Reporting military casualties in Nigerian newspapers: An analysis of operations against Boko Haram insurgents

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Abstract The Boko Haram conflict has inflicted untold hardship to the peace and society of the Northeast region in Nigeria and surrounding countries. Within the Nigerian front, the military has been mandated to engage the insurgents and bring them to submission. Opinions on the position of the media in helping the government to bring the conflict to a conclusion were divided as reports emerged that newspaper articles have caused low morale within the military during combat. This study employed content analysis on four Nigerian newspapers, *Daily Trust, Premium Times, The Nation* and *Vanguard* to investigate how military casualties were reported from 2014-2016. The research was based on the Framing theory of the press. Findings showed that 185 reports mentioned 33 military casualties. There were no images of military casualties found in any of the reports, where mentions of military casualties were predominantly found in the body and concluding parts of articles. The study found no evidence to support the claim that media reports were to blame for soldiers not being able to confront the Boko Haram insurgents. This study recommends cooperations between the media and military to coordinate efforts to end the conflict.

Keywords: military; Boko Haram; journalists; nigeria; military casualties; insurgency; newspapers.

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INTRODUCTION

The military in Nigeria has been battling the Boko Haram terrorist group since 2009 with no foreseeable conclusion. The protracted nature of the conflict has defied predictions of resolutions where the public assumed there might be another form of militancy already experienced in Southern Nigeria. Media reports, according to some scholars, had not been proactive in ending the conflict (Campbell, 2019; Shehu, 2015; Hamid & Baba, 2014; Lawrence, 2011). Some reports also argued that newspaper reports have demoralized troops fighting the insurgents in the past (Shaban, 2019; Haruna, 2017; Audu, 2013).

In addition, the then Director of Information, Defense Headquarters, Major General John Enenche, claimed that troops were reluctant to engage the Boko Haram terrorists because the media framed the Boko Haram (BH) group as superior and constantly winning the battle against the military; thus making well-armed soldiers reluctant to engage members of the terrorist group in open battles (Erunke, 2017). If this assertion is true, the media has many questions to answer. This view, however, is subjective and is best tested by analysing the contents of newspaper reports about military operations in North-East Nigeria against the insurgent group. Therefore, this study investigated how four Nigerian newspapers reported military casualties when reporting about military operations against Boko Haram to provide an insight into this claim. This study carries the assumption that including images of injured or dead soldiers when writing about military engagements with the insurgents has a demoralizing effect on the troops. Newspapers reports on such losses are expected to include causative agents for military failures in combating the insurgents. If the statement of Major-General Enenche was accurate, it is expected that the newspapers will blame the military hierarchy of war commanders.

With these in mind, this study aimed to find out if military casualties were highlighted in a manner that may deflate and frighten the soldiers when confronting insurgents in battle. The mention of military casualties by the press is important as it can reveal the media's leaning. The following research objectives were proposed to guide the study: 1) Investigate if news reports on Nigerian military operations against Boko Haram insurgents included pictures of military casualties in Nigerian newspapers. 2) Asserts where military casualties were placed on the news reports about military engagements with Boko Haram. 3) Find out who is blamed by the news for military casualties caused by operations against Boko Haram.

Due to the limited availability of reliable sources of information about military operations in North-East Nigeria, national newspapers became a vital source of information for this study. News reports about military operations in the northeast represent an important footing for discussing this important topic. An understanding of the military operation in the

northeast is useful in understanding military operations in other parts of Nigeria.

Framing as a concept has become appealing in researches in media studies. It has been adopted into a number of communication and other related disciplines such as sociology, health, political science, economics, linguistics, policy studies. Framing is defined as how issues, concepts, or events are organised and presented to make sense and resonates with their audiences by journalists and other media professionals. Bateson (1972) was credited with coining the term, but Goffman (1974) developed the framing approach as we understand it today. Other scholars such as Tuchman (1978), Gitlin (1980), Iyengar and Kinder (1987), Gamson and Modigliani (1989), Entman (1993) and others have contributed to the further development of the framing concept. Rationalizing framing from the works of Bateson (1955/72), Van Gorp (2007) offered an opinion on the topic;

> "The connection between framing and reasoning devices in a text on the one hand and the actual frame on the other happens during the interpretation of the message by the journalist and the audience on the basis of a cognitive process. This process ensures that the complexity of the event is reduced to a graspable plausible whole. The frame package suggests a definition, an explanation, a problematisation, and an evaluation of the event and ultimately results in a number of logical conclusions—for example, with regard to who is responsible for the perceived problem. As such, the media provide the public not only with information on the event itself but also on how it should be interpreted. Consequently, framing is a form of metacommunication. That is, the frame specifies the relationship between a number of connected elements in a text on the basis of which an issue or a topic may be defined and understood" (p.65).

Situating this with our research, when reporting about military operations against Boko Haram, the Nigerian media tries to explain the event by reporting what happened (or is happening) and situating this with the insurgency; providing an evaluation of the success of the military activity; and in if the military fails, the media finds who is responsible. This study examined if the blames were put on the military field commanders, the higher-ranking within the military, government economic policies, or the general execution of the war. The point was, in most cases, the press attributed the blame on a factor. In other cases, the press could also be silent on the responsibility aspect and put it as collateral of the war efforts because, in reality, most wars result in casualties on both sides.

Tuchman (1978) pointed out that the central position the journalists and media practitioners occupy in framing was to achieve its purpose to

simplify a story for easy comprehension and perception for their audience. Micro construct clarifies how people use media information to form opinions about topics under consideration (Scheufele & Tewksbury, 2007). These variables individually add to how the audience views the issues under examination. The influence of the media is that much significant; it potentially creates an explicit response from readers and the general public based on how the article is presented (Freyenberger, 2013).

Entmant (1993) illustrated how the study of media framing is crucial for scholars in communication studies: "(framing) is really the imprint of power—it registers the identity of actors or interests that competed to dominate the text" (p. 55). The way an article is framed can potentially influence its assimilation by the audience (Iyengar & Kinder, 1987), propagate stereotypes in the society, and is capable of creating an impression of empathy or aversion toward a group of people or their ideology (Robinson, 2002; Evans, 2010). How military casualties are reported and presented to the audience, which includes military personnel and their families, has a way to penetrate the personnel's sub-consciousness; Erunke (2017) suggested that posting images of dead soldiers or using headlines depicting the number of military casualties can negatively affect attitude in combat and put fear in the minds of soldiers.

Entman (1993) clarified that the process of framing involves making selected facets prominent from the supposed actuality in a written body of work, such that it promotes a specific issue characterisation, interpretation of the causes, evaluating its morality, and/or how to solve the issue or recommended approaches. Going further, Entman added that news texts are made up of frames that are made apparent by the existence or nonexistence of some terms, typecast pictures, information sources, and structure of the sentences. By this characterisation, this research considered framing as the product of a deliberate procedure. Therefore, this study was based not only on explicit frames generated by the news media organisations but also on other methods used by journalists in news reports in the frame building and development process. For instance, the use of keywords, images and their placement in news reports, and causative agents were analysed because, as Entman indicated, they are part of the more extensive framing process.

In reporting military operations against the Boko Haram the media may choose to highlight pieces of information that portrays government forces as victorious. It can be done either by pointing out the terrorists' casualty estimates or downplaying or outrightly omitting such estimates for the government forces, thereby making the enemy casualty figures more salient in the report. Entman (1993) defined salience as "making a piece of information more noticeable, meaningful, or memorable to the audience" (p.53). By applying salience to negative aspects of Boko Haram shortcomings, while omitting those of the military and government forces,

it may discourage other Jihadis from faraway places to join the insurgent group in fighting the Nigerian government.

This paper examines how the Nigerian press framed military casualties when reporting military operations against Boko Haram. It aimed to find out if press reports have highlighted military casualties by making them more visible and intrinsic, as well as explored the significant roles the framing theory of communication play within the focus of our study.

Reporting casualties is generally a sensitive aspect of the media function when covering insurgencies, terrorist attacks, and other conflicts. The media is generally expected to report truths on how events unfold. At the same time, their reporting should be a rallying call that unites the country against internal and external threats to the continued existence of the nation, rather than reporting events to cause panic and unnecessary tension that heats the politics and disrupts economic and commercial activities which are harmful to development.

Several studies have analysed how the government have managed conflicts and how casualties have affected public opinion and support for military engagements with terrorists (Gelpi, Feaver & Reifler, 2006; Gartner & Segura, 1998). Others have looked at how the media helped to shore up support for the government where there were active insurgencies and terrorists (Sheafer & Dvir-Gvirsman, 2010; Berrebi & Klor, 2006).

Broadly, it is generally acknowledged that the democratic public is sensitive to casualty figures reported in the media. Researchers have found a pattern that showed public support for governments was not linear with the number of casualties in combats and conflicts (Karol & Miguel, 2007; Berebbi & Klor, 2006; Larson, 1996). The public support for such war efforts is in the initial high when the governments announced measures to address internal and external forces that have disrupted and terrorized the society. Similarly, it is true when the governments were reported to be victorious with little or no casualties. A protracted conflict with increasing casualty figures was likely to lose public support and can cause unrest and civil disobedience. This is even more so when such casualty numbers were boldly written in the headlines and leads of news stories (deLeon, 2015; Biello, 2010).

Rising casualties are issues not to be treated lightly as it can go a long way in determining support or opposition against government policies and can play a crucial role during elections. Contemporary research affirmed that the context in which casualties are reported in the news is equally central to decoding how audience assesses the costs of the war because it has become clear that losses have been incurred. Pictures of dead military personnel in news report negatively affect public support, causing dissatisfaction even more than textual descriptions (Althaus et al., 2014).

One of the reasons attributed for the loss of the incumbent President Jonathan in the 2015 general election in Nigeria was the Boko Haram crises and the casualties from the war reaching its peak with the kidnap of the Chibok schoolgirls in 2014 (Nwafor, 2017; Zane, 2015). The failure of Jimmy Carter's re-election bid in the US was also attributed to how the government handled the Iranian hostage situation coupled with the public anger against the Nixon era Vietnam War (Meenagh, 2014).

The media in Nigeria in 2015 and America in 1980 portrayed the Presidents as weak, powerless, and incapable to take tough decisions which leads to their overwhelming defeats in their respective elections where both Presidents were conceding defeats to their opponents well ahead of official announcements as if they already knew the outcome of the polls. They were both the earliest concessions in the respective countries' election histories (Meenagh, 2014).

Henshall and Ingram (1991) stated that pictures serve three functions in the news; to brighten the page, tell the news and to show what it looks like. They argue that pictures are not ideal for all reporting. Some will be told more easily in words than in pictures, while other stories may be told with one picture more efficiently and clearly compared to in many words. Pictures are relevant to this discourse as the issue involves conflict reporting, thus, pictures put a face to the conflict, making it easier for readers to visualise and make their meanings of what is being reported as it entails a close to the lingering of the impasse.

In their view, pictures can stand alone as news, with a caption to say who the people are and where the event is taking place. At other times, the picture may go with a story, to work as a team with the words. Either way, a news picture must always leave the reader knowing more than he did before. It must carry information, especially in areas where television may not be accessible, where they could end up being the only way people find out about the truth. This will be especially true in Nigeria as the country has been plagued with electricity problems; people in remote areas may depend mostly on newspapers for information. A strong news picture should be about the news; to that extent; it is no different from a news story.

Tereszkiewicz (2012) claimed that the images employed in the news are most times, not the news, but rather are expected to express the relationship between the image and the text found in elements such as headline and the body; together they provide a better insight into the presented idea. Barret and Barrington (2005) noted that despite the plethora of studies that have analysed the problem of using photographs in news reporting, there is little consensus among researchers if there exists a media bias in the selection of visual images.

Pictures can stimulate public support for a government's military campaign. Images from the Vietnam war and the Iranian hostage situation negatively impacted the re-election bid of Jimmy Carter (Meenagh, 2014). Contrastingly, the visuals from the kidnapped Chibok girls (Nwafor, 2017; Zane 2015) led to international condemnation for the terrorist Boko Haram group leading to support both locally and internationally for the military in the battle to combat the group. The group expected the kidnap of the girls to strike fear. Instead, it led to the discussions about the formation of an international coalition against the terrorist organisation as earlier shown in previous sections of this study.

This study chose to analyse pictures as a framing device because according to Gombrich (1974), images possess the power to influence and to affect opinion in our visual age. Audiences each day are exposed to thousands of pictures through various media (Rosen, 2005). Perlmutter (1999) added that currently, 'the news that really matters is what is visually prominent'' (p. 178). Furthermore, Zelizer (1995) submitted that visual documents aid the media audience to recall and comprehend the past by stabilizing "the transient nature of memory'' (p. 233). Past studies have shown that pictures used in the news provide a linkage between the audience recollection and recognizable categories and situations (Griffin, 2004).

Schwabe (2006) highlighted that with the US-led Iraqi war, the images became etched on the collective memory of the audience, where they shaped how the war was remembered and helping to make sense of the conflict. Likewise, posting casualty images with news caption leaves a lasting impression in the minds of readers. Images of dead military service members will leave a negative perception in the audience and can create a feeling of disillusion among the soldiers tasked with combating Boko Haram insurgents. On the other hand, pictures of Boko Haram casualty will evoke a different kind of emotion among the citizens and the audience, especially the soldiers combating the insurgents.

Some Literary scholars (Ifantidou, 2009; Saxena, 2006) believed that headlines are viewed as an enthralling shortcut to newspaper contents. Structurally, they are essential in a news report. However, reservations have been presented about their function to summarize as they have been shown not to embody the whole stories accurately (Ifantidou, 2009; Althaus, Edy & Phalen, 2001). It has also been shown that they do not aid audience understanding, nor do they include extensive information (Smith, 1999). Ifantidou (2009) contended that in the cited examples, it was concluded that headlines make a loose, insufficient, or misrepresentative substitute for the news; first, by directing the attention of the reader to an attribute of the story; by highlighting the issue in a prejudiced, yet captivating way; and by oversimplifying the news report, while always masking other 'relevant' information that can aid reader's comprehension

and perception of the topic being discussed (Ifantidou, 2009; Althaus et al., 2001).

Chen, Conroy and Rubin (2015) asserted that the headline as one of the main methods of attracting the attention of the readers should make the reader inquisitive as to what the news is about so that it entices the reader into reading further about what the news says. Bell (1991) contended that headlines are read purposely for a quick and loose grasp of the information contained in the news, are skimmed in morning browsed daily in newsstands, studied in academic courses on media, language and communication genres as self-contained linguistic units. Ludwig and Gilmore (2005) stated that "the best headlines both 'tell and sell', that is, they tell the reader quickly what the news is and persuade the reader that the story is worth reading." (p.107).

Headlines are essential tools in the process employed by the media to create public consensus, reproduce hegemonic knowledge and ideologies, and on occasions used to challenge dominant discourses by upholding their independence (Metila, 2012). This is highlighted in research about headlines and discourses in reports from the newspaper about traffic accidents in South Africa (MacRitchie & Seedat, 2008). Metila (2013) revealed that well-written headlines reinforce assertive opinions and represent diverse communities in various functions. For example, careless and negligent drivers are represented as undeserving natives, traffic wardens as guardians, motorists as victims, and first responders during emergencies as angelic rescuers. As sources of knowledge in news texts, headlines are instinctively inclined to bring forth a particular account of truth, reality, or world order, i.e. presenting a specific frame of reference.

As the most critical element of the news headlines are strategically positioned, and this is revealed by a clear-cut layout and style (White, 2011). Considering this assertion, headlines, consequently, expound on what the media consider as the underlying message the audiences are supposed to be informed of. A careful collection and exposition of news elements based on their conforming importance denote manifestation (Stewart, 2005). Consequently, what is found or not in headlines reveals the capacity of texts to restrain or facilitate the explanation of an issue in a particular way (MacRitchie & Seedat, 2008). In texts, the message that demonstrates headline manifestation is what the media considers essential (Metila, 2013).

Bell (1991) clarified that there are two significant components of any news story – the headline and the lead, with the headline being the most significant constituent of the news. Its principal purpose, according to Reah (1998), was to summarize the essential actions and appeal to the reader to probe further. In this abstraction, Keeble (1994) noted that headlines perform an advisory role, as they present the central information on the content of a story, headlines typically include the most noteworthy specifics

on the characters, authors or the type of event making the news. In this way, such titles merge the pragmatic function of a headline and a lead. In terms of function, Cotter (2010) informed that the lead of a news story performs two main objectives; to attract the public to the story and to put the critical news actions into a frame perspective, making it informative and interpersonal in an expanded scope when compared to the headline. The lead paragraph also underscores the most pertinent, attractive, new or immediate information (Kolodzy, 2006).

Peace journalism is a media report of issues to establish rocesses that bring about the peaceful resolution to conflicts and enthrone a peaceful society. Galtung (1986, 1998) postulated that war journalism and peace journalism are two contending frames in the coverage of war and conflict. War journalists reactively report conflict in a way that promulgates violence and victory. Conversely, peace journalists preemptively report on the causes of and solutions to a conflict giving voice to all parties through responsible, compassionate journalism (Gouse, Valentin-Llopis, Perry & Nyamwange, 2018). Howard (2003) stated that peace journalism is rooted in the belief that the news media can be a powerful force to reduce the causes of conflict and to enable a conflict-stressed society to pursue conflict resolution better. This ideology can be applied to reports on Boko Haram by the headlines and slants emphasised in news reports. The media can also achieve this through training its journalists to understand conflict and the media's role in it better. The journalists can strengthen their reporting to avoid stereotypes, personal bias and narrow perspectives on the causes and process of conflict.

Shinar (2007) elucidated that Peace journalism combines journalism with peace as an external aim and understands itself as "a normative mode of responsible and conscientious media coverage of conflict that aims at contributing to peacemaking, peacekeeping, and changing the attitudes of media owners, advertisers, professionals, and audiences towards war and peace" (p.2). Shehu (2015) added that the media have to be peace-inclined in their watchdog role between the government and the governed. Seow and Maslog (2005) in furtherance of the notion of coverage of conflict, including any reportage about war is grounded in the news value of conflict. Consequently, conflict reporting is often sensational and a mere device to boost circulation and ratings. Likewise, Galtung (1998) proposed peace journalism as a self-conscious, working concept for journalists covering wars and conflicts as a contribution of journalists to the cessation of hostilities in conflicts and wars. His opinion thus give rise to a dichotomy of peace journalism and war journalism both competing frames in coverage of conflicts. He construed war journalism to sports journalism, where winning is the central theme, and no party wants to end on the losing rostrum. Furthermore, he argued that a better model would be health journalism, where the plight of a patient would be described, as well as

the causes, the range of possible remedies, and future preventative measures. This model would prove more productive in the context of conflict reporting and ending the war than focusing on violence, deaths, and negative events and siding with a particular protagonist.

METHODOLOGY

This study employed of content analysis research design. The research populations consisted of the four daily newspapers which were purposively selected, which include; *Vanguard*, *Premium Times*, *Daily Trust*, and *The Nation*; and includes all editions of the selected newspapers from January 1, 2014, to December 31, 2016, including weekend versions amounting to 4384 issues. The sample size of this study was calculated using the algorithm from the website https://www.statisticssolutions.com/sample-size-for-populations.html at a confidence level of 95%. This gave us 353 issues as the sample. To make an even distribution, seven more issues were added to make the study sample 360.

To ensure equal representation for each sampled newspaper, we used quota sampling to share the sample across the four newspapers into 90 issues for each, and further divided into 30 issues per year for spread. Systematic random sampling was applied as proposed by (Macnamara, 2011) with an issue selected every 12th day. To further reduce bias, a straw was drawn and January 10, 2014, was selected as the starting point. The unit of analysis for this study is straight news; this study used both quantitative and qualitative techniques in the analysis of the study data. The research objectives are situated in the framing analysis, as seen in the works of Entman (1993) and Van Gorp (2007). Entman informs us of typecast pictures used to achieve a purpose, and this is investigated in the first research objective, the prominence given to selected facets of news by selectively placing them in the headlines, Van Gorp highlights the function of responsibility for a perceived problem, the third objective evaluates responsibility for military casualties.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Research Question 1: Does news reporting about Nigerian military operations against Boko Haram insurgents include pictures of military casualties in Nigerian newspapers?

The findings from the Nigerian newspapers analysed revealed a total of 185 stories that mention military operations in the news. Of this number, 133 show the use of pictures in reporting; the breakdown is presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Use of pictures

	Pictures	Newspapers				Total	%
		Daily Trust	Premium Times	The Nation	Vanguard		
1	Picture present in stories	9	53	32	39	133	72
2	No picture in stories	17	1	22	23	52	28
	Total	26	54	43	62	185	100

Table 1 showed that pictures were used in 72% of the stories about military operations against Boko Haram, *Premium Times* had the highest pictures usage in 53 stories while *Daily Trust* the least with nine stories. The finding also validated the use of pictures as an instrument to understand how the press reported military operations against Boko Haram. Gombrich (1974) discussed the power of images to influence and to affect news opinion and aligns with the views of Rosen (2005) that audiences are exposed to thousands of pictures through various media, and they seem to be the most visually prominent which makes them important (Perlmutter, 1999). However, our concern is centred on the presentation of pictures showing military casualties which were presented in Table 2.

Table 2. Picture Depiction

	Picture Variables	Newspapers				Total
		Daily Trust	Premium Times	The Nation	Vanguard	
1	Military Triumph	0	0	1	1	2
2	Military/equipment in Combat	3	18	5	8	34
3	Military/Equipment Non-combat	3	12	22	21	58
4	Rescued from Boko Haram	1	4	1	2	8
5	Arrested/Casualty for BH	0	9	0	5	14
6	Military Casualty	0	0	0	0	0
7	Picture of BH members/Weapons	1	4	2	2	9
8	Boko Haram victims	0	6	2	0	8
	Total	8	53	33	39	133

To answer the first research question which sook to investigate if news reporting about Nigerian military operations against Boko Haram insurgents includes pictures of military casualties in Nigerian newspapers, we observed from our population that there was no mention of military casualty in the pictures used in reporting military operations against Boko Haram insurgents. Majority of the pictures analysed depicted scenes that positively highlight military objectives in their operations. The dominant pictures seen were Military/Equipment in combat or non-combat, followed

by Boko Haram casualty. The media in this regard largely frames the narrative to depict the military positively from the postulates of Scheufele and Tewksbury (2007), Tuchman (1978) who opined that the framing concept that how a topic is portrayed in media texts can shape audience perception of news stories to promote a particular ideology. It may be inferred that in the eyes of the public, the military has the upper hand in their engagements with the insurgent group.

Military casualties are excluded in the pictures, thus promoting the frame military casualties does not exist; the brain does not recall what the eye does not see. The newspapers may have lots of reason for not using images of dead soldiers, one of such reasons could be a lack of access to the battlefields where Nigerian soldiers are battling Boko Haram, another reason is to be seen as patriots; the newspapers may not want to publish images capable of causing public disorder in the society and also turn the public against the government. Another reason for not posting military casualties could be that it would be in bad taste, capable of causing disaffection among newspaper readers. The dangers of having images of dead military personnel were already highlighted by Althaus et al. (2014) and Gartner (2011) who affirmed that pictures of dead service members in news reports negatively affect public support causing dissatisfaction more than textual descriptions only. The Nigeria media has refrained from posting images of military casualties in their news reporting. However, to be sure of the exact reason(s) for not posting images of military casualties, a survey of media organisations and journalists who have worked in North-East Nigeria would provide a better insight as to their reasons.

Research question 2: Where are military casualties placed in the news when reporting about their engagements with Boko Haram?

A total of 33(18%) stories out of the 185 news articles analysed contained information on military casualties. This is also a justification for our use of reporting military casualties as a measure of media in the war against Boko Haram. The analysis for the placement of military casualties is presented in Table 3.

Table 3. Placement of Military Casualties

	Casualty Placement	Newspapers				Total	%
		Daily Trust	*Premium Times*	*The Nation*	*Vanguard*		
1	Headline	1	4	1	3	9	27
2	Deck	0	0	0	0	0	0
3	Lead	1	1	0	4	6	18
4	Body	1	2	4	4	11	33
5	Conclusion	2	1	2	2	7	21
	Total	5 (15%)	8 (24%)	7 (21%)	13 (39%)	33	100

Vanguard newspaper had the highest number of stories that mentioned military casualties with 13 (39%) mentions and the least was *Daily Trust* with 5(15%) mentions. The "body" and "conclusion" combined to give 18(55%) of casualty placement compared to 15(45%) that were contained in the "headline" and "lead". No casualty was mentioned in the "deck" in all the analysed articles.

In discussing casualty placement; we analysed which part of the news military casualty appears most. The headline is the most visible part of any news story followed by the deck, then the lead, body and conclusion in that order. We classified military casualties placed in any of the first three as being unfavourable to the military, while the body and the conclusion are sections of the news story which requires meticulous attention for readers to identify information embedded in them, military casualties placed here will be considered favourable to the military. Their summation shows that the body and the conclusion had a cumulative of 18 (55%) mentions compared to the mentions in the other three categories, which add up to 15 (45%). As mentioned by MacRitchie and Seedat (2008), 'the most significant message' about the news is stated in the headline, therefore, not including military casualties in the headlines means that the newspapers are not giving prominence to military casualties.

Thus for casualty mentions, Nigeria newspapers were more favourable to the military when reporting about operations against the Boko Haram group as the adverse impact of military casualty reporting has been stated by scholars (Karol & Miguel, 2007; Berebbi & Klor, 2006). This could explain why there is yet to be citizens' discussions about military casualties in the war against Boko Haram as they are kept out of public purview and minimised in press reports. In cases where Nigerian military officers are killed in action, there is always a piece of accompanying information about the greater number of insurgents killed during the particular battle as a justification (See Akioye, 2016; Duku, 2015; Omonobi, 2014).

An example of the casualty appearing in the body of the report was seen in a *Vanguard* news report on September 19, 2014, with the headline "Soldiers kill 60 more B/Haram fighters, capture commander". The story continues further to state in the body of the report that "…Also at Benishek where troops fought through an ambush yesterday, four motorcycles of the terrorists were captured, the military said, adding that one soldier died in the fight while four others wounded are receiving treatment" (Idris & Mutum, 2014).

We can see that the military casualties were embedded within the story while the information was mainly about the death of many insurgents and the capture of a high-value Boko Haram Commander on the wanted list released by the Nigerian army. This example and those observed in

(Duku, 2015; Omonobi, 2014) all show the different ways Nigerian newspapers employ when deciding on where to place military casualties in the news when reporting about military operations against Boko Haram insurgents. Thus, military casualties are less salient and are made less memorable by being placed within the body of the news. Entman (1993) defined salience as "making a piece of information more noticeable, meaningful, or memorable to the audience." By putting information in the body and conclusion, the impact of such news items would be minimised. When the reader sees a higher proportion of casualties for the insurgents in the headline and accompanying, there is a subconscious inward where the military may be permitted to have less casualty compared to the insurgents, and such information would have little significance on the reader unless there is a personal connection with the casualty or if their names identify them.

In other words, by applying salience to negative aspects of Boko Haram shortcomings, while omitting those of the military and government forces, it may discourage other Jihadis from faraway places to join the insurgent group in fighting the government. Broadly, it has been established that the public in a democracy is sensitive to casualty figures reported in the media. Researchers have found a pattern that shows declining public support for governments with increasing casualties when fighting and managing conflicts, thus, masking military casualties can minimise their significance especially concerning position they occupy in the news structure.

Research question 3: Who is blamed for military casualties in reporting military operations against Boko Haram?

The attribution of blame for military casualties discerned from press reports analysed is presented in Table 4.

Table 4. Blame for Military Casualties

	Attribution of Blame	Newspapers				Total	%
		Daily Trust	*Premium Times*	*The Nation*	*Vanguard*		
1	Military	0	0	0	0	0	0
2	BH superiority	0	1	0	1	2	6
3	Poor weapons	0	0	0	0	0	0
4	Poor tactics	0	0	0	0	0	0
5	Accident/fate	1	3	1	1	6	18
6	Ambush	0	1	0	2	3	9
7	Battle	4	3	6	9	22	67
	Total	5	8	7	13	33	100

The dominant attribution of blame for military casualties was "Battles" which was mentioned in 22(60%) of the reports. The military hierarchies were not blamed in any of the reports for military casualties. 9% of military casualties were attributed to an ambush by the Boko Haram insurgents, 6% was credited to stories that describe Boko Haram as being superior to the Nigerian army, another 18% was attributed to accident/fate while 67% of military casualties were said to occur in battle with the insurgent group. This also is favourable to the military as casualties are expected in wars, but the overall objective in such wars is always to achieve the desired set goals and at the same time keep casualty figures to the barest minimum. The set goal here is the unconditional surrender or defeat of the Boko Haram insurgents and the return of normalcy in the beleaguered region.

The findings do not agree with assertions in Erunke (2017), Shehu (2015), or Hamid and Baba (2014) that faults media reporting for military losses and fear-mongering was among military service members battling the insurgents. What was, however, worrisome from the data was that 6% of military losses were attributed to superiority of the insurgents; the military hierarchy should ensure that such a bothersome statistic is eliminated or reduced to as little as possible, and building the confidence of service members and the general public in the military hierarchy to come up with solutions that would permanently bring to an end the conflict in the North East of Nigeria to forestall the humanitarian disaster that has ravaged the region since the start of the uprising.

Situating the study in the context of peace and war journalism, 69% of the pictures used in news reports about military operations against Boko Haram contained military or their equipment in combat or non-combat situation. This could be a case of intimidating their rival Boko Haram insurgents who are expected to feel threatened by images of the military or their equipment. This aspect highlights war journalism, and in the views of Galtung (2004), the winner is the person/institution that is made prominent in news reporting. The majority use of pictures of Nigeria military can be attributed to being war journalism, where one of the actors is portrayed as being the victor. Reversely, the media downplayed on military casualties by not including pictures of military casualties and also ensuring their placement in the body and conclusion parts of news reports where their visibility is reduced.

This can be seen as peace journalism as journalists report factual information but on the other hand minimise its effect on the society as headlining military casualties can lead to chaos, rash government actions and ill-thought policies capable of causing more mayhem in the society. The Nigerian media in this aspect is commended and should train its journalists on peace journalism and how it can be used to foster unity in the nation. The media also continued the trend in evaluating the third

research objective, which looked at who was blamed for military casualties. In line with peace journalism postulates, the media put most of the blame of battle/fate, which is inevitable whenever two or more sides conflict. Effort should, however, be put in place to ensure that journalists covering conflicts and wars are abreast with best global practices when covering conflicts to avoid exacerbating the situation but rather to deescalate through peace journalism.

In all the instances seen from the news stories analysed for this study, no evidence supports the claim that media reports made soldiers afraid to face the Boko Haram insurgents in battle as stated in Erunke (2017). We saw that none of the pictures used by the media in reporting military operations against the insurgents contained military casualties; the media avoided placing military casualties in the headline, deck and lead paragraph where they would be most prominent and instead placed them mainly in the body and conclusion parts of the news. Also, the most significant attribution of military losses was "battle" which was to be expected in open hostilities, and the government is however expected to keep such casualties to the barest minimum.

CONCLUSION

In summary, there is a need for a synergy of ideas between the military and the media to improve the media-military relationship when reporting such conflicts. The Nigerian military should see the media as partners in progress. Exposures by the media should lead to improvement rather than being seen as a witch-hunt against the army to expose its shortcomings. To this end, relevant stakeholders including the military heads, legislative bodies, media regulatory bodies and media organisations should brainstorm with the view to put the issues in perspective and proffer solutions that will take Nigeria to greater heights. Based on the main findings of the study which was that media reports between 2014 and 2016 about military operations against Boko Haram insurgents were framed mainly in support of the military by exclusion of images of military casualties, and placing of military casualties mainly in the body and conclusion sections of the news, the authors recommend that further studies be carried out to determine if newspaper reports are consistent with the findings of this research especially between 2016 and 2019. Further research should also investigate why news reports do not contain military casualties and also include qualitative studies involving journalists to find out their disposition towards peace and war journalism, especially with rampant sensationalism in journalism today.

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