAS.

Bem Sex-Role Inventory (BSRI), test used to measure an individual’s femininity and masculinity. The Bem Sex-Role Inventory (BSRI) is one of the most widely used tools in research on gender roles. The Bem Sex-Inventory Index (BSRI) is a self-reported 60-item survey to characterize a person as masculine, feminine, or “androgynous” as a function of the difference between their endorsement of masculine and feminine personality characteristics. The BSRI takes about 15 minutes to complete. Respondents indicate how well each item describes themselves, from 1 (“Never or almost never true”) to 7 (“Always or almost always true”). The masculinity score is the average of the ratings on the 20 masculine items, and the femininity score is the average of the ratings on the 20 feminine items.

The Biased Attitude Scale (BiAS) is a 32-item self report that can be used to assess individual difference in three types of biases that hinder ethical decision making. It was developed by Watts, Medeiros, McIntosh and Mulhearn, 2020. It uses a 5-point scale, rate the extent to which participants agree or disagree with the items.

Table 2: Comparison of mean score of perceived perpetrator with masculine, feminine and neutral

Variable	Percv Perpetrator Mean (SD)	Percv Perpetrator Mean (SD)	t-test	df	p-value
Androgyny					
Masculine	1.14(0.380)	1.18(0.346)	-0.965	117	0.052*
Feminine	1.14(0.352)	1.20(0.402)	1.423	117	0.005*
Neutral	1.17(0.384)	1.13(0.346)	-0.987	117	0.041*

*Significant

Table 2 shows the result of the t-test exploring the difference in mean score of perceived perpetrator of terror act and androgyny. It revealed that there were statistically significant differences in the mean scores of perceived perpetrator with masculinity, femininity and neutrality respectively ($t = -0.965$, $p < 0.052$); ($t = 1.423$, $p < 0.005$); ($t = -0.992$, $p < 0.041$).

Discussion

The present study investigated the gender profiling in Nigeria's insecurity news reportage in which males are seen as terrorist. Results showed that there were no statistical relationship between perceived perpetrator with both masculinity and femininity. This is in contrast with Bigio and Vogelstein (2019) extremist groups rely upon women to gain strategic advantage, recruiting them as facilitators and martyrs while also benefiting from their subjugation. Admittedly, the authors of the current study opine that gender profiling is based on social perception and social categorisation.

Conclusion

Nigerian news media, especially print, are wont to categorise perpetrators of crime as male, establishing beyond animacy, the belief that these crimes are only committed by males. These reports of terrorism, banditry and street gangsterism portray the male as a perpetual non-state actor who undermines the powers of the state, and this is despite concrete evidence in previous reports of acts of terrorism including suicide bombings carried out by young, radicalised females. Rested on the agenda setting theory, the framing effect, social construction theory, feminist muted group theory, and fuzzy-trace theory, this paper analyses the male-dominance reporting pattern in twenty-seven (27) news items (2021-2023) from three (3) mainstream news media and goes further to interrogate the effects of the media bias on the perception of readers specifically gender profiling.

The research established media bias in the preference for terms like "herdsmen," "(unknown) gunmen" and corresponding pro-forms, which had significant psychological impact on the social perception of readers to believe that the insecurity

challenges of Nigeria are a result of the exclusive perpetration by males even though females have also been found to be complicit. The current study revealed that there is no relationship between perceived perpetrator of a terror act and masculinity or femininity. Even though there exist differences in the mean scores of perceived perpetrator with masculinity and femininity. Notably, this further corroborates the view of the authors that gender profiling is based on social perception and social categorisation.

Recommendations

It was recommended that the media should balance their reporting in referring to perpetrators of crime, so that their reports would be truly representative of the subsisting reality.

Policies should be made to improve a gender-balanced recruitment process for media firms (Macharia & Mir, 2022)

Limitation

This study is limited by lack of inclusion of respondents from other geo-political zone particularly those in the north as participants were from southwest specifically Abeokuta, Ogun state of Nigeria. Another limitation is coverage bias in the selected news print of which media outlets could have chose to report only negative news about one party in this case males as terrorist.

Suggestions for further study

Future research could explore the psychological effects of gender profiling on the social perception of readers on male/female genders in the aspects of the actors and causes of crime and terror. Further study may also investigate how the media can

ensure balanced reportage of crime and terror, while ensuring inclusivity of both genders involved.

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