BOKO HARAM INSURGENCY AND THE CHALLENGES OF ONLINE TERRORISM IN NIGERIA

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Abstract

The Boko Haram terrorist group is one of the major threats to peace and security in Nigeria. Since 2015, the group seemed to have altered its modus Operandi and modus vivendi in favour of online communication platforms like Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube. This study therefore examines issues and challenges faced by the government in the management of the use of Online Media by the terrorist group in the propagation of its extremist ideology. It also examines its implications for national security. Using secondary sources and descriptive narrative analysis, the study shows that the online space in Nigeria is a double-edged sword. On the one hand, it is a veritable tool for social and economic development; on the other, it is an avenue for indoctrination and radicalization by violent extremist groups. With over 104 million active internet users in 2021, the paper argues that the online space in the country is not properly monitored. It, therefore, recommends collaboration with members of the international communities and international security organizations to tap from their experiences.

Keywords: Boko Haram, Cyber-Terrorism, ideology, indoctrination, extremism, security

Introduction

The online space is a double-edged sword. On the one hand, it is a veritable tool for promoting social interactions and economic development; on the other, it is an avenue for perpetrating cybercrimes

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such as indoctrination and radicalization by violent extremist groups (UNDP, 2021). Beyond the transmission of its deadly ideology, the Boko Haram sect was reported in August 2012 to have hacked into the databases of Nigeria's Secret Service (Baken, 2013). This represented a radical shift in the terrorist campaigns of the sect since it officially started in 2009. The reactionary attack exposed the names, addresses, bank information, and family members of current and former personnel assigned to the country's spy agency. However, since its relationship with ISWAP, Boko Haram has shown an enormously changed approach to executing its barbaric attacks. Since al-Qaeda began to use the Internet as a vital communication vehicle in 1996, Boko Haram's incorporation of online space into its activities was almost inevitable. Boko Haram's seemingly new online strategy is an indication that Nigeria and its neighbouring Sahel region neighbours are ripe for exploitation as the hub of cyber-warfare. By the same token, the Network Against Cyber-Terrorism (NACT) has raised an alarm about the new antics of the Boko Haram/ISWAP (Daily Post, 2019). The group said the terrorist group was deploying the use of the internet to divert attention to the fact that they are being decimated by government forces. NACT said that members of the sect were manipulating videos to show that they were still occupying certain regions in the country. NACT revealed:

> The Network nonetheless charges those who legitimately work in disseminating information – journalists, editors, bloggers, social media influencers, etc. – to take exceptional care in treating multimedia content emanating from ISWAP. They should bear certain things in mind in this regard. The first is to be mindful of unknowingly helping to spread lies and propaganda for the terrorists. The second reason to be circumspect is the need to not assist the terrorists in spreading weaponized messaging that terrorizes members of the public. We are convinced that cyberspace is a key battleground where a timely defeat of ISWAP will translate into a conclusive dismantling of its terror

> infrastructure and a resounding defeat in the physical battles in the various theatres of military operations against the global menace. (Opejobi, 2019: 4).

The fatality from the activities of the dreaded Boko Haram since its inception in 2009, according to the United States Council on Foreign Relations (2021), has reached a staggering 350,000, while over three million were displaced people in the Lake Chad region alone. Furthermore, the Council stated that no fewer than 310,000 people have been displaced in the Northeast region of Nigeria. However, after a peak in Boko Haram–related violence in 2014 and 2015, the number of casualties attributed to the group reduced drastically. The Nigerian military—with assistance from the Republic of Benin, Cameroon, Chad, and Niger—pushed Boko Haram/ISWAP out of several provinces in northeastern Nigeria, but the group retains authority over some of the territory and continues to launch deadly attacks on defenceless civilians, most of whom were women, and children. The gravity and even the pattern of Online radicalization in the Muslim North are difficult to predict given the pace and spread of Information and the drive for Technology among the youth of the region. For instance, the former Emir of Kano Muhammadu Sanusi II described the exposure of youths to information technology and social media as one of the major causes of youth enrolment into Jihadist and extremist groups such as Boko Haram (Ahmadu, 2015). There is a lingering concern over the role of online communication in the radicalization and counter-radicalization efforts in Nigeria. Conversely, much of the discussion has only focused on countries in the global North about ISIS and Al Qaeda's online influence of domestic terrorism and foreign fighters travelling to the Middle East. Little is known about patterns of online radicalization in Nigeria and the extent to which government strategies address the use of Online Media by Boko Haram and ISWAP. It is on this premise that this paper seeks to interrogate the involvement of Boko Haram insurgents with the use of the internet or cyberspace for their nefarious activities.

Conceptual Clarification

Online Media: Online media refers to a method, process, or medium that creates, publishes, transmits, or disseminates message- or theme-oriented audiovisual content, photos, or other types of media using sign, symbol, text, voice, graphics, song, music, video, animation, and other forms of multi-media over the internet.

Terrorism: Terrorism may not have a universally acceptable definition. But for this study, terrorism may be conceptualized as an act of threat and violence against the Nigerian state and people with the sole aim of bringing about religious, economic and political change.

Cyberterrorism: is the use of online media or cyberspace to terrorize a legitimate government, state, religion, or ethnic group; and for the recruitment of members and for other purposes which may include ideological indoctrination, radicalization and funding.

