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Propaganda and information warfare in Boko Haram insurgency in Nigeria, 2009-2020

Felicia Itodo
National Defence College, Nigeria

Felix Ikalewumi
National Defence College, Nigeria

Abstract:

Information is at the heart of an effective planning and execution of a goal or target undertaken by an individual or a government. Therefore, information that has to do with the security of a country is critical and highly sensitive to the government security architectures given its bearing on national security. Tangentially, in the recent time, information has been contrived as a weapon of warfare via the modern technology of a broadband speed by criminal elements to messaging the public. The internet and cyber space are abashed as a propagandist tools of the terrorist groups to propagate their course beyond the physical space. Conversely, Boko Haram terrorist group becomes emboldened by its leverage on cyber space platforms to sell videos of their activities, recruit members, display victims and making efforts to convince those that consume their contents online to key into the course. Hence, the use, function and impact of this development has appeared neglected by scholars. It is for this reasons that this paper attempts to provide a critical analysis of the role of propaganda and information warfare in the insurgency of Boko Haram Terrorist in Nigeria 2009-2020. It investigates the core messages of the group and the delivery methods employed. The paper takes notice of Boko Haram's purposeful use of brutal, enduring images to emphasize the savagery of its deeds, including suicide bombs, drive-by shootings, and direct assaults on marketplaces, mosques, churches, and military bases. The paper relies on secondary sources and adopts the descriptive and analytic method of research. It concludes that once Boko Haram began to experience losses following the assault of Nigerian soldiers, the impact of its propaganda started to wane. It is imperative therefore, that effort be made to curtail the access and usage of the cyberspace by terrorists.

Key Words: Boko Haram, Nigeria, social media, online messages, propaganda

Introduction

The Nigerian government has invested hugely in terms of human and material resources to combating terrorism and insurgency on its telecommunications infrastructure and the internet. However, such efforts and dimension towards combating the challenges of insurgency appears unknown to many as emphasis has mostly been on cybercrimes ranging from internet fraud to the neglect of fundraising, and financing of terrorism. Consequently, initiatives to nip the ugly

trends have fallen short of identifying the dangers posed by the propaganda machines of the terrorists or insurgents as clearly seen online. The internet online platform provides easy access for actors to spread information across geographical boundaries to support terrorism.

The internet and social media provide performers access to alternate realities, and viewers and users are impacted by the information that strangers including criminal elements provide to them. In this regard, terrorists' use of websites, blogs, YouTube, Twitter, and Facebook to influence people is on the rise globally, and the security agencies have not really developed enabling systematic measures towards mitigating terrorist activities such as the manipulative use of new channels to influence the public.[1]

Noticeably, the Boko Haram, a Nigerian militant Islamist group has embraced technology – a broadband speed to spreading violent religious ideology, hate messages, raising money, conspiring, planning, and executing their attacks. This is because the group leaned on the tactics of ISIS and other terrorist groups. To this end, the Nigerian government has just begun to incorporate robust active and passive defense measures against adversaries into the National Security Strategy.[2]The cyberspace has become abashed as a veritable new theatre of war where terrorist groups deploy new weapons of attack through the internet platform to shaping information and communication technology (ICT) with the motive of instilling fear in people and compelling their targets to comply with their demands.[3] The present danger is that modern-day terrorists have transformed Information communication technology (ICT) into tools of attack with weaponised information to drive their ideology to unsuspecting victims.

As a result, terrorist websites serve as the virtual training ground where messages and propaganda videos that help to boost morale and networking, drive fundraising efforts, recruitments, and call for terror actions are hosted. It is on this premise that Kaplan has pointed out that terrorist websites moved from fewer than 100 to 4,800 between 2006 and 2008.[4] The groups publicize roadsides bombing, and a sizable of society watch videos of terror and propaganda of captives that were being beheaded. Sadly, certain jihadist websites are actually designed to play video games that showcase where assigned holy warriors slaying government soldiers.

Given technologies' interface capability, which have enhanced the terrorists' capacities and effectiveness in information dissemination of their activities through the social media handles. Cyber terrorism has therefore become a new wave of terrorism and area of concern. Terrorist groups in Nigeria have moved

[1]AliyuOdamah Musa, "Socio-economic Incentives, New Media and the Boko Haram Campaign of Violence in Northern Nigeria," *Journal of African Media Studies* 4, No. 1 (2012): 111-124., https://doi.org/10.1386/jams.4.1.111_1.
[2]Aliyu, "Socio-economic Incentives, New Media and the Boko Haram Campaign of…110.
[3]US Army Training and Doctrine Command. "*Critical Infrastructure."*
[4]Kaplan, Eben. "Terrorists and the Internet." Council on foreign Relations No. 8 (2009).

their conflict online, utilizing social media to plan attacks, communicate, and disseminate messages of hatred and deadly religious doctrine. It has become sacrosanct to lean on the outcome of extant research, existing law enforcement approaches to manage cyberspace, and legislation should be evolve to address cybercrime and other related offences.[5] Besides, the extant literature asserted that the future of fighting extremism, falsehoods, and bogus information in cyberspace depends on the deployment of robust technology.[6] Despite this, there is little information on how the experts could make their choice of cyber security technologies that can be effectively deployed to halt the expansion of terrorism in the cyberspace and the extent to which the government should use the expertise. In an attempt to breaking the barrier, different countries, including Nigeria, have used several kinds of technologies to mitigate effects of terrorists' harmful messages in cyberspace. Hence, the urgent need to understand the effectiveness of cyber technologies in terrorism projection, and build a robust counter narrative, security experts and administrators to safeguard the cyber space from continuous manipulation and wrongful projection of information by Boko Haram terrorist groups against the stability of the country informs this study.

Conceptual clarifications

In an attempt to deepen the understanding of this work, it becomes imperative to give a succinct clarification of what the major concepts adopted connote.

Propaganda

According to the United States military, propaganda entails "any form of communication in support of national objectives designed to influence the opinions, emotions, attitudes, or behavior of any group in order to benefit the sponsor, either directly or indirectly."[7]Additionally, what characters of propaganda connote is made clearer in some other definitions such as the definition by the Oxford Learners' English Dictionary, which sees propaganda as "information or ideas, that may be false or exaggerated and that are used in order to gain support to promote a political cause or point of view.[8] Similarly, the Cambridge English Dictionary also defines propaganda as "information, ideas, opinions or images often only giving one part of an argument, that are broadcast, published or in some other way spread with the intention of influencing people's opinions."[9] A definition by the Encyclopedia Britannica captures the fact that propagandist information is often not "objective and is

[5] Adomi, Esharenana E., and Stella E. Igun. "Combating cybercrime in Nigeria." *The Electronic Library* 26, No. 5, (2008): 716-725.
[6] Berger, John M. "The evolution of terrorist propaganda: The Paris attack and social media." *The Brookings Institution* (2015).
[7]Lieberman, A. V.,Terrorism, the internet, and propaganda: A deadly…95
[8]Oxford Learner's Dictionaries. Retrieved from:
https://www.oxfordlearnersdictionaries.com .Accessed 2 May, 2023.
[9]Propaganda – Cambridge English Dictionary. Retrieved from:.https://www.dictionary.Cambridge, org .Accessed 2 May 2023.

used primarily to influence an audience and further an agenda, often by presenting facts selectively to encourage a particular synthesis or perception, or using loaded language to produce an emotional rather than a rational response to the information that is presented."[10] And much of what is disseminated as propaganda is "information – facts, arguments, rumours, half-truths or lies…" presented not only as words (or texts) but also may be in the form of gestures, banners, monuments, music, clothing, insignia, hairstyles, designs on coins and postage stamps etc. Lieberman identifies and characterizes different forms of propaganda namely (1) white propaganda – propaganda that identifies the source of the message sent to a particular target (2) black propaganda – propaganda that comes from an unknown source often containing fabrications and lies (3) Gray propaganda – containing neither completely true nor completely false information and does not identify its source.[11] ISIS generally practices black propaganda associated with unreliable information and half-truths. An example is their negotiations with Jordan for the release of the captured pilot, Muath Safi Yousef al-Kasasbeh in exchange for the release of captives in Jordanian jails in 2015. ISIS released a video showing al-Kasasbeh's death by burning on 3 February, 2015.[12] However, the Jordanian government's investigation showed that the pilot was actually killed on 3 January, 2015. If that was true, it would confirm that ISIS never intended to exchange him for prisoners. But their propaganda succeeded because the publicity around the graphic online video of their victim's execution resulted in global media coverage of the event.[13]

Propaganda is also categorized on the basis of its subject matter. For instance, 'defamatory propaganda' is such that degrades, reviles and insults foreign states, their institutions, leaders or other agents with the aim of disrupting peaceful relations between states. 'Subversive propaganda' refers to any communication that is intended to overthrow the political leader, or existing internal political order of a state, which violates international principle of non-interference in the internal affair of a sovereign state. Propaganda or incitement to aggressive war or genocide is communication intending to infiltrate the minds of the people with hate and disposition to engage in or normalize unlawful violence.[14] All the three types of propaganda are able to effectively win the hearts of local population if used effectively but can also turn against the originators if used ineffectively causing what is known in the intelligence community as "blowback."[15] Interestingly, either ISIS or Boko Haram, both

[10]Propaganda according to Encyclopedia Britannica
[11]Liebman, A. V.,Terrorism, the internet, and propaganda……95
[12]Ali, M.-R., *ISIS and propaganda: How ISIS exploits women.* Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism. University of Oxford.(2015)Retrieved from http://reutersinstitute.politics.ox.ac.uk/sites/default/files/research/files/Isis%2520and%2520Propaganda%2520How%2520Isis%2520Exploits%2520Women.pdf .
[13]Ali, M.-R., *ISIS and propaganda: …*
[14]Lieberman, A. V. Terrorism, the internet, and propaganda: A deadly combination. *Journal of…* p.97
[15]Lieberman, A. V., Terrorism, the internet, and propaganda: A deadly combination. *Journal of…* p.98

terrorist groups have used the different types of propaganda relatively effectively.

Terrorism

It is noted that there is general disagreement among scholars on the meaning of terrorism. Terrorism is a term used to describe violence or other harmful acts.[16] It has been viewed that terrorism is value laden and subjectively defined in line with the ideological school of the individual defining it. This is because one man terrorist is another man freedom fighter. Thus, terrorism both as practiced and justified by terrorist themselves, is a tool used to achieve a specific outcome by using force or violence on one segment of society with the primary goal of causing fear in the larger society to make change in that society. [17] The United Nations General Assembly offered one definition of terrorism that has apparently been deemed serviceable for most purposes: criminal acts intended or calculated to provoke a state of terror in the general public, a group of persons or particular persons for political purposes...whatever the considerations of a political, philosophical, ideological, racial, ethnic, religious or other nature that may be invoked to justify them. It is an unlawful use of force or violence against persons or property to intimidate or coerce a government, the civilian population, or any segment thereof, in furtherance of political or social objectives. The FBI defines terrorism as "the unlawful use of force or violence against persons or property to intimidate or coerce a government, the civilian population, or any segment thereof, in furtherance of political or social objectives".[18] According to the description above, terrorism is the use of fear and intimidation to achieve change.

To increase the effect of their operations, terrorists frequently use certain strategies. The goal is to terrorize a bigger target population and perhaps to increase the number of sympathizers.[19] It is opined that conventional warfare makes extensive use of psychological 'warfare' to amplify its impact and terrorism relies almost exclusively on psychological 'warfare' for its intended impact. As a form of unconventional warfare, terrorism is sometimes used when attempting to force socio-political change by convincing a government or population to agree to demands to avoid future harm or fear of harm, destabilization of existing government, motivating a discontented population to join a mutiny, escalating a conflict in the hope of upsetting the status quo, expressing an injustice, or drawing attention to a cause.

[16]Garrison (2004) cited in Eke (2013) Eke, C. C. Terrorism and the Dilemmas of Combating the Menace in Nigeria. *International Journal of Humanities and Social Science. 3 (4).*265-272
[17]Koh 2022 cited in Biernatzki, W. E., Terrorism and Mass Media. Centre for the Study of Communication and Culture, (2002) 21(1) 1-44
[18]Biernatzki, W. E., Terrorism and Mass Media. Centre for…
[19] Bozarth, M. A., Terrorism and the Media. *Department of Psychology University at Buffalo*, (2005). Retrieved in September, 2015 from www.PsychologyofTerrorism.com

Information Warfare

Information warfare otherwise known as information operations is a common concept in the military doctrine. It implies a description of computer networks attacks often by highly trained military units like hacking into databases to observe or steal information, disrupting and degrading a target's technological capabilities, weakening military readiness, extorting financial ransoms and much more.[20]In the context of this paper, information warfare entails disinformation and deployment of information in the social media handles through videos or other animations as means of creating psychological trauma, attracting unsuspecting audience and arousing sympathy by criminally minded group such as the Boko Haram.

Social media and propaganda: The Boko Haram Romance with ISIS and Others

The external dimensions of Boko Haram could easily be drawn from its similarities between its tactics and those adopted by Islamic insurgencys in Iraq, Afghanistan and North Africa. The ISIS has a significant influence on most of the terrorist organizations operating in Africa, including the notorious Boko Haram (Jamā'aAhl al-sunnah li-da'wawa al-jihād), a Sunni group preaching religious extremism and Jihad in Nigeria. The group renamed itself as "Islamic State's West Africa Province" (ISWAP) in April 2015. The ISIS has taken over the propaganda function of Boko Haram against the Nigerian State, using advanced technology such as encrypted media such as Telegram to pass messages among members about clandestine operations. The group is using social media to recruit members and to also raise money for its activities, including the spread of violent ideologies.[21]

The group broadcasts its acts on YouTube in an effort to instill fear and terror in the public and pressure the Nigerian government to comply with its demands. For instance, in 2014, Boko Haram utilized YouTube to publicize the kidnapping of over 276 schoolgirls. The organization often distributes jihadist lectures via YouTube videos in northern Nigeria urging communities to deny females modern education since, in their belief, women are slaves.[22] How terrorists use social media to perpetrate its agenda points to the future. Lohrmann found that ISIS has been using the Internet successfully to recruit new fighters through new media technology such as Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, and Telegram.[23] The study suggests that social media technology is the central tool to spread

[20]Forest James.J.F, Political Warfare and Propaganda: An Introduction. *Journal of Advanced Military Studies,* Vol.12.No.1, spring 2021, 15.
[21]Baken, D. "Cyber warfare and Nigeria's vulnerability'."*E-International Relations* 3 (2013).
[22] Agbiboa, Daniel, and Benjamin Maiangwa. "Why Boko Haram kidnaps women and young girls in north-eastern Nigeria." *conflict trends*, no. 3 (2014): 51-56.
[23] Dan, Lohmann. "How terrorists' use of social media points to the future," *GOVTECH,* June 20, 2016, http://www.govtech.com/em/safety/Terrorists-And-Social-Media.html

hateful and violent messages. Attention-seeking terrorists have been using social media in new ways to reach out to mass audiences with their message.

More so, electronic jihad via strategic messaging and communication has become the manifestation of modern-day terror with the use of online media technologies to disseminate sophisticated multidimensional information. Liang discovered that the application of social media technology such as Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, Telegram, and Chat room facilitated communication and coordination at a global level outside of the control of governments.[24] The Increased connection posed problems that could not be simply solved by conventional legislation or international accords. Because filtering and the removal of terrorist information are reactive and ineffective, researchers contend that the frontline of the Internet needs a proactive defense. Additionally, a study that looked at why terrorists select social media platforms was presented at the 13th Annual Conference of the International Association for Intelligence Education by a former FBI Director of Intelligence and Counterintelligence. According to the study, this dynamic is more appealing to terrorists since it is hard to curtail the circulation of false material online.

A study titled "the development of terrorist propaganda: the Paris attack and social media" by the U.S. House Committee on Foreign Affairs' Subcommittee on Terrorism, Nonproliferation and Trade questioned why social media companies would allow terrorist content on their platforms. The report found that Twitter remains the favorite and most widely used platform by terror organizations while Facebook has become the terrorist favorite platform to share photos on message boards.[25] The report claimed that among social media companies, Twitter is far worse than the rest with regard to acting proactively to track and remove terrorist content. The committee's report discovered that the ISIS is using new technology to escape detection and the eventual removal of its content when posted on YouTube. The ISIS uses a service known as "Vimeo" to post graphic violence. YouTube tried but did not succeed in removing them all. Among the counter radicalization strategies that the White House published in 2011 was the commitment to devise means to deal with the new threat, including the use of intelligence led strategy, which consists of right resources, tools, and process to defend against cyber terrorism.[26]

What is not known is how the technology will be deployed and how effective it will be. Meanwhile, a coalition of top technology companies in the United States of America is making efforts to curb terrorists' use of social media technology with the use of Artificial Intelligence (AI). Korolov explained that AI-based

[24] Liang, Christina Schori. "Cyber Jihad: Understanding and Countering Islamic State Propaganda." *GSCP Policy Paper* 2 (2015): 4.,https://www.jugendundmedien.ch/fileadmin/user_upload/3_Medienkompetenz/Gegen narrative/Cyber_Jihad_-_Understanding_and_Countering_Islamic_State_Propaganda.pdf
[25]Berger, John M. "The evolution of terrorist propaganda: The Paris attack and social media." *The Brookings Institution* (2015).
[26]Berger, The evolution of terrorist propaganda…

security applications can read and understand security — they can analyze every incident, identify causes, methods, and trends, and predict the next pattern even before it happens.[27] For instance, IBM developed Watson, which has been taught to read vast quantities of information online.[28] Watson provides smart data analysis and visualization services, which makes it easy to detect patterns. It has an inbuilt capability that enables the user to interact with data in a conversation with a response the user can easily understand. In some countries of the Global North, the Law Enforcement and intelligence agencies are using AI and machine learning to detect and respond to different kinds of cyber threats, including cyber terrorism. There are different kinds of cyber security tools available, but the user or organizations must know how to apply them and integrate them into the broader cyber security strategy. To keep up to this, there is an ongoing project to create a shared digital database which includes "fingerprinting" or patterns of all suspicious terrorist content that raise red flags.[29]This inter-company collaboration will ensure that content that has been flagged on Twitter will not appear on Facebook or another social media platform.

The Internet Social Media Platform and Terrorism: The Meeting Point

The Internet and social media have not only revolutionized terrorism, but have also turned the Internet into a dangerous tool for terrorist propaganda and recruitment.[30]It has been noted that Jihadists' conduct "highly organized social media campaign, uses deceptive tactics and shows a sophisticated understanding of how such networks operate,"[31] Thus, the Internet has served Islamic extremists a variety of resources for disseminating their ideology and propaganda. Some extremist groups have gone to the level of developing specifically for the youth audiences for the target of disseminating propaganda via carefully designed colorful cartoons and games. These sites – many of which are available in English – help to get the groups' message out to a worldwide audience…" ISIS for example, have even developed an app to spread their propaganda through images and the streaming of violent online videos.[32]

[27]Maria Korolov. "How AI can help you stay ahead of cyber security threats," *CSO Online,* October 19, 2017, https://www.csoonline.com/article/3233951/machine-learning/howai-can-help-you-stay-ahead-of-cybersecurity-threats.html.
[28]Newton Lee. "Artificial Intelligence and data mining," *Counterterrorism and Cyber security* (pp. 323–341). Cham: Springer, 2015.
[29]Mike Isaac. "Facebook and Other Tech Companies Seek to Curb Flow of Terrorist Content," *New York Times*, December 5, 2016, https://www.nytimes.com/2016/12/05/technology/facebook-and-other-tech-companiesseek-to-curb-flow-of-terrorist-content.html
[30]Berger, J. M., *The evolution of terrorist propaganda: The Paris attack and social media*,(2015 Retrieved from https://www.brookings.edu/testimonies/the-evolution-of-terrorist-propaganda-the-paris-attackand-social-media/
[31]Berger, J. M. (2015). *The evolution of terrorist propaganda*…11
[32]Awan, I. (2017). Cyber-extremism: ISIS and the power of social media. *Conflict Trend*, *54*(2), 138-149.

Lieberman has identified nine ways that the Internet has revolutionized how terrorist groups use propaganda.

First, thanks to technology, terrorist organizations may now immediately distribute large amounts of material to websites and individuals without the need for an intermediary like the conventional media, which covers, interprets, and analyzes terrorist situations. Terrorists now have the ability to methodically modify their communications to appeal to various audiences based on their age, geography, and other characteristics. For instance, ISIS' communications with Muslim nations that speak Arabic differ from its communications with English speaking Western countries. While messages sent to the Western world present Jihad as a means of personal fulfillment, messages in Arabic to Muslims in the Middle East tend to insist that Jihad is a duty for all Muslims.[33]

Second, because the Internet breaks geographical or spatial barriers, terrorist groups are able to efficiently recruit new members and spread their ideology and propaganda with ease online. Despite efforts by social news outlets like Twitter and Facebook to do so, they are able to establish any number of account names on social media platforms, and since communication is free and simple, it is nearly hard to stop them. Berger notes that the number of Jihadists on social media is still negligible in comparison to the total user base, and that Facebook and YouTube have implemented reporting processes that enable users to flag content that supports terrorism for removal following years of debate among free speech advocates. Significantly, "starting shortly before ISIS disseminated a video of the beheading of American journalist, James Foley, Twitter began to take a more aggressive approach to ISIS specifically, and thousands of ISIS supporter accounts have since then been suspended."[34] For instance, there were almost 800 confirmed ISIS supporter accounts suspended between 2014 and 2015 and about 18,000 accounts related to the ISIS network, which were suspended during the same period.[35] In 2013, the 72 persons attacked on the Westgate Mall in Nairobi by the Somalian terrorist group, Al-Shabaab, was live tweeted (in English). After then, Twitter deleted the account. Efforts to reclaim the account by Al-Shabaab was blocked by Twitter.

Boko Haram used two distinct Twitter accounts until 2012, notably Boko Haram@BokoHaram (Chadian Border) and BokoHaram@BokoHaram (Republic of Arewa). The former, which was brief, probably drew more followers and was hosted by group members in Chad and Niger.The latter account, which had the catchphrase "I detest School," was more persistent until eventually becoming dormant and disappearing. What is currently left of the Boko Haram (English) Twitter account is @Boko Haram watch, which features the slogan: "I hate

[33] Lieberman, A. V. (2017). Terrorism, the internet, and propaganda: A deadly combination. *Journal of National Security Law & Policy, