



Mitigating the Impact of Media Reporting of Terrorism – Case Study of the #BringBackOurGirls Campaign

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International Centre for
Counter-Terrorism - The Hague



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Strategic Communications Project Report

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This report is part of a wider project, led by the International Centre for Counter-Terrorism (ICCT) – the Hague, and funded by the EU Devco on “Mitigating the Impact of Media Reporting of Terrorism”. This project aims to produce evidence-based guidance and capacity building outputs based on original, context-sensitive research into the risks and opportunities in media reporting of terrorism and terrorist incidents. The role of media reporting on terrorism has been under investigated and is an underutilised dimension of a holistic counter-terrorism strategy. How the media reports on terrorism has the potential to impact counter-terrorism (CT) perspective positively or negatively.



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Key Findings

- The #BringBackOurGirls campaign gained traction nationally and internationally following the 2014 kidnapping of 276 schoolgirls at their school in Chibok, Nigeria by Boko Haram terrorists. However, it was largely a missed opportunity for both the Nigerian government and the media in Nigeria, both in terms of rallying the civil populace and producing effective counter-terrorism messaging. This being because it was received by the government as a dissenting voice and by the media as a competing platform.
- The #BringBackOurGirls global media campaign was an indication that, to a large extent, the international media set the agenda for Nigerian media in terms of reporting terrorism. This trend continues to shape Nigeria's media landscape.
- There were no benchmark editorial policies or codes of ethics in reporting terrorism. This is further hindered by a sharp difference in contents and the use of language and style between the 'Lagos corridor' and 'Kaduna corridor' media houses.
- The media ownership landscape in Nigeria is deeply rooted in ethnic, political, and religious contexts and disparities. The coverage during and in the aftermath of the Chibok girls' kidnapping exposed how ownership patterns often affect media coverage in the country.
- The 2015 general election—which, for the first time in the history of Nigeria, saw an opposition candidate defeat an incumbent central government—undermined and all but put an end to the activities of the #BringBackOurGirls campaign.
- The Nigerian government, past and present, saw the activities of the #BringBackOurGirls as a threat rather than a call for collective responsibility. #BringBackOurGirls' constant and consistent demand for the release of the Chibok girls and others in Boko Haram captivity irked the previous government because it exposed its response to the kidnapping to international scrutiny. Having risen to power partly on the support of civil rights groups and campaigns such as the #BringBackOurGirls with a promise to rescue the girls, the present government began a clampdown on the group's activities once it was unable to fulfil the promise of securing the release of all the girls.
- It was unanimous among respondents that reporting on terrorism has improved since Chibok. Television has shown the most noticeable improvement in terms of content, while print media too has improved, significantly de-emphasising terrorist propaganda. However, most respondents fear that the line between responsible reporting and the responsibility to report terrorism-related news remains blurred.
- There is still mutual mistrust between government communicators and Nigerian journalists reporting terrorism.

Introduction

This incident-based case study research is part of a larger research project which seeks to investigate the impact of media reporting of terrorism on counter-terrorism and develop approaches to minimise the negative and maximise the positive impacts of that reporting.

The 2014 kidnapping by Boko Haram of 276 female students at the Government Girls Secondary School, Chibok, Borno State, Nigeria, sparked a global communication campaign aiming to ensure the rescue of those girls. Using the #BringBackOurGirls slogan, the campaign was able to galvanise high-profile supporters globally and draw condemnation against both the terrorist group's activities and the Nigerian government's inadequate response. This project investigated:

How the #BringBackOurGirls campaign played out across Nigeria's media ecosystem; its impact on perceptions of Boko Haram and of the Nigerian government; if the campaign had a different impact domestically compared to internationally; if the campaign had a direct impact on rescue operation; and whether lessons could be learnt from the Nigerian government's response to the incident.

Methodology

The primary research question of this project is “*what is the impact—positive and negative—of media reporting of terrorism in the countries most affected by terrorist threats?*” The consequent findings and analysis aim to produce evidence-based guidance and capacity-building outputs based on original, context-sensitive research into the risks and opportunities in media reporting of terrorism and terrorist incidents.

The sources used in this research included media reports, published reports and documented reactions by government spokespersons as well as civil society groups between 2012 and 2019. These were supplemented by focus group discussions, interviews with 26 defence correspondents and editors, interviews with eight key informants among conflict response coordinators in the civil society space, and with three government communicators. Those interviews were carried out at locations in Abuja and Kaduna.

The respondents approached during this study were those who had, at one point or another, been involved in the media coverage, response management, or government communication of terrorist and counter-terrorist activities.

A mix of correspondents, editors, key informants, and government communicators were interviewed, while the focus group discussions were conducted strictly

with journalists as attendees. Owing to the sensitivity around terrorism and counter-terrorism reporting and research, respondents were allowed to choose their preferred mode of interview, while the focus group discussions were staggered to accommodate attendees' conveniences.

One of the biggest challenges experienced during the course of data collection was the reluctance—and in most cases, refusal—of government communicators to provide information, even when they were assured that it was strictly for research purposes and that they would remain anonymous. Of the ten potential government communicators approached, only three agreed to be interviewed and only one of the three permitted the researcher to record audio. Had more government communicators responded, there could have been a broader view on the impact of media reporting on the #BringBackOurGirls campaign.

The researcher was also confronted with journalists and editors requesting financial details of the research project and demanding money before they could respond. Finally, fieldwork could not be conducted in Maiduguri, Borno State as initially planned due to logistical and security constraints. These constraints included the Christmas/year-end festivities (when many potential respondents were on holiday) and a resurgence in the activities of Boko Haram around Maiduguri during the data collection period.

The Context

The *Jama'tulahlul Sunnah Lidda'awati Wal Jihad* (which roughly translates to Islamic Movement against Western Civilisation), also known as Boko Haram, emerged in Borno State, northeast Nigeria in 2000. The group was founded by the late Mohammed Yusuf. In 2003, Yusuf moved to Kanamma, Yobe State, close to the border with Niger Republic, to a base referred to as 'Afghanistan'.¹ In 2009—in the aftermath of Yusuf's killing by Nigerian security agents—the group's activities took an even more violent turn.

On April 14, 2014, Boko Haram fighters broke into Government Girls Secondary School, Chibok, north-eastern Nigeria and forcibly removed 276 girls from the school. It was later reported that fifty-seven of the schoolgirls jumped off the truck conveying them and managed to escape. The kidnapping led to the #BringBackOurGirls media campaign championed by Oby Ezekwesili, Aisha Yesufu, Bukky Shonibare, Hadiza Bala Usman and others which, in turn, sparked international response. Almost six years later, out of the 219 girls that were taken away, 107 girls have either been found or released by Boko Haram after it struck a deal with the Nigerian government. At least 112 girls are still missing.²

Prior to the 2014 kidnapping, Boko Haram had been

¹ Nigerian Government, 'Nigeria's Countering Violent Extremism Programme', Office of the National Security Adviser, 2014
² Mbah, Fidelis. "Nigeria's Chibok schoolgirls: Five years on, 112 still missing", Al Jazeera, April 14, 2019. Available at: <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2019/04/nigeria-chibok-school-girls-years-112-missing-190413192517739.html>, accessed: January 16, 2020

attacking schools, killing, and taking students hostage. Attacks on student hostels were reported in Damaturu, Yola, Mubi, Gwoza, BuniYadi, Potiskum, and other parts of the northeast of Nigeria before the Chibok incident.³ However, it was the kidnap of 276 Chibok schoolgirls that drew global attention to Boko Haram's strategy of attacking schools and led to the #BringBackOurGirls campaign.

Shortly after the Chibok schoolgirls were kidnapped, Oby Ezekwesili, former vice president of the World Bank for Africa, gave an emotional speech in which she demanded that the Nigerian government should 'bring back our girls'. The phrase stuck among social media influencers in Nigeria—especially, on Twitter. Sensing an opportunity to use the momentum and platform to reach global audience, Ezekwesili teamed up with other rights activists to form the #BringBackOurGirls group.⁴

With Ezekwesili's rallying speech in Port Harcourt, Rivers State, Nigeria, the #BringBackOurGirls campaign instantly resonated among the Nigerian populace—which was already outraged by the insecurity and threats to lives and property caused by Boko Haram through previous soft target attacks. In no time, millions of Nigerians at home and abroad, as well as millions of celebrities, world leaders, human rights activists, and ordinary people around the world, took to the streets and/or their social media platforms with banners and posters reading 'Bring Back Our Girls'.

Two factors added momentum to the campaign. First, the fact that the victims were girls and mostly Christians lent credence to the perception of Boko Haram's modus operandi as an Islamist group which targets vulnerable populations, which had been denied by some Muslim clerics in northern Nigeria. Secondly, it was widely believed that crisis communication responses by the Nigerian government shortly after the Chibok girls were kidnapped was poor. Analysis of media reports suggests that the Nigerian government failed to respond swiftly to the incident and later, when it did, the response was heavily politicised. For instance, Newsweek reported that, "[a]lmost three weeks after their abduction, (Goodluck) Jonathan spoke out on the girls for the first time. 'Wherever these girls are, we will surely get them out,' said Jonathan." They also reported that #BringBackOurGirls campaign group clashed with Jonathan's administration when the then Nigerian president accused the group of manipulating "victims of terrorism".⁵

In an extract from "Nigeria: Dancing on the Brink"

published on his 'Africa in Transition' blog, former US ambassador to Nigeria, John Campbell, said about the Nigerian government's response to the Chibok girls' kidnapping:

"First Lady Michelle Obama joined many celebrities in an international 'bring back our girls' campaign. In Nigeria, the Jonathan administration, at first, did not take action. The Nigerian first lady characterised the kidnapping as a hoax. But Nigerian civil society, led by former education minister Oby Ezekwesili, among others, successfully pressured the Jonathan administration to take action, though to little avail... Further, the Nigerian government downplays Boko Haram and more or less continually claims that its destruction is at hand..."⁶

Among global figures who endorsed the #BringBackOurGirls hashtag were President Barack Obama, First Lady Michelle Obama, civil rights campaigner Malala Yousafzai, former British Prime Minister David Cameron, and Hollywood actor Angelina Jolie. By the end of 2014, #BringBackOurGirls was one of the most used hashtags on social media and was — perhaps still is — the most intense social media campaign to come out of Nigeria.⁷

From this research, two key reasons were identified why the #BringBackOurGirls campaign was very effective in demanding and receiving the response of the Nigerian government to bring back abducted Chibok girls. Firstly, the group's diverse and female-driven composition made it a credible point of convergence for building a sustained coalition encompassing political leaders, celebrities, youth activists, students, human rights groups, and other concerned Nigerians because women had less political affiliations and were less likely to trump up sentiments such as religion and ethnicity which often discredit such campaigns. This made the #BringBackOurGirls campaign transcend age, gender, ethnicity, and religion. Ezekwesili, Aisha Yesufu, Bukky Shonibare, and Hadiza Bala Usman, who were the faces of the group, are all women.

Another reason for the group's effectiveness was its ability to transition its campaign from social media to the streets. Members of the #BringBackOurGirls embarked on monthly protests in Lagos and Abuja, and on daily sit-outs at the Unity Fountain Park, Abuja. They also used milestones in the timeline of the Chibok girls' abduction (such as anniversaries of the abduction and release of some of the girls) to remind the government that some of the girls were still in Boko Haram captivity.⁸

3 Human Rights Watch. "They Set the Classrooms on Fire: Attacks on Education in Northeast Nigeria", Human Rights Watch, April 11, 2016, <https://www.hrw.org/node/288584/>, accessed: March 28, 2020

4 Personal Interview with a founding member of the #BringBackOurGirls group, who was also a key informant (via Twitter Direct Message), Abuja, 17 December, 2019

5 Gaffey, Conor. "Bring Back Our Girls: A Brief History of What We Know about the Missing Chibok Women", Newsweek, April 14, 2017. Available at: <https://www.newsweek.com/chibok-girls-boko-haram-583584>, accessed: March 25, 2020

6 Campbell, John. "Five Years After Kidnapping, Nigeria's Chibok School Girls Fade From the International Scene", Council on Foreign Relations, 28 June, 2019. Available at: <https://www.cfr.org/blog/five-years-after-kidnapping-nigerias-chibok-school-girls-fade-international-scene>, accessed: February 18, 2020

7 Uzorji, Basil. "Bring Back Our Girls – A Global Movement for the Release of the Chibok Schoolgirls", A Research Paper Published by the International Centre for Ethno-Religious Mediation (ICERM), New York, 2017. Available at: <https://www.icermediation.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/08/Bring-Back-Our-Girls-A-Global-Movement-for-the-Release-of-the-Chibok-Schoolgirls-by-Basil-Ugorji.pdf>, accessed: February 10, 2020

8 Ojebode, A. and Oladapo, W., "Using Social Media for Long-Haul Activism: Lessons from the BBOG Movement in Nigeria". Utafiti Sera Research Brief

Findings

One of the first impacts of the campaign was to put pressure on the Nigerian government to come up with a form of immediate response by announcing a reward for information leading to the release of the schoolgirls and accepting international assistance for their search.⁹ However, the greatest impact of the #BringBackOurGirls group was attracting global attention to the incident in particular, and to Boko Haram's activities in north eastern Nigeria more broadly.

Between 2016 and 2017, the media reported the release of some Chibok girls. In October 2016, twenty-one girls were released after negotiations with the Red Cross, while in May 2017, after further negotiations, another eighty-two were reported to have been handed over to the Nigerian government in exchange for some detained Boko Haram suspects. Media reports, however, suggested that details of the negotiations—such as how many Boko Haram suspects were freed in exchange for the schoolgirls and whether they included payment to the group—were not made public.¹⁰

In addition to these releases, the #BringBackOurGirls group continued its campaign for the remaining girls to be released. Indeed, the campaign expanded to include other abducted schoolgirls such as Leah Sharibu, a student of Government Girls' Science and Technical College, Dapchi, Yobe State, who, along with 109 of her classmates, were kidnapped in their school by Boko Haram in February 2018. The kidnapping of another group of schoolgirls attracted media attention, embarrassed the Nigerian government and prompted it to quickly enter into negotiations with Boko Haram for their immediate release. In March 2018, the Nigerian government announced that the group had returned all the Dapchi schoolgirls in captivity, except Sharibu, who Boko Haram said had refused to renounce her faith.¹¹ Miss Sharibu became the new face of the #BringBackOurGirls campaign.

Although 112 Chibok schoolgirls and many others, including Sharibu, are still missing, the #BringBackOurGirls communication campaign changed Nigeria's media ecosystem and directly impacted citizens' demand for action, changed perceptions of Boko Haram, and provided lessons in rescue operation and post-incident communication response to terrorist activities.

The #BringBackOurGirls campaign gained traction nationally and internationally following the 2014 kidnapping of 276 schoolgirls at their school in Chibok, Nigeria by Boko Haram terrorists. However, it was largely a missed opportunity for both the Nigerian government and the media in Nigeria, both in terms of rallying the civil populace and producing effective counter-terrorism messaging. This is because it was received by the government as a dissenting voice and by the media as a competing platform.

On the Nigerian government's side, many public affairs commentators and key informant respondents believed that communications around the Chibok kidnapping were far from being well-conducted.¹² It was also unanimously agreed among interview respondents that the government's response to the incident lacked adequate energy, coordination, clarity, consistency, and transparency. One respondent¹³ said that a poor immediate response from the Nigerian government led to the #BringBackOurGirls campaign in the first place and that those shortcomings in government communications were evident in the dissatisfaction of citizens and adverse commentary by the international community.¹⁴ There were media reports that the Nigerian government initially denied the incident and later, when it admitted that the schoolgirls had in fact been kidnapped, attributed it to political opposition. Another respondent said this about the government's response:

"If you remember, instead of the Goodluck Jonathan-led government to rally the nation together and address the issue from a united front as Nigerians versus Boko Haram, he unleashed his spokespersons on the nation to spin the narrative as a political fiction. That was after many government officials, including the then minister of information and national orientation, Labaran Maku, had denied that schoolgirls were kidnapped. It took about three days before the government came out to say, yes, those schoolgirls were forcefully taken from their hostels. Of course, you remember the drama former first lady, Patience Jonathan, displayed on live television when she accused the principal of the school in Chibok and the victims' parents of trying to embarrass her husband's government."¹⁵

Other respondents agreed that the first implication of the government's earliest response to the Chibok

Series, Nairobi: Partnership for African Social & Governance Research (PASGR). July 2018. Available at: <https://www.ids.ac.uk/publications/using-social-media-for-long-haul-activism-lessons-from-the-bbog-movement-in-nigeria/>, accessed: March 27, 2020

9 Clarke, Kamari 'Keynote Lecture on Hashtag Activism', speech given at Society for the Humanities Annual Conference on Corruption in New York, October 2017. Available at: <https://www.ids.ac.uk/publications/using-social-media-for-long-haul-activism-lessons-from-the-bbog-movement-in-nigeria/>, accessed: March 18, 2020

10 Hegarty, Stephanie. "Nigeria Chibok Girls: Eighty-two Freed by Boko Haram", BBC, May 7, 2017. Available at: <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-39833309>, accessed: March 25, 2020

11 Boko Haram did not let Leah Sharibu return because she did not renounce her Christian faith

12 Respondents 9, 10, 11, 12 and 15

13 Respondent 9

14 Personal Interview with a founding member of the #BringBackOurGirls group, who was also a key informant (via Twitter Direct Message), Abuja, 17 December, 2019

15 Respondent 10

crisis was to further widen the gap of mistrust between government and the civil populace.¹⁶

On the side of the media, respondents admitted that there were shortcomings in the way the media handled the Chibok story.¹⁷ Some of these respondents also felt more should have been done by government communicators in terms of providing the media with adequate information.¹⁸ It was unanimous among respondents that—lacking in the requisite access, resources, and capacity to effectively report terrorism and violent extremism—the Nigerian media simply did not know how to go about reporting the kidnapping of the schoolgirls. A respondent, who was working in an Abuja-based newspaper when they received news of the kidnapping, said:

“Although kidnapping was not new to Boko Haram as a strategy, we were simply confused in the newsroom about how to report that particular story. We did not know the implication of the abduction and we were not getting any confirmation from the Nigerian military. It was a state of confusion.”¹⁹

As has been the case in many crisis communication situations, the press was torn between professionalism and patriotism in the coverage of the Chibok story.²⁰ Respondents recalled the pre-amnesty Niger Delta militancy.²¹ During this time, reporters who had access to the militants and were giving regular updates about militants’ activities were reported to be harassed by the Nigerian military and government as enemies of the state and conspirators. Also cited by some respondents was the case of Ahmad Silkida—an investigative journalist covering Boko Haram, who the Nigerian government labelled a traitor for keeping his sources anonymous.²² Some respondents said that, at the early stage of the abduction of the Chibok schoolgirls, they were afraid of the Nigerian military’s response to whatever they reported, especially when access to both the scene of the abduction and official information was very difficult to come by.²³ Respondents from private media organisations unanimously agreed that the two terms, professionalism and patriotism, had not been appropriately defined, as the media’s definition is different from the government’s definition. One respondent, who had covered Boko Haram terrorism in the north eastern part of Nigeria as a defence correspondent, stated:

“When a government official talks about patriotism in reference to media reporting, they very often mean you should suppress the truth where it

hurts government and amplify it when it favours government. On the other hand, a journalist often feels that negative reporting is what makes them professional; that just putting negative content out there without thinking of its implications on victims, communities, intelligence gathering, etc is professional.”²⁴

However, another respondent said this about professionalism versus patriotism:

“Nobody is saying the media should be censored but they should report in such a way that they don’t instil fear on the civil populace and not to embolden the terrorists. Responsibility lies on the media to ensure that terrorist reporting to be measured. Yes, there is the responsibility to report the news. However, there also should be the responsibility not to amplify terrorists’ agenda.”²⁵

One respondent who, at the time of the Chibok girls’ abduction held a senior position in a newspaper in Nigeria, said that in reporting the Chibok kidnapping, the media, for many reasons, resolved to sensationalism, the promotion of political, ethnic, religious, and business interests, as well as the commercialisation of headlines.²⁶ As such, the respondent continued, the media displayed a lack of understanding of the impact and implication of its reporting on families of the kidnapped schoolgirls, their friends and communities, as well as on the larger civil population.

On the other hand, the respondent said that the Nigerian military and government felt that it was necessary to restrict access to information about the kidnapping and thus, cleared a few government-owned media houses for carefully guided coverage of events to guarantee preferred reporting. “However, it only further dented public confidence about the commitment of the Nigerian government to rescue the kidnapped girls. It was that public confidence vacuum that the #BringBackOurGirls campaign filled very effectively” the respondent said.²⁷ For instance, some respondents — many of whom had covered the Chibok story and other conflict-sensitive stories — said the first thing the Nigerian military often does in such situations is prevent the media from talking to eyewitnesses and/or members of the community where a security incident had occurred.²⁸ The reason, they said, was to ensure that the press did not get the accurate story from the angle of those most affected for fear of exposing certain lapses on the military’s part. One respondent explained:

16 Respondents 1, 2, 3, 4, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 20, 21, 25, 26, 27, 32, 33 and 34

17 Respondents 5, 6, 17, 18, 19, 24, 28, 29, 30, 31 and 32

18 Respondents 17, 18 and 19

19 Respondent 1

20 Respondent 3

21 Respondents 2, 3, 7, 8, 20, 21, 22, 23, 24, 25, 36 and 37

22 Respondents 11, 36 and 37

23 Respondents 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 20, 22, 36 and 37

24 Respondent 3

25 Respondent 19

26 Respondent 11

27 Respondent 11

28 Respondents 6, 7, 8, 27, 28, 29, 30, 31, 32, 33, 34, 36 and 37

“If it is not Nigeria Television Authority (NTA), Federal Radio Corporation of Nigeria (FRCN), Voice of Nigeria (VON) or the News Agency of Nigeria (NAN)—which they know won’t give the military and government “bad” press because they are 100 per cent bankrolled by government—you can’t get certain information from them.”²⁹

This position was overwhelmingly agreed with by interviewees from private media houses. Analysis of media coverage also showed that much of the information given to journalists by government communicators on issues of security cannot be verified by the media as a result of restricted access, except in a few cases when international research or non-governmental organisations release evidence-based reports.

It was unanimous among respondents that when the #BringBackOurGirls campaign emerged as a direct result of the Nigerian government’s poor response to the kidnapping and the media’s ineffective coverage, the group was regarded as a third force with its own agenda. Many respondents believed that had the government, media, and #BringBackOurGirls conveners worked as partners when the Chibok schoolgirls were kidnapped, the campaign would have made more substantial gains than merely bringing the issue to global attention.³⁰

The #BringBackOurGirls global media campaign was an indication that, to a great extent, the international media set the agenda for Nigerian media in terms of reporting terrorism. This trend continues to shape Nigeria’s media landscape.

The media ecosystem in Nigeria has changed as it has the world over. The advent of social media, which has changed both news consumption patterns and media responsibility, has given birth to pervasive communication in the internet era. Nigeria has one of the fastest growing telecommunications environments.³¹ The implication of this is that, more than before, opinions are now increasingly received and formed at the level of ordinary people and foreign entities—not merely from local and national authorities.

All but five respondents agreed that a lack of access to information is one of the major challenges faced in reporting conflict generally in Nigeria.³² All respondents in the journalist/editor category unanimously and strongly believed that when the Nigerian government

and military denied local journalists access to information in the wake of the Chibok abduction, understanding the situation and reporting accurately became a challenge for the local media. On the other hand, analysis of media coverage showed that wider reach and better standards make government communicators rather take information to international media. We therefore have strong reasons to believe that a combination of these challenges makes the local media cede the responsibility of setting the editorial agenda to international media organisations. One respondent, who had experience in multiple areas of communication, said that the incidents that followed the Chibok girls’ abduction were indicative of the shortcomings of the Nigerian media in reporting terrorism and violent extremism:

“The Nigerian media was simply waiting for international media organisations such as CNN, BBC and Al Jazeera to lead the charge while they simply toe the line. There is this mindset in the Nigerian media landscape that once these international media organisations report the story of a local event, then such [a] story is newsworthy and should be amplified.”³³

They identified the challenge of having access to stories as one of the reasons foreign media continues to set the local agenda for Nigerian media. In the case of the Chibok crisis, as part of crisis communication response to the popularity of the #BringBackOurGirls campaign, analysis of media coverage indicated that the Nigerian military and government communicators gave foreign media access to information to show to the world that post-incident measures were being taken.³⁴ This, according to analysis of our focus group sessions, deprived the local media of an opportunity to focus on issues such as how the families of the kidnapped girls were living through the ordeal, what it meant to their communities, what stories of resilience were there to be told, and what kind of post-incident assistance could be given to traumatised families and communities. Before the #BringBackOurGirls campaign drew global attention to the Chibok crisis in particular and Boko Haram terrorism in general, the media under-reported the kidnappings and previous Boko Haram attacks on schools in Borno, Yobe, and Adamawa states in northeast Nigeria.³⁵ Some respondents, many of whom are or had been defence correspondents, admitted that, for a fault not solely theirs, Nigerian journalists simply did not go and find the story for themselves and, thus, were not in control of the kind of contents the civil populace

29 Respondent 27

30 Respondents 3, 4, 5, 6, 9, 12, 14, 15, 16, 23, 24, 28 and 37

31 Nigeria’s internet penetration is among the fastest growing in the world, with 92.3 million active users amounting to 47.1 per cent internet penetration in 2018 and a projected growth to 187.8 million internet users by 2023. See: <http://www.statista.com/statistics/183849/internet-users-nigeria/>, accessed: December 23, 2019

32 Respondents 10, 16, 17, 18 and 19

33 Respondent 12

34 Oputu, Edirin. “Nigerian Journalists are Struggling to Cover #BringBackOurGirls: The Challenge of Reporting on Boko Haram”, *Columbia Journalism Review*, May 14, 2014, http://archives.cjr.org/behind_the_news/nigerian_journalists_are_strug.php, accessed: January 23, 2020; Gever, Verlumun Celestine. “Analysis of Foreign and Local Broadcast Media Coverage of Boko Haram Insurgency in Nigeria”, *ResearchGate*, November 19, 2019, http://www.researchgate.net/publication/337313026_Analysis_of_Foreign_and_Local_Broadcast_Media_Coverage_of_Boko_Haram_Insurgency_in_Nigeria_Analysis_of_Foreign_and_Local_Broadcast_Media_Coverage_of_Boko_Haram_Insurgency_in_Nigeria, accessed: February 17, 2020

35 Cartner, Holly. ‘I Will Never Go Back to School: The Impact of Attacks on Education for Nigerian Women and Girls’. *Global Coalition to Protect Education from Attack Report*, October 2018, Available at: http://www.protectingeducation.org/sites/default/files/documents/attacks_on_nigerian_women_and_girls.pdf, accessed: January 28, 2020

consumed.³⁶ Another respondent, a freelance journalist who previously worked as a cameraman in defence and security, said:

“Journalists’ safety is not guaranteed when the military does not approve of them going to conflict areas and will not agree to embedding them. We simply rely on what the military tells us and although we want to do more it is difficult to go and find the story when we are not treated as partners.”³⁷

Another respondent confirmed that their security outfit does not actually embed local journalists during security operations.³⁸

Respondents identified poor funding, inadequate capacity development, lack of curiosity or interest, and limited access in the local media industry as some of the reasons why the #BringBackOurGirls campaign became a platform through which the Chibok story was presented to the international audience.³⁹ Respondents’ feedback, focus group discussions, analysis of media coverage, showed that the majority of the private media in Nigeria are struggling to stay financially afloat.⁴⁰ Many rely on some form of political patronage through proximity to either the central government or provincial governments.⁴¹ This has a direct implication on quality of content and independence of the media. Poor funding also means that the welfare of journalists suffers, and adequate attention is not paid to their training or retraining. Some of these respondents said that, amidst all these challenges, it was easier and more cost-effective for the local media to rely on its foreign counterparts who have the resources, expertise, and access to tell the story—even if it meant allowing the international media to not only tell the story, but to drive it.⁴²

There were no benchmark editorial policies and codes of ethics in reporting on terrorism. This was hindered further by a sharp difference in content, and the use of language and style between the ‘Lagos corridor’ and ‘Kaduna corridor’ media houses.

Many media houses in Nigeria have style books and general guides on how to report violence such as rape, assault, murder, etc. However, this research could not establish that any Nigerian media house has a specific code of ethics for reporting terrorism or violent extremism. The Nigerian Press Council, the Nigerian government’s press regulatory body, has a Code of Ethics which Nigeria’s print media is expected to be

guided by. Curiously, the document only mentions the term ‘terrorist’ once, in Article 8 on violence, when it states that: “A journalist should not present or report [an] act of violence, armed robberies, terrorist activities or vulgar display of wealth in a manner that glorifies such acts in the eyes of the public.”⁴³ Similarly, there is no dedicated provision for broadcasting terrorism and violent extremism in the most recent version of the Nigeria Broadcasting Code (5th Edition), as published by Nigeria’s broadcast regulators, the National Broadcasting Commission. It is only in Section 1.3.2 under Coverage of Crisis, Disasters and Emergency that the code states that: “The broadcaster shall observe caution, empathy and due sensitivity in the coverage and presentation of emergencies, calamities, riots, grief, etc.”⁴⁴

One of the challenges of agreeing on a reporting template for covering terrorism and violent extremism in Nigerian media is the division in style and language use between what is referred to as the ‘Lagos corridor’ and the ‘Kaduna corridor’ press. Media houses, especially newspapers, established and based in Lagos and other south-western cities in Nigeria tend to be more liberal and more accepted by the secular population. On the other hand, media houses established in the Kaduna, Kano, and other cities in the northern part of the country are more conservative in the matters of religion and ethnic identity, thus having a narrow but devoted followership. This makes it very difficult to arrive, for instance, at a common description of Boko Haram. While the ‘Lagos corridor’ media is open to labelling Boko Haram ‘Islamist’, ‘terrorist’, or ‘jihadist’, the ‘Kaduna corridor’ media often prefers the terms ‘insurgent’ or ‘militant’ because ideological terrorism is an emotive subject to a sizeable number of their audience. Respondents unanimously agreed that more than in any other subject, people simply trust media that reflect their own emotive views while distrusting those which do not.

What often plays out in the reporting of terrorism is that the ‘Lagos corridor’, which presents Boko Haram as an Islamist terrorist organisation, highlights and amplifies the group’s attacks when they appear to be directed at Christian or liberal targets. On the other hand, the ‘Kaduna corridor’, which rejects the tag of ‘Islamist terrorists’, downplays Boko Haram attacks on Christian and liberal targets but highlights attacks on fellow Muslims as proof that the group bears no association with Islam. With this kind of slanted presentation, some respondents said it would be difficult to come up with an agreeable code of ethics for reporting terrorism.⁴⁵ Another respondent, who is familiar with both Lagos and Abuja, shared his experience:

36 Respondents 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 10, 14, 15, 16, 27, 28, 29, 30, 31, 32, 36 and 37

37 Respondent 33

38 Respondent 17

39 Respondents 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18 and 19

40 Oxford Business Group, ‘Nigeria’s media landscape undergoes rapid change.’ Report: Nigeria 2020. Available at <https://oxfordbusinessgroup.com/overview/engaging-modern-audience-sector-undergoes-period-rapid-change>, accessed: October 21, 2020

41 Kolawole, Simon and Emeka Umejei. “Media Landscapes: Expert Analyses of the State of Media”. 2020. Available at <https://medialandscapes.org/country/nigeria>, accessed: October 19, 2020

42 Respondents 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15 and 16

43 The Nigerian Press Council, “Code of Ethics”, <http://www.presscouncil.gov.ng/>

44 National Broadcasting Commission, “Broadcast Code”, Available at: <https://www.nbc.gov.ng/publications-and-paper>, accessed: December 22, 2019

45 Respondents 9, 11, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18 and 19

“A few years ago, I was part of a group of editors, journalists and government spokespersons who attended a media workshop on reporting terrorism. The most contentious issue discussed at the workshop was how to best label Boko Haram—Islamist group, insurgent group, militant group or just terrorist group? Many government spokespersons and journalists working for northern-based newspapers rejected any description that would suggest a religious connotation and even suggested that we refer to them as bandits or gunmen. A session during the workshop wanted us to come up with a template for reporting terrorism but we could not because, for two days, we could not agree on how best to describe Boko Haram. Recently, the president was responding to a report about Boko Haram persecuting Christians in the northern part of the country and said ninety per cent of the group’s victims had been Muslims.⁴⁶ His response was received and reported differently by the media, depending on the north-south dichotomy. This is the challenge we are facing.”⁴⁷

The media ownership landscape in Nigeria is deeply rooted in ethnic, political, and religious contexts and disparities. The coverage during and in the aftermath of the Chibok girls’ kidnapping exposed how ownership patterns often affect media coverage in the country.

At the heart of the visible editorial policy differences between northern-based newspapers and those in the southern part of Nigeria is media ownership. Media ownership in Nigeria is deeply influenced by the perceived necessity to fight perceived political/economic opponents, to access public funds through propaganda and politicisation of media content and to represent the interest of a group.⁴⁸ These have served as impediments to establishing an acceptable code of conduct. Media content is heavily influenced by ownership, which, in turn, is influenced by politics, ethnicity, religion, and financial interests. In a country where the government is by far the largest investor, media client and spender, it is easy for editorial content to be influenced by marketing. Respondents said they had had cause to take down editorial content at the instruction of their editors-in-chief and/or media owners for fear that such contents could deprive the establishment of government’s patronage — even when such content were factual.⁴⁹ One respondent—whose media organisation recently wrote an editorial critical of the Nigerian government where certain editorial policies were announced regarding Nigeria’s security situation — claimed to be

aware of the blacklisting of a media organisation among government ministries, departments, and agencies from advertorials and sponsored special publications.⁵⁰

In the case of the Chibok girls’ kidnapping and the eventual emergence of the #BringBackOurGirls media campaign, respondents in private media houses said many of these houses whose owners or backers were close to the central government were reluctant to give full coverage to the story of the girls and the activities of the #BringBackOurGirls group.⁵¹ They said editors were simply afraid of any backlash such reports could generate. Another respondent said media organisations which gave fuller coverage to the Chibok story and #BringBackOurGirls activities were tagged as ‘opposition’ media houses by politicians in government.⁵² Interestingly, the same respondent said that a close look at the setup of such media houses showed that their owners or backers were indeed closer to then opposition politicians than those in government. Another respondent, who worked in a pro-government newspaper, said of the Chibok schoolgirls’ abduction:

“The owner of a media organisation was very close to the then federal government and would have his journalists report routine only stories about the abduction. On many occasions the organisation declined press invitation by the #BringBackOurGirls group, whether to cover a protest or press conference. The reporters were simply being cautious because what is the point of covering an event whose story you are almost certain the editors in the newsroom would not use?”⁵³

The 2015 general election — which, for the first time in the history of Nigeria, saw an opposition candidate defeat an incumbent central government — undermined and all but put an end to the activities of the #BringBackOurGirls campaign.

In 2015, for the first time since Nigeria returned to democratic governance in 1999, an opposition political party defeated the central government. Before then, members of the then major opposition aligned with the #BringBackOurGirls campaign and openly joined the group to call for the rescue of Chibok girls, with a promise to tackle insecurity if voted into power. When the opposition formed the central government after the general election, the #BringBackOurGirls group continued to demand the return of Chibok girls and others in Boko Haram captivity. When there was limited success in terms of the security situation, the government

46 Daka, Terhemba. “90% of Boko Haram Victims are Muslims – Buhari”, The Guardian, February 4, 2020. Available at: <https://guardian.ng/news/90-of-boko-haram-victims-are-muslims-buhari/>, accessed: March 23, 2020

47 Respondent 3

48 Okwuchukwu, Okafor Godson. “The Influence of Media Ownership and Control on Media Agenda Setting in Nigeria” International Journal of Humanities Social Sciences and Education. July 2014. Available at: <https://www.arcjournals.org/pdfs/ijhss/v1-i7/5.pdf>, accessed: October 19, 2020

49 Respondents 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6 and 7

50 Respondent 34

51 Respondents 1, 2, 27, 28, 29, 36 and 37

52 Respondent 36

53 Respondent 3

turned on the #BringBackOurGirls campaigners.

When, during the 2019 general elections, Oby Ezekwesili, a co-convenor of the group, decided to run for president, the government discredited the #BringBackOurGirls group and its members, questioning the group's motive from the outset and accusing its leaders of using the campaign as a platform for furthering their political interests. In effect, the objectives of the group were deeply delegitimised and this drastically affected its activities.⁵⁴

The political party on whose platform Ezekwesili intended to run for president was engulfed in a serious intra-party crisis and there were media reports that the fallout of the crisis negatively affected Ezekwesili as a political activist.⁵⁵ Three respondents who claimed to be close to Ezekwesili, said she regretted accepting to run for president under the political party because it did more harm than good to her work as an activist.⁵⁶ Analysis of media coverage showed that in the runoff to the 2019 election, the incumbent government—which had aligned with the #BringBackOurGirls campaign as opposition pre-2015—embarked on a smear campaign against the group and what it stood for.⁵⁷ After the 2019 election, which was won by the incumbent, the Unity Fountain (venue of the #BringBackOurGirls daily sit out in the heart of Nigeria's capital, Abuja) was sealed off by the government to prevent any form of protest by the group.⁵⁸ Some respondents said that the #BringBackOurGirls campaign promised much in terms of bringing global attention to the Chibok crisis but delivered little in terms of results, and they attributed this to how easily political change could sway support for a cause.⁵⁹ Respondents unanimously agreed that #BringBackOurGirls was an example of the wide gap between popular 'click activism' and bringing about genuine change through media campaigns.

The #BringBackOurGirls group has been partly credited for efforts leading to the rescue or release of 107 of the 276 Chibok girls abducted in 2014 because of the pressure the group mounted on the Nigerian government to act. The group also succeeded in keeping the Chibok abduction in the news, while eliciting both local and international solidarity. However, analysis of media coverage indicated that, like many popular and powerful media campaigns embedded in social media, outcomes depend largely on how the momentum generated at the height of the campaign is capitalised on.⁶⁰ In principle

and symbolism, the #BringBackOurGirls campaign still exists but with subdued dedication and few activities. In the case of the #BringBackOurGirls campaign, the adoption of both online and offline channels increased its support base, which made its activities — including protests, sit-outs, social media posts, and endorsements — visible to the government one way or the other. In the context that some of the Chibok girls have been freed or rescued, the #BringBackOurGirls campaign has been effective. However, considering the very straightforward objective of demanding action that would lead to the freedom of all the girls, this outcome has fallen short of the huge interest generated by the media campaign itself.⁶¹

The Nigerian government continues to view the activities of the #BringBackOurGirls as a threat rather than a call for collective responsibility. The #BringBackOurGirls campaign's constant and consistent demand for the release of the Chibok girls and others in Boko Haram captivity irked the previous government because it exposed its response to the kidnapping to international scrutiny. Having come to power partly on the support of groups such as the #BringBackOurGirls with a promise to rescue the girls, the present government began a clampdown on the group's activities once it was unable to fulfil the promise of securing the release of all the girls.

This particular finding, all but three respondents noted, was causal to the previous one.⁶² Analysis of media reports showed that the prior Nigerian government — rather than accepting the demand by the #BringBackOurGirls as a call to collective action against Boko Haram — felt that it was unjustly exposed by the group to the international community. Interestingly, when the new government came into power in 2015 and could not deliver on its promise to end the terrorist activities in the north-eastern part of Nigeria, it turned against the same #BringBackOurGirls group which it had supported before the election. One respondent, who was actively involved in the group's campaign, said:

“No matter who is in government, inasmuch as the demand of the group is the release of the girls in captivity and such demand has not been fully met, the #BringBackOurGirls campaign will never be identified with or supported by any government of

54 Obia, Vincent. “The Unwanted Antagonism Towards Bring Back Our Girls Group”, ThisDay, September 18, 2016. Available at <https://www.thisdaylive.com/index.php/2016/09/18/the-unwarranted-antagonism-towards-bring-back-our-girls-group/>, accessed: March 28, 2020

55 Ibekwe, Nicholas. “Updated: Oby Ezekwesili withdraws from presidential race”, Premium Times, January 24, 2019. Available at <https://www.premiumtimesng.com/news/headlines/307491-breaking-oby-ezekwesili-withdraws-from-presidential-race.html>, accessed: October 19, 2020

56 Respondents 1, 9 and 10

57 Aina, T.A.; Atela, M.; Ojebode, A.; Dayil, P. and Aremu, F. “Beyond Tweets and Screams: Action for Empowerment and Accountability in Nigeria – The Case of the #BBOG Movement”, IDS Working Paper 529, Brighton: IDS. July 2019. Available at: <https://www.ids.ac.uk/publications/beyond-tweets-and-screams-action-for-empowerment-and-accountability-in-nigeria-the-case-of-the-bbog-movement/>, accessed: March 27, 2020

58 Sahara Reporters. “Ezekwesili Condemns Nigerian Government's Move to Build Fence Around Unity Fountain Abuja”, Sahara Reporters, October 6, 2019. Available at <http://saharareporters.com/2019/10/06/ezekwesili-condemns-nigerian-government%E2%80%99s-move-build-fence-around-unity-fountain-abuja>, accessed: February 9, 2020

59 Respondents 10, 11, 12, 13, 14 and 15

60 Aina, T.A.; Atela, M.; Ojebode, A.; Dayil, P. and Aremu, F. 2019, p. 29

61 Chiluiwa, Innocent, and Presley Ifukor. “War against Our Children: Stance and Evaluation in #BringBackOurGirls Campaign Discourse on Twitter and Facebook.” *Discourse & Society* 26, no. 3 (2015): 267-96. Available at: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/26376358>, accessed: February 11, 2020

62 Respondents 17, 18 and 19

the day.”⁶³

It was unanimous among respondents that reporting on terrorism has improved since Chibok. Television has shown the most noticeable improvement in terms of content, while print media too has improved, significantly de-emphasising terrorist propaganda. However, most respondents fear that the line between responsible reporting and the responsibility to report terrorism-related news remains blurred.

Respondents were unanimous in acknowledging—and analysis of media coverage showed—that reporting terrorism and violent extremism has improved in the areas such as reducing sensationalism and de-emphasising terrorist propaganda since the #BringBackOurGirls campaign.⁶⁴ Five respondents, who claimed their organisations had carried out independent analyses of media coverage of terrorism in the north-eastern part of Nigeria, said one of the benefits of the #BringBackOurGirls campaign is that more media houses and journalists covering terrorism and violent extremism now focus on reporting on the victims and vulnerable people and their responses to terror activities, rather than solely reporting the actual attacks.⁶⁵ One of the respondents, whose organisation works with victims on the frontline, noted:

“We have observed significant improvement in media focus and content being disseminated in the media since the Bring Back Our Girls campaign. At the peak of the #BringBackOurGirls activities, the group was setting [the] media agenda which centered more on response than the actual reporting of an event. That response-based agenda has helped change the focus of our local media from what has happened to what should happen.”⁶⁶

Analysis of media coverage indicated that television is leading this new content charge, by focusing on issues such as community, resilience, and victims’ psychological states after an attack. This research showed that there has been an improved consciousness among major news television channels to include information on emergency response, evacuation, safety, relief efforts, and general counter-insurgency measures taken by stakeholders. For instance, Channels Television, a leading private TV news channel, now has dedicated terrorism-related programmes which focus on post-incident reporting. Premium Times, a popular multi-media news platform, now uses fact-checking tools and data journalism to drive its reporting on terrorism. This has led to more

people being aware of the responsibilities of both the source and of the general public when it comes to accurately reporting on terrorists’ activities.⁶⁷

Findings showed that in cases where journalists have challenges accessing troubled areas/accessing information from the Nigerian government and military, publications by research groups and civil society organisations have proven helpful. Due to the extensive work carried out by these research groups and civil society organisations, journalists’ reporting of terrorism content, especially in the print media, has become more in-depth and analytical. Respondents said the abduction of Chibok girls and the activities of the #BringBackOurGirls group opened up a new frontier in research which provided the Nigerian media with better insight and fuller reportage, unlike the initial inadequacy in research-based report and ‘storyline setters’ in Nigeria’s print media.⁶⁸

However, respondents were unanimous in stating that, for a number of reasons, including poor funding, welfare issues, capacity building and general motivation, and, most importantly, inadequate access to information, the Nigerian media still faces challenges reporting terrorism and violent extremism. There was a wide acknowledgement amongst respondents that the rise of citizen journalism has made the traps and errors of reporting terrorism more inevitable because conventional media now competes with citizen journalists who operate with little or no ethical guidance. However, some respondents also believed that mainstream journalists will improve media content if they regard social media as a new tool by applying the rules of conventional journalism to its use.⁶⁹ What this means, according to those respondents, is that rather than seeing social media as a parallel or rival platform, journalists will improve the quality and credibility of its content if they actively get involved in its use and shape its engagement by applying the ethics of journalism to its use. Respondent thirty-three, a journalist and member of the #BringBackOurGirls, said:

“I still strongly believe that had more journalists been involved in the #BringBackOurGirls campaign online and offline, the group would have made faster and more concrete progress in demanding the return of the abducted schoolgirls. Journalists simply felt the social media was for influencers and missed the opportunity to be part of a campaign which changed the face of Nigeria’s activism forever.”

63 Respondent 9

64 Neem Foundation, ‘Taking Local Communities Seriously: A Tale of 7 Towns’. Peace Building Mechanism and Context-Specific peace Model for North-East Nigeria, December 2019

65 Respondents 11, 12, 13, 14 and 15

66 Respondent 12

67 Channels Television. “Fight against Insurgency: Special Report on Nigerian Army (Part 1)”, YouTube, November 30, 2018. Available at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rgsWNYjEJ1o>, accessed: January 28, 2020; Amaza, Mark. “Against All Odds: How Can You Fact-Check Security-Related News in Nigeria?”, April 2019. Available at <https://dubawa.org/against-all-odds-how-can-you-fact-check-security-related-news-in-nigeria/>, accessed: March 20, 2020

68 Respondents 9, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15 and 16

69 Respondents 9, 10, 17, 18 and 19

There is still mutual mistrust between government communicators and Nigerian journalists reporting on terrorism.

Many respondents, especially among the journalist/editor category, emphasised that the media and government were not natural bedfellows because each has a different role to play. They cited the provision in the Nigerian Constitution which holds the Nigerian press responsible to the people to also hold the government accountable.⁷⁰ Three respondents strongly held that there were only two kinds of journalism—good and bad.⁷¹ Thus, as earlier mentioned, the terms ‘professionalism’ and ‘patriotism’ in reporting terrorism and violent extremism are processed differently by government communicators and the media. Seven respondents were concerned that government communicators felt that the best way to foster patriotic press is to restrict access to terror-related information.⁷²

On the other hand, analysis of media coverage showed that the Nigerian press can be too sensational and commercial while reporting on terrorism and violent extremism, which could play into the propaganda agenda of terrorists. As a result, each side complains about the other — especially in respect to matters of security. Respondents in two categories — journalist/editor; and government communicator categories — were sharply divided about why the relationship between the government and the media is frosty, especially in the areas of defence and security. Some respondents⁷³ alleged that government communicators often fail to be transparent or cooperative in providing information; while other respondents⁷⁴ countered this allegation by stating that the media often endangers public safety through reckless, unprofessional reporting.

To many respondents in the journalist/editor category, patriotism of journalists should not be expressed through blind loyalty to political establishments or to a public figure, but to fellow citizens, and through the pursuit of truth. Seven respondents went even further to say the state did not possess the moral right to demand patriotism from the media and that the state’s definition of patriotism related more to the manipulation of the press.⁷⁵ To a large extent, six other respondents agreed with the journalist/editor category but added that patriotism also meant the promotion of good governance and rejection of bad policies.⁷⁶ More importantly, they added that during national emergencies or threat to national security, the definition of patriotism could change. Another respondent, who has worked in both media and government circles, said:

‘The relationship between government and the media, however strained at times, is not improved

by government over-regulation or aloofness, nor is it politically wise. Nigeria has struggled hard for its democracy and the freedom of its press is treasured by its people, respected by its governments, and protected by law. So, how do these two institutions discharge their respective functions without “rocking the boat”? The demand by the #BringBackOurGirls group – the way it was handled by the Nigerian government – indicates that once an action or advocacy is of perceived dissent, government treats it advocates with mistrust. This does not exonerate journalists who, sometimes, could be carried away and could jeopardise sensitive security operations by sensationalising their stories.”⁷⁷

Conclusion and Recommendations

The mainstream media has an agenda-setting role to play in an emerging democracy like Nigeria. However, just because a communication campaign did not emanate from the mainstream media does not mean that such campaign could not be adopted and promoted by the media. One of the findings of this research is that the Nigerian media did not fully support the #BringBackOurGirls communication campaign because it did not set that agenda and only started highlighting its activities when the foreign media helped transmit it to a larger international audience.

The research also showed that many of the challenges faced by Nigerian journalists reporting terrorism stem from poor welfare, lack of a standard code of ethics for reporting on terrorism, inadequate capacity and training, poor military-media relations, lack of post-incident access to areas attacked by terrorists, corruption, and media ownership structure. We, therefore, strongly recommend that constructive engagement be initiated between the government of Nigeria, media regulators, media owners, and media workers in order to review and revitalise codes of ethics and codes of professional conduct and practice.

Professional media and regulatory bodies—such as the National Broadcasting Commission, the Nigerian Press Council, the Nigeria Union of Journalists and the Nigerian Guild of Editors—should work with the Nigerian government and other relevant stakeholders to develop a code of ethics for reporting terrorism and violent extremism. Apart from standardising the way terrorism is being reported across all media platforms, this would help educate journalists about the pitfalls of reckless reporting of terror-related stories. It could also provide

70 Nigerian Government, ‘Nigerian Constitution, Chapter II, Section 22 of the 1999 Constitution (as amended)’. Available at: https://publicofficialsfinancialdisclosure.worldbank.org/sites/fdl/files/assets/law-library-files/Nigeria_Constitution_1999_en.pdf, accessed: October 27, 2020

71 Respondents 1, 2 and 28

72 Respondents 1, 2, 3, 27, 28, 36 and 37

73 Respondents 1, 2, 3, 4, 27, 28, 36 and 37

74 Respondents 10, 12, 13, 15, 16, 17, 18 and 19

75 Respondents 1, 2, 3, 27, 28, 36 and 37

76 Respondents 9, 11, 12, 13, 14 and 15

77 Respondent 10

a workable solution to the conflicting requirements of patriotism and professionalism in handling security reportage.

The media ownership landscape in Nigeria has led to an emphasis on personal interests of owners which has corroded general ethics, conduct, and standards of journalists and outlets. One of the lessons the coverage of the abduction of Chibok schoolgirls and the activities of the #BringBackOurGirls has taught regarding journalistic practice in Nigeria, is that media ownership's lack of transparency distorts and damages news coverage and commentary. In partnership with the Nigerian government, relevant stakeholders should explore ways and means to make media ownership and funding patterns more transparent. When those who back and fund a media house are made known and their sources of income are of public knowledge, there will be more credibility in the interaction between government and media, improved quality and objectivity of reporting, and better working conditions for media workers.

While media ownership and funding in Nigeria needs to be more transparent and open to scrutiny, the Nigerian media, especially print media, should focus more on reporting terrorism from the angles of the resilience of victims, rescue efforts, and how effected communities are responding to terror threats.

The Nigerian military should institutionalise the embedding of local journalists in its frontline activities for fuller coverage and better accuracy. Giving journalists access to military operations provides them with insights to successes, challenges, and prospects which—if dispassionately reported—could create opportunities for the civic populace and decision makers to further provide needed support for the military.

Journalists require regular capacity development, especially in such areas as countering violent extremism, counter-terrorism, and conflict-sensitive reporting, which still have very few research resources in Nigeria. The media could be the first point of contact in terms of information on terrorism for many groups, policy makers, and institutions, and it plays a big role in how society responds for better or worse in galvanising support for state efforts against these extremist groups.

To increase mutual trust and confidence between the media and government, there is the need to deliver a freer, more accurate, and more balanced flow of information between the Nigerian government and the Nigerian people.

Finally, if a communication campaign such as the #BringBackOurGirls resurfaces in the Nigerian media landscape, the media should use it as an opportunity to highlight the challenges faced by Nigeria and a call to collective action.

Appendix

Table 1: Interviews

Respondents (1), (2), (3), (4), (5) and (6) were all interviewed individually and present at the focus group discussion meeting on separate dates.

Interviewee	Category	Designation	Place of Interview
Respondent 1	Journalist/Editor *	Senior editor with national newspaper	Abuja
Respondent 2	Journalist/Editor *	Senior editor with national newspaper	Abuja
Respondent 3	Journalist/Editor *	Senior editor with national newspaper	Abuja
Respondent 4	Journalist/Editor *	Senior editor with national newspaper	Abuja
Respondent 5	Journalist/Editor *	Senior editor with national newspaper	Abuja
Respondent 6	Journalist/Editor *	Senior editor with national newspaper	Abuja
Respondent 7	Journalist/Editor	Senior editor with national newspaper	Abuja
Respondent 8	Journalist/Editor	Senior editor with national newspaper	Abuja
Respondent 9	Key Informant	Human rights activist	Abuja
Respondent 10	Key Informant	Former Public Servant	Abuja
Respondent 11	Key Informant	Civil Society Organisation expert	Kaduna
Respondent 12	Key Informant	Non-governmental organisation lead	Kaduna
Respondent 13	Key Informant	Non-governmental organisation lead	Abuja
Respondent 14	Key Informant	Strategic communication expert	Abuja
Respondent 15	Key Informant	Strategic communication expert	Abuja
Respondent 16	Key Informant	Public Relations expert	Abuja
Respondent 17	Government Communicator	Public Servant	Kaduna
Respondent 18	Government Communicator	Public Servant	Abuja
Respondent 19	Government Communicator	Public Servant	Abuja
Respondent 20	Journalist/Editor	Journalist with regional newspaper	Abuja
Respondent 21	Journalist/Editor	Journalist with regional newspaper	Abuja
Respondent 22	Journalist/Editor	Journalist with regional newspaper	Abuja
Respondent 23	Journalist/Editor	Journalist with regional newspaper	Abuja
Respondent 24	Journalist/Editor	Journalist with regional newspaper	Abuja
Respondent 25	Journalist/Editor	Journalist with regional newspaper	Abuja
Respondent 26	Journalist/Editor	Journalist with regional newspaper	Abuja
Respondent 27	Journalist/Editor	Defence correspondent for private TV	Abuja
Respondent 28	Journalist/Editor	Defence correspondent for private TV	Abuja
Respondent 29	Journalist/Editor	Defence correspondent for private TV	Abuja
Respondent 30	Journalist/Editor	Defence correspondent for private TV	Abuja
Respondent 31	Journalist/Editor	Defence correspondent for private TV	Abuja
Respondent 32	Journalist/Editor	Defence correspondent for private TV	Abuja
Respondent 33	Journalist/Editor	Abuja-based freelance journalist	Abuja
Respondent 34	Journalist/Editor	Journalist with national newspaper	Abuja
Respondent 35	Journalist/Editor	Journalist with national newspaper	Abuja
Respondent 36	Journalist/Editor	Journalist with regional newspaper	Kaduna
Respondent 37	Journalist/Editor	Journalist with regional newspaper	Kaduna

Table 2: Focus Group Discussion

Attendee	Category	Designation	Place of Interview
Respondent 1	Journalist/Editor	Senior editor with national newspaper	Abuja
Respondent 2	Journalist/Editor	Senior editor with national newspaper	Abuja
Respondent 3	Journalist/Editor	Senior editor with national newspaper	Abuja
Respondent 4	Journalist/Editor	Senior editor with national newspaper	Abuja
Respondent 5	Journalist/Editor	Senior editor with national newspaper	Abuja
Respondent 6	Journalist/Editor	Senior editor with national newspaper	Abuja
Respondent 38	Journalist/Editor	Journalist with regional newspaper	Abuja
Respondent 39	Journalist/Editor	Journalist with online newspaper	Abuja
Respondent 40	Journalist/Editor	Journalist with online newspaper	Abuja
Respondent 41	Journalist/Editor	Security reporter with public TV	Abuja
Respondent 42	Journalist/Editor	Security reporter with public TV	Abuja
Respondent 43	Journalist/Editor	Photojournalist for national newspaper	Abuja

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About the Author

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Kayode Adebisi has educational background in Linguistics and English, but much of his 13-year post-graduate education work experience has been in media and communications research. He was a correspondent on the editorial board of Leadership Newspapers, an influential print media house in Abuja, Nigeria's capital. He is also vastly experienced in data collection and coordinating communication for behavioural change and grassroots intervention. Kayode has been on various research and development projects in diverse capacities, including as National Expert on Strategic Communications in the European Union Support to Help Strengthen Nigeria's National Capacity to Respond to Evolving Security Challenges (EUTANS), assisted Countering Violent Extremism Programme for Nigeria and as Project Communication Coordinator for the NSRP/British Council-funded Positive Voices Campaign Project. In 2017, he returned to the newsroom at the News Agency of Nigeria (NAN), where he presently works as a Senior Correspondent.