Theoretical Framework

This paper utilizes the Realist Theory propounded by James Adams as its theoretical construct. Adams (2001) in his classical work 'Virtual Defense' used a neorealist approach to explain the incidences of cyber terrorism and security. To him, cyberspace addresses some security concerns and threats to nations but at the same time takes the form of the anarchic, tense, distasteful domain of contested values, and consequently declares it as a new international battlefield. He opines that countries with strong military capability and advanced information technology, especially the United States of America are most susceptible to cyber terrorism. Etymologically, the term Anomie originated from a Greek word: *anomia,* which means the absence of law. In sociology, anomie is a societal condition defined by the breakdown of any societal moral values, standards or guidance generally provided for individuals to follow. Anomie may evolve from conflict of belief systems and cause the breakdown of social bonds between individuals and communities. Alienation in a person can progress into a dysfunctional inability to

integrate within normative situations of their social world like finding a job, finding success in relationships, and so on (Long & Robertson, 2019). When applying the theory to explain the Boko Haram insurgency in Nigerian schools, the anomie theory would bring to the fore the economic woes for not functioning optimally to produce the desired outcome. The theory also considers the failure of the political system to produce the requisite output necessary to enable the economy to function properly. However, the result of such dysfunctional situations is usually felt by the masses through widespread poverty, unemployment, starvation, low standard of living, illiteracy, deprivation as well and marginalization with attendant consequences of which school kidnapping for ransom or economic gain is one. Government ineptitude and failure is not reflected in the Boko Haram insurgency, but in all facet of the country's life: strike action by university lecturers, youth uprising (ENDSARS protests), mass exodus of Doctors, banditry and kidnapping, police and military mutiny.

In 1938, Robert K Merton linked *anomie* with *deviance*, arguing that the discontinuity between culture and structure has the dysfunctional consequence of resulting in deviance within society. He described different types of deviance in terms of the acceptance or rejection of social goals and the institutionalized means of achieving them. To Merton (1954), anomie refers to a lack of consensus on norms judged to be legitimate. He argues that anomie is a unique characteristic of an open democratic society. In a closed society, anomie is more rampant because people know their place in the stratification system. A weak democratic political system is thus the precondition for the growth of anomie. He also states that in every society and societal system there are two essential elements: cultural goals and institutional norms which all create a platform where anomie becomes socially induced. Later research by Cao, Zhao, Ren, and Zhao (2010) demonstrated that people in societies with more social support should be less anomic because their fundamental needs are satisfied and they are not under extreme pressure to achieve monetary success. The theory will link the Boko Haram insurgency to the dysfunctional state and silent structural frictions in all facets of the Nigerian state. It is, thus,

argued that the Boko Haram insurgency is a microcosm of the failure of the government to earn the trust of the Nigerian people, which is partly caused by primitive accumulation or what can be described as prebendalism (Joesph, 1998).

Boko Haram Insurgency from a historical perspective

Boko Haram is officially known as Jama'at Ahl as-Sunnah lid-Da'wah wa'l-Jihād, which literally means Group of the People of Sunnah for Preaching and Jihad or JAZ. It was formed in Maiduguri, Borno State in 2002 by a young cleric, Mohammed Yusuf. After his ejection from two mosques for his radical views, he set up his mosque and attracted a large following. Boko Haram was also known as Wilayat Garb Ifrqiya, meaning "West African Province," and, after pledging allegiance to the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant in 2015, it was briefly called "Islamic State in West Africa" (ISWA) and later Islamic State of West African Province (ISWAP). The group split in 2016 leading to the existence of two factions-ISWAP and Boko Haram. However, both groups are often referred to as Boko Haram while some academics refer to the new group as ISWAP, believing that Boko Haram died with Abubakar Shakau in May 2021.

The name Boko Haram is translated as "Western education is forbidden." Haram is an Arabic word meaning forbidden, and the Hausa word Boko means Western Education cum civilization. In a 2009 media statement, the group denounced that translation as the work of the "infidel media," claiming the real rendition is "Western Civilization is forbidden", and that they are not "opposed to formal education coming from the West" but "believe in the supremacy of Islamic culture (not education). Other translations in English include "Western influence is a sin", and "Westernization is sacrilege." Until the demise of its founder Mohammed Yusuf, the group was also at a point known as ‘Yusifiyya’. Historically, Most Muslims from Northern Nigeria have rejected Western education as ilimin Boko ("fake education") and secular schools as *Makaranta Boko*. The group became known in 2009 when it clashed with the police, attacking police stations and other public institutions in Maiduguri (Mu’azu. 2011). When the police could

not control the group, Nigeria's federal government deployed the armed forces. The military fought Boko Haram fighters, and its mosque and headquarters were destroyed. Yusuf was apprehended by the military and handed over to the police; he was subsequently killed in police custody. According to Mu'azu (2011), the police stated that he died during gunfire exchanges with their officers. Yusuf's father-in-law and about eight hundred members of Boko Haram were killed during the fighting in 2009. Some of the group's survivors fled to the neighbouring countries of Chad and Niger. Boko Haram was able to recover from its losses, and, as subsequent events showed, it became even more deadly. It was later led by another young trigger-happy cleric, Abubakar Shekau who was also killed by the ISWAP in May 2021. Boko Haram, according to security observers does not exist as it were. It has been decimated, not by the Nigerian forces alone, but by friendly forces of ISWAP owing to internal wrangling and leadership tussle between the two terrorist groups holding sway in the Sambisa Forest. Boko Haram views its members as warriors in a holy war between Islam and the rest of Nigeria (Mu'azu, 2011).

At the international level, there have been several conventions and legal instruments that deal with online terrorism. In the same vein, the United Nations has several agencies that seek to address Online terrorism, including, the United Nations Office of Counter-Terrorism, the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, the United Nations Office for Disarmament Affairs, the United Nations Institute for Disarmament Research, the United Nations Interregional Crime and Justice Research Institute, and the International Telecommunications Union. Both EUROPOL and INTERPOL also notably specialize in the subject. The problem therefore is that while the government is deploying kinetic measures in fighting the war against Boko Haram, its performance in winning the Online War has not been very successful. Through messaging, Boko Haram has succeeded in using the convergence Media in the transmission of its radical ideology. Shakau for instance has released several videos on YouTube and has written letters that have been translated, even as the group continues to woo the teaming youth in the poverty-infested region. The Northwest and

the Northeast, according to official data, are the poorest regions of the world. This paper therefore examined some of the issues and the challenges faced by the government in the management of online indoctrination and online communication by the dreaded group.

Boko Haram strategy before Online

It is on record that at the outset and before shifting to online, the Boko Haram terrorist group deployed conventional methods of media communication which includes

1. Open Air lecture
2. Distribution of leaflets
3. Distribution of audio cassettes
4. Distribution of video cassettes
5. Street procession
6. Camping and isolation

There has also been a report that the group made an attempt to establish a newspaper but failed.

It is on record that in its early days in 2002, it often addressed the local media, with its spokesperson seen as its poster boy, Abu Qaqa, briefing the press on at least 53 separate occasions between 2010 and 2012. (Mahmoud, 2017). The UNDP-RAND report stated that after Qaqa's demise in September 2012, Shekau took over the group's messaging role, which led to a rise in video publications and a shift away from physical briefings of local media. The production style and video were of low quality. However, they grew steadily until 2015. Since its bay'ah, the style of Boko Haram's online communication has become more like that of ISIL. For instance, Boko Haram added the jihadist black flag (rayat al-uqab) to its previous crossed-guns-and-Quran logo, as well as ISIL's anthem, 'My Umma, Dawn has Arrived', to the musical stanza of its videos. In one of its videos released in November 2015, Shekau said he was establishing his own 'Islamic Caliphate' and sending his greetings to the 'brothers' in Somalia, Pakistan, Yemen and Afghanistan, as well as to 'the Caliphate in Syria and Iraq (Olawale, 2013). It is thought that the support Boko Haram got

from ISIL must have led to the creation of a Twitter account,@Al Urwah al-Wuthqa, in 2015. However, the account was said to have been shut down by Twitter owing to a violation of its terms Laing (2015). In its report, the New Telegraph captured the story thus:

> The account, @Alurwa_Alwuthqa, was set up on January 18(2015) as part of what is believed to be a bid to mimic the successful PR and recruitment campaigns of groups like al-Shabaab in Somalia and the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant. Within days, it had gained 4,000 followers and on January 25, announced in Arabic the capture of Monguno, a strategic town close to Maiduguri, the state capital of Borno province and Boko Haram's birthplace. Pictures have also been posted on the account to suggest Boko Haram, which means "Western Education is Sinful", was actively training child soldiers, a tactic borrowed from conflicts in other parts of Africa. They showed children as young as ten dressed in dark robes, training in military formation and holding AK-47 assault rifles. "Photo of Cubs nation," the caption reads. "Generation of conquest and victory, God willing." The profile also posted a link to a video interview with Abu Mus'ab Al Barnawi, who is said to be the group's spokesman, in which he discussed the capture of Baga, the village where an estimated 2,000 civilians were killed.

In the second video, the newspaper said:

> A second video showed an interview with a group of Boko Haram fighters, explaining their motivation. There has been intense speculation online about whether the account was genuine since others set up previously have proved to be fake. However, the suspension of the account by Twitter boosted claims that it was. The US State Department also lent credibility to the claims by tweeting a photo of the purported child soldiers, writing: "Amid its massacres of innocents, Boko Haram running training camps for child soldiers. "The videos posted to the account, if genuine, reflect a growing sophistication in Boko Haram's publicity machine, which

previously was limited to disseminating shaky clips showing the group's leader Abubakar Shekau flanked by arms-laden pick-up trucks and ranting in rudimentary Arabic.

Issues and challenges

The exploitation of online space for terroristic purposes is one of Boko Haram's most potent recruitment tactics. To increase the group's membership, deceitful clerics radicalized the youth by disseminating fake teachings and portraying Islam incorrectly. According to a recent study, these priests were responsible for brainwashing people into believing that their problems were caused by Western influence by exploiting the cultural, economic, and social circumstances of Northeastern Nigeria (Onuoha, 2014; Olojo, 2019).

The recruitment of new members shouldn't come as a surprise because the terrorist organization has long held anti-Western and anti-Muslim beliefs. Muhammad Yusuf, the founder of Boko Haram, was able to influence people who were "primarily uneducated, unschooled, impressionable, destitute, and dissatisfied with the status quo through his teachings (Maza, Koldas and Aksit, 2020, 7.). Except for switching to social media now, the terrorist group's recruitment technique hasn't changed significantly in that regard. A 2017 policy brief on the viewpoints of peace-builders, who were questioned about the likely sources of recruitment by Boko Haram, lends credence to this argument. The results of the quantitative poll show that the terrorist organization mostly (52%) uses social media platforms to recruit new members. However, physical characteristics through a network of friends (44%) and neighbours (36%) appear to complement the online recruitment strategy. By claiming that those who joined the terrorist group were frequently persuaded to believe they were "adhering to real and pure Islam as required by the Quran and the teachings of the Prophet," peace-builders emphasized the significance of religion in terms of Boko Haram's recruitment (Salifu & Ewi, 2017, 5.). The manipulation of the recruits could have several causes, including indoctrination with radical ideologies and a lack of understanding of their religion.

The same message is echoed in a report released in 2015 by the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC). It implies that there is a disconnect between some Muslim youngsters and Islamic principles, suggesting that they are misinformed about the Islamic religion (Organization of Islamic Cooperation, 2015). These people are susceptible to being seduced by the promise of paradise and persuaded that their role in preventing Islam from degenerating into decadence is crucial. "They told us that youngsters should defend the religion of God," a Yobe man stated (Mercy Corps, 2016, 14.). Therefore, these naive and misguided young people are an easy target for Boko Haram's recruitment, especially online. It may also be possible to gain insight into Boko Haram's recruitment by examining the prevalent languages used in its internet messaging. Due to the terrorist group's initial preference for local targets, Hausa was initially the most popular language for message dissemination. Arabic, however, started to predominate as the group began to grow geographically and planned for international exposure (Mahmood, 2017). There was only one Arabic-language release between 2011 and 2012, according to a 2017 assessment by the Institute for Security Studies (ISS).

Another strategy is the use of the Hausa Language as a medium of communication while the proprietors of Boko Haram,-Muhammad Yusuf and Abubakar Shekau-were, not Hausas. They were Kanuris. On most occasions, the Hausa language was used in Shekau's video clips. It is not for nothing. The Hausa Language is the third most widely spoken language in Africa, after Arabic and Swahili. Therefore, the message tended to go far across the Nigerian borers. Arabic was utilized to develop relations with the Islamic State and possibly reach people who had received a thorough education in Islam; Hausa was employed as a basic language for recruiting and propaganda in the region. However, the continued dominance of Hausa in internet messages can be explained by the terrorist group's wish to keep its attention local given that Arabic works received little coverage in Nigerian press due to the language barrier. But soon after it developed relations with ISIS in 2015, it grew its Arabic content, possibly to connect easily with the Arabic-speaking ISIL in the Middle East.

Radicalization and internet usage in Nigeria

There is palpable evidence showing the linkage between internet usage and radicalization. Arguably, the terrorists leverage the widespread usage of the internet which has grown exponentially lately. As of January 2021, Nigeria posted around 104 million active internet users, which corresponds to about half of the country's 200 million population. Data from 2021 cannot be directly compared to those from previous years as the sources used by the publisher have changed. Data show that the percentage of the population using the internet in the West African country decreased in the last years (Statista, 2022). It stated that in 2021 alone, there were over 101.72 million mobile internet users in Nigeria. This figure is projected to grow to 142.73 million by the end of 2026. In 2016, mobile internet audiences in Nigeria were barely 39.57 million users.

The table shows the growth rate of internet users in Nigeria:

Dates	Internet users(millions)
Jan 2017	97.2
Jan 2018	91.6
Jan 2019	98.39
Jan 2020	85.49
Jan 2021	104.4

Statista: 2022

Similarly, in February 2021, Nigeria's President Muhammadu Buhari said the growth and development of the internet is to blame for the rise in threats posed by online-related terrorism in the country. The comments, which came during the launch of the National Cyber-security Policy and Strategy (NCPS) 2021 on Tuesday, recall a series of

policy decisions the Buhari-led administration enforced to increase penetration of the internet in the daily lives of citizens, particularly for the utilitarian purpose. (Oluwole, 2021). The President said:

> All these initiatives serve as enablers for tackling many of the economic and security challenges facing our country while also providing us with the platform to improve accountability and transparency in our unwavering resolve to tackle corruption. However, like many other countries across the globe, the growth and development of the Internet are accompanied by significant problems. We are witnessing a rise in threats posed by cybercriminals, online financial fraudsters and cyber terrorists who use the internet to cause apprehension. (Oluwole, 2021)

President Buhari alluded to the fact that online media have witnessed a significant surge in the propagation of hate speech, fake news, seditious and treasonable messages, as well as the risks of breaches of personal information and sensitive official data. President Buhari added:

> In October 2020, we all witnessed an escalation in the use of social media for the dissemination of subversive messages and incitement of violence which played a part in heightening tensions, causing unrest and spurring widespread acts of looting and destruction across the country. It is almost impossible to overstate the challenges. Some global events, such as the rapid emergence of new technologies, the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic and the advent of 5G technology, have further widened the scope and diversification of these cyber threats.

He however called for an overhaul of the national strategy on cyber security, urging more emphasis on exploring the internet for economic growth opportunities, enhancement of knowledge and mitigation of crime. He added:

> I urge the National Security Adviser to continue to coordinate the efforts of all stakeholders to ensure that our Internet and cyberspace are used for the enhancement of national security and economic progression,'' the President said at the launch of the National Cybersecurity Policy and Strategy (NCPS) 2021. I am confident that, together, we can pave the way for the creation of new opportunities to usher Nigeria into a bright future driven by a prosperous cyberspace and digital economy. (Oluwole, 2021)

Boko Haram's Online Tactics

To state that Boko Haram/ISWAP's online tactics have transformed over the years is no news. (RAND, 2020). It is on record that at the outset and before shifting to Online, the terrorist group, employed conventional methods of media communication which included: Open Air Lecture, distribution of leaflets, distribution of audio cassettes with prerecorded messages, and public statements, among others. There has been a report that the group made an attempt to establish a newspaper but was not successful. However, since 2015, Boko Haram seemed to have changed its methods of media communication towards Facebook,

Twitter and YouTube. According to a UNDP-sponsored study:

> Boko Haram's use of social media is not as sophisticated as that of al-Shabaab. Nonetheless, it appears to have become more advanced in its techniques following Boko Haram leader Shekau's declaration of allegiance (bay'ah) to ISIL on 7 March 2015 and its adoption of the name 'Islamic State West Africa Province' (ISWAP) the following month. According to one interviewee, Boko Haram's popularity grew after it pledged allegiance to ISIL and the associated expansion of its social media strategy, which 'positively shaped youth perceptions of the group'. In 2009, Boko Haram lacked an online strategy; instead, it contacted journalists via individual members of the Nigerian militant group and distributed audio cassettes on Nigerian street corners containing the lectures of its former

leader, Mohammed Yusuf. Boko Haram's subsequent pledge of allegiance to ISIL and rebranding, however, has exposed the group to a well-established and significant social media base and the expertise of its ISIL ally (see Chapter 5). Since becoming ISWAP in 2015, the group has set up its own media department, termed the Media Office of West Africa Province, and has made greater use of YouTube and Twitter (e.g. establishing its own Arabic Twitter account, @Al Urwah al-Wuthqa, in 2015), and has improved the quality of its videos distributed via these platforms. Despite these changes, the core content of Boko Haram's videos has remained consistent, still focusing on ongoing attacks, operational victories, and beheadings of hostages.

Membership Drive

Experts say that one of the media through which Boko Haram/ISWAP recruits and influences its members lately is through social media and or Online Platforms. The use of the social media platform, analysts say could be attributed to wide availability and the exponential growth of Internet access in Nigeria. Extremist groups like Boko Haram now favour the use of online platforms for indoctrination (Sanusi, 2015).

Ideological Propaganda

Although many factors enabled the youth in the Northeast specifically to subscribe to the Boko Haram ideology. One such is economic crunch and unemployment owing to successive failure by the political class to create an enviable social and economic atmosphere for development and most importantly youth employment and empowerment. For one, Nigeria is said to be the poverty capital of the world(World Bank, 2018), having taken over from India; and the Northern part of Nigeria is the hardest hit with a poverty rate hovering around 87% in some places, according to official data from the National Bureau of Statistic(NBS, 2019). What is more, as of 2022, the data has been reviewed and it was reported by the Financial Derivative Company that extreme poverty is growing by six-person per minute in Nigeria; and that 93.9 million

Nigerians currently live below the poverty line. The terrorist group therefore uses social media to propagate its deadly ideology. It is not uncommon to watch the former leader of the group via YouTube making speeches half of which is what the ideology stands for, and the second half a threat to the Nigerian State.

In his reaction, the head of The Government Communications Headquarters (GCHQ) faulted social media websites for helping terror groups, while calling for improved ties with intelligence agencies. Chief Africa analyst for Red 24 Ryan Cummings, a crisis management firm, reported that the Twitter account seemed to be just one outlet in a "media network" launched by Boko Haram. He noted the interviews showed a desire to dispel the notion that Boko Haram was killing indiscriminately, and emphasised the group's extremism credentials. "It does seem very legitimate and until it was shut down, offered some very interesting insights into the operations and methodology of the organisation," he said. "The fact that there was no mention of Abubakar Shekau, for example, suggests a new degree of factionalism, and the strengthening of links with groups like Isil which is something he never supported," he added.

One of the group's most widely circulated propaganda was the kidnapping of 276 schoolgirls from Chibok (ECOWAS, 2016; BBC News, 2017). Following the kidnapping, on April 14, 2014, Boko Haram released quite a few clips that included those of Shekau declaring that the girls were 'slaves', which led to a global media movement tagged '#BringBackOurGirls'. The poor nature of the group's video footage showed that it lacked media sophistication before declaring allegiance to ISIL the year after. (Abubakar, 2017).

According to the UNDP commissioned report, Boko Haram's use of the Internet for online recruitment is not as clear as that of other armed groups, such as al-Shabaab or ISIL. Al-Shabaab has created specific recruitment videos and has supposedly made use of chartrooms to contact prospective recruits directly while ISIL has used a variety of platforms, including Telegram, Kik and WhatsApp, to seek direct contact with supporters.

On the other hand, such a proactive strategy is less used in the case of Boko Haram. Physical and online factors both appear to influence recruitment to the group. However, there are concerns that physical recruitment is still central to the dreaded group. Here they use both kidnappings and the use of monetary 'loans' from Boko Haram members as a way to attract recruits, given the high rate of poverty in north-eastern Nigeria, and almost all former members interviewed said their decision to enlist in the group had been influenced by friends, family members or a business colleague. It is therefore not in doubt that offline recruitment is still in vogue by the group. After the Boko Haram and ISIL collaboration and or purported fusion, an improved feature of its communication and coordination began to be seen. On January 27, 2015, a clip showing the JAZ's spokesperson Abu Mus'ab al-Barnawi was released by an ISIL source. This clip was also circulated via the group's Twitter account, al-Urwah al-Wuthqa, and subsequently uploaded, tweeted and spread through ISIL channels. The relationship between ISIL and Boko Haram authenticates the level of online coordination. (Jihadology, 2015).

Similarly, the group has been uploading prerecorded clips through YouTube and famous journalists to the world. For instance, the Jonathan administration tried unsuccessfully in 2012 to negotiate an agreement with Boko Haram through the National Supreme Council on Islamic Affairs. President Goodluck Jonathan declared on May 2, 2014, that his administration had launched a concerted effort to free the kidnapped Chibok girls. (Osasumwen et al., 2017). However, the assurance uttered by Jonathan was countered by a video released on 12 May 2014 by Boko Haram in which Abubakar Shekau was shown amid over 130 girls, demanding a prisoner exchange (Osasumwen et al., 2017). Even under the government of Muhammadu Buhari, negotiations had led to the release of the kidnapped Dapchi girls and even a series of kidnappings in early 2021, including the hundreds of girls abducted from Government Girls Secondary School, a boarding school in Jangebe in Zamfara state in March 2021 (Alfa & Ives, 2021).

Government Responses to Online Radicalization

In his assessment of government interventions, former US Ambassador to Nigeria, John Campbell said in a widely circulated review titled: "Boko Haram: origin, challenges and responses" that credible reports of human rights abuses by the Nigerian security forces create difficulties for outside involvement by democratic states committed to furthering human rights(NOREF, 2014). Meanwhile, the Federal Government in 2019, reviewed its 2014 National Security Strategic document, but it is barely implemented. A huge amount of money has also been spent on security. Yet the Nigerian forces complained of a lack of arms and weapons to engage the insurgents. Nigeria has also refused to recruit more soldiers as the current enrolment rate is grossly inadequate. The Buhari government has continuously claimed that it has strengthened its collaboration with international partners to reverse the trend through the Multi-National Joint Task Force with the regional Intelligence Fusion Unit. The Nigerian government has also initiated a major reorganization of the Counter-Terrorism and Counter-Insurgency operation, codenamed Lafiya Dole and moved the Military Command and Control Centre to Maiduguri in Borno State, the epicentre of the crisis. President Buhari said: "We also facilitated improved funding, procurement, operations, training, logistics and welfare for the security agencies to ramp up security operations across the nation." (Buhari, 2019). There is no gain in saying that there have been, and there are still, attempts by the government to initiate and implement laws that can help reverse the trend of insecurity caused by online subscriptions. One such effort was laid bare in 2021 by the Minister of Information, Lai Muhammed (Akpan, 2021). The Minister, who spoke at the Public Hearing on the amendment of the National Broadcasting Commission (NBC) Act to empower the agency to regulate social and online media, said the federal government had asked the House of Representatives to enact a law to regulate social and online media in Nigeria. Section two (b) of the NBC act states: "(1) The Commission shall have [the] responsibility of Receiving, processing and considering applications for the establishment, ownership or operation of radio and television stations including cable television services,

direct satellite broadcast and any other medium of broadcasting". According to Alao, Osah, and Adam (2019), the 1992 law deregulating the telecommunications business was a watershed moment in the industry, while the GSM revolution, which began in 2000, gave an unconstrained opportunity for Nigerian citizens to use mobile communication services Adesuyi, Oluwafemi, and Abdulhamid, Oluwafemi, Adesuyi, and Abdulhamid (2013). Nigeria's active mobile lines increased to 144 million in December 2017, according to the Nigeria Communication Commission NCC (2018). As a result of the large number of cell phone users, more than 70% of the population is connected to digital communication, albeit some people utilize two or more lines, and criminal elements have unrestricted access. The Nigerian government has taken several practical initiatives.

The regulation issued by the National Communication Commission in May 2010 about the registration of "Subscriber Identity Module" (SIM) cards of mobile phone customers was one of the practical initiatives taken by the Nigerian government to combat cybercrime. Part of the purpose was to monitor and track various types of crimes that could be allowed via the Internet. Because there is no restriction on the number of lines an individual can obtain even from the same service provider, the majority of those who have had their phones stolen or lost may choose not to conduct SIM sap or welcome back, false figures of mobile phone users have resulted. Furthermore, the popularity of local merchants of SIM cards that have already been registered could be a hindrance to such an endeavour. (Tshabalala, 2015).

President Goodluck Jonathan signed the Terrorism Prevention Bill into law on June 3, 2011, as part of government control. In addition, in 2015, the Cybercrimes Act was signed into law. An assessment of the legislation's effectiveness revealed that greater action was needed to ensure cyber security. Attacks on soft targets have continued in Nigeria, demonstrating that enacting legislation without political will, citizenry, and international collaboration is insufficient to combat cyberterrorism. The Boko Haram Terrorist had attacks on the Police Headquarters and the United Nations Building in Abuja, as well as other security

establishments. It's worth noting that the Jonathan administration launched a National Action Plan against Cybercrime in 2014, with internet service providers, domain name registration bodies, telecommunications service providers, and internet exchanges being identified as key players in achieving the aim. It also allowed for control centralization to ensure a quick and effective response to cybercrime (National Security Policy, 2014).

The Nigerian government launched the Nation Action Plan in November 2017 as a follow-up 2017, to enhance the government's position in combating cyber terrorism and terrorism. The goal was to prevent violent extremism (PVE) by focusing on improving Nigerian institutions, including the rule of law and human rights, community capacity participation and resilience, and strategic communication to combat PVE (Office of the National Security Adviser: Counterterrorism Center, 2017).

The success of these action plans cannot be determined at this time. tough The Trump administration has granted the go-ahead for the procurement of military planes to combat terrorists. However, it is public knowledge that security agencies, particularly the Special Anti-Robbery Squad (SARS), have turned the war on cybercrime into a tool for enriching themselves by conducting irrational checks and arrests of youth with phones or laptops, accusing them of cybercrime, and forcing them to withdraw money from their ATM for settlement Ogundipe (2018) and Oludimu (2018). (2018).

According to the FATF (2013), an international NGO/Charity organization in the Middle East's attempt to open an account in Nigeria was frustrated as a result of vigilance in the banking system in Nigeria, and a Suspicious Transaction Report (STR) was filed with the Nigeria Financial Intelligence Unit (NFIU). According to Ajakaye(2014); Komolafe(2013); and Nwaoha, (2013), the Central Bank of Nigeria took proactive steps to block accounts and transactions linked to Boko Haram members and their likely sponsors as part of the Federal Government's measure to curb the ease of financial transaction by criminal elements, including terrorists.

In contrast to the above assertion, The Cable (August 31, 2014) and Varghese (August 31, 2014) reported that an independent Australian hostage negotiator between the Nigerian government and Boko Haram observed that an official in the Central Bank of Nigeria processed financial transactions on behalf of Boko Haram, allowing the group to conceal its funding sources and avoid scrutiny when purchasing equipment. In 2012, the Nigerian government petitioned the US State Department for the training of roughly 200 security professionals and a Nigerian army battalion, citing the necessity for external participation to combat cyber terrorism. The agreement was called off due to the Federal government's purported human rights stance, based on their belief that the Nigerian government had breached the US Leahy Amendment of 2012. As a result, it is clear that the Federal Government's efforts to combat cyberterrorism are ongoing, but the war is far from ending. It must be understood that terrorism is not a typical battle that can be easily won, and terrorists cannot be prevented from embracing and employing current technological innovation. This means that the federal government should take more proactive measures to combat online-motivated radicalization as in the case of Boko Haram and other terrorist groups in Nigeria.

According to a recent analysis of Boko Haram's public messaging, "claimed assaults" (50%) and "strength" (50%) were the two main topics of 2016. (Mahmood, 2017). While the latter can tie into recruiting by portraying the terrorist organization as the victorious side, the former is more closely related to (but not restricted to) propaganda. After the bayah(pledges) to ISIL in 2015, MOWAP was in charge of creating videos about the alleged Boko Haram attacks. These materials were not only better-looking and higher-quality, but they also placed a strong emphasis on attesting to the group's power and effectiveness, which "positively impacted young opinions of the group" (Cox, 2018, 22.).

Responses to Online terrorism threats by security agencies

Major-General John Enenche, a former director of defence information, stated that the newly established information and communication

centre will also be used to monitor social media to identify and respond to any online discourse that is hostile to the government, the military, or security. The armed forces have disseminated information about Boko Haram and other counterinsurgency operations in the theatre of operations via social media. The films, images, and words that the military uploaded on their social media accounts were used by the electronic and print media to report on some of the military's counterinsurgency operations.

The Nigerian military has used social media on several occasions to broadcast films and post images of their offensive operations, including aerial bombardments and the capture of terrorists and criminal groups like the Boko Haram sect. The military, especially the army, has used social media in the theatre of operations to refute the Boko Haram rebels' narrative by uploading and posting graphic images (Alfa, 2016). The military's social media broadcasts appear to have the goal of reestablishing public trust in the armed services.

The Nigerian military's counterinsurgency effort is challenged by its insufficient capacity (in terms of personnel, social media infrastructure, and equipment) to monitor online media. Currently, the National Information Technology Development Agency (NITDA), Nigerian Communications Commission (NCC), and National Broadcasting Commission are in charge of online media (NBC). Despite not being security organizations, these authorities have the resources and infrastructure to enable online media surveillance. In counterinsurgency and counterterrorism circumstances, monitoring online media over time is a useful technique for learning about various patterns and undercurrents within the target audience (Sethi, 2013).

The military and other security organizations are present in the operational area. Nearly all security agencies have included Online Media in their daily operations. However, it seems that one difficulty in military counterinsurgency operations is the lack of coordination in their use of Online Media. The use of Online Media by numerous security services could lead to contradicting information that could endanger the operational actions of personnel in the theatre of operations and Nigeria's national security. A significant difficulty for

the Nigerian military is the development of various social media accounts by people and organizations to spread false information, mislead the public, and misrepresent the military.

False signals that are unrelated to the truth are fake news. For some Online Media users, fake news may be useful, but it also has personal and societal consequences because it makes it harder for people to understand the real status of the world, especially when it comes to military operations (Allcott & Gentzkow, 2017). For instance, the Nigerian Defence Headquarters found a bogus Twitter account called @DefenseMonitor. Using the Defense logo in jest, the Twitter account posts messages that appear to be coming from the Defense Department's headquarters. Additionally, several social media accounts have been made in the Chief of Army Staff's name. These false Online Media profiles are being used to commit crimes and alienate members of the military.

Implications for National Security

Sometime in July 2014, Cameroon's Defense Ministry made a startling revelation that Boko Haram had recruited over 20,000 members. This revelation conveyed strong signals to Nigeria's regular armed forces, whose number hovers around 223,000, according to the World Bank collection of Development Indicators in 2018. However, a journalist with longstanding contact with the group put the estimate of the Boko Haram members at 50,000. Even the lower approximation of 20,000 has already made the 'War Entrepreneurial' group one of the biggest and most dreaded dead merchants around the world. It competes comfortably with militant groups such as Jabhat al-Nusra in Syria, ISIL and pro-Russian militias in eastern Ukraine (Zenn: 2017). The statistics are more worrisome given the fact that there exist more individuals within communities and informants providing unspecified intelligence to the group. This made approximation a difficult task. While many want to describe them as proprietors of death, there are more scary statistics about the fatalities caused by Boko Haram and its allied sisters. For instance, the Nigeria Governors Forum's Peace and Inclusive Security Initiative (PISI), between May 2011 and February 2021, said

over 76,000 fatalities were reported in Nigeria; and can be largely attributable to intra-state and internal conflicts perpetrated by mostly armed non-state actors. (Leadership: 2021).

The Governors also linked the spike to the 40 per cent poverty rate and the marauding activities of Boko Haram, bandits, Farmers-Herders clash, IPOB secession bid, ethnic mistrust, climate change, the proliferation of small arms and light weapons, the weaponisation of social media and the 'instrumentalization' of violence, among others(Daily Trust: 2021).

In a corollary to the above, the United Nations reports that the Boko Haram insurgency which broke out 12 years ago has claimed no fewer than 40,000 lives (BBC June 6, 2021), while about 2.4 million people have been displaced around Lake Chad, an impoverished region divided between Nigeria, Niger and Cameroon (UNHCR, 2019). According to the Global Terrorism Index for 2020, Nigeria is the third most terrorized country in the world. It is only being outstripped by Afghanistan's Taliban and the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL). This means that Nigeria is classified as a country at war. (www.economicsandpeace.org).

With an extremely radical ideological agenda to create a state within the Nigerian state, backed by easy access to recruits and finance; the Jamā'atAhl as-Sunnah lid-Da'wahwa'l-Jihād(JAS) also known as Boko Haram has emerged as the most audacious and deadliest armed non-state actor in the country's intrastate conflict, nay, Nigeria's history(UNHC:2019).

That Boko Haram's Online Media operation affects Nigeria's National Security is perhaps to state the obvious. The main target of the group was to bring or whittle down the multi-religious setting of Nigeria and set up a caliphate state in the Northeast. The activities of the group have not been limited to attacks on government officials and its institutions, but civilians and indeed Muslims are the biggest victims of the terrorists. Arguably one of the major victims of the attacks is the Nigerian economy. Money that should have ordinarily been used to invest and create jobs for Nigerians was being channelled towards the acquisition of arms to confront the terror group. Also, owing to a

humanitarian crisis, people have not been able to go to their farms and businesses, thus creating another stream of poor people, which is a major causative factor of criminality.

The protection and defence of a sovereign state, including its people, economy, and institutions, is referred to as national security or national defence and is viewed as a responsibility of the executive branch of government. National security, which was initially intended to be a defence against military attack, is now widely recognized to encompass non-military aspects as well, such as security from terrorism, reducing crime, economic security, energy security, environmental security, food security, and cyber security. Similar to how other nation-states may act, violent non-state entities like drug cartels, multinational companies, and even the consequences of natural disasters may pose a threat to national security.

The Nigerian Governments rely on a range of measures, including political, economic, and military power, as well as diplomacy, to safeguard the security of the nation-state. Nigeria has also acted to build the conditions of security regionally and internationally by reducing transnational causes of insecurity, such as climate change, economic inequality, political exclusion, and nuclear proliferation. Only last year (2021) Nigeria signed into law the Climate Change Act that empowers it to take certain proactive decisions as it affects the environment, businesses and security.

Conclusion

By examining the connections between Boko Haram's online media strategy and the threats it poses to national security, policymakers in the governmental and institutional domains may be better able to comprehend what the terrorist group stands for. As a result, their counterterrorism policies can be developed appropriately.

However, as seen by its connections to other terrorist organizations, it is rather entangled in global patterns of terrorism. ISIL has been linked to the establishment of the Media Office of the West Africa Province (MOWAP). Understanding the online strategy of Boko Haram could be helpful since the more information available, the better

able we will be to comprehend the reasons why the group engages in terrorism.

We may be able to foresee forthcoming attacks in Nigeria and even put an early halt to them through meticulous research of Boko Haram's Online media comments and video recordings (Ogbondah & Agbese, 2018). The study will also contribute to the expanding body of literature on terrorism and recruitment in the area. We can develop more effective efforts to counter Boko Haram's influence by comprehending the potential connections between its use of social media and the methods by which it recruits its members.

Experts say Nigeria's socio-political environment is conducive to online criminalities. This is so because the government is more focused on politics than governance or enforcing the rules guiding Information Communication Technology. Most efforts to counter online crimes are just on paper. For instance, the government had embarked on the registration of SIM cards, yet the country finds it difficult to fish out bandits and kidnappers terrorizing the northern region. Most negotiations for the payment of ransom to kidnappers are usually carried out using online services including phone calls, SMS, WhatsApp etc.

Extremist groups like Boko Haram spread their views, incite people to violence, glorify martyrs, form online communities with like-minded people, offer moral or legal justifications for violent behaviour, and communicate privately with recruits to train them for violent activities using a combination of conventional websites, popular social media platforms, YouTube, and other online services. To develop measures to counteract online extremist propaganda, this research suggests applying community policing concepts. Citizen engagement is one of the most important elements of community policing. This entails figuring out how the public might help combat various forms of crime and disturbance, such as violent extremists' online appeals. Internet users in the community use social media and surf the web.

They may develop into reliable sources of information about what is happening online and how violent radicals are utilizing it. The Nigerian Police Force should make an effort to get people to report

online extremist activities by using their websites and social media accounts.

In a corollary to online radicalization, surveys, interviews, and focus groups conducted in Nigeria in 2013 suggested that unemployment, poverty, illiteracy and weak family structures contribute to making young men vulnerable to radicalization. The terrorists leverage the situation by conveying a narrative of the government as corrupt, wicked, ungodly and inept.

Beyond the kinetic approach, therefore, Islamic cleric must be prevailed upon to cautiously guide their followership to be wary of online messages. More so, since Nigeria is a multi-religious country, it would not be out of place to create a Ministry for Religious Affairs, where sermons are regulated and coordinated, as it is in countries like Saudi Arabia, Malaysia and Egypt. The freedom to speak truth to power enjoyed by clerics must not however be gag. The battlefield therefore could be said to have shifted to Digital War.

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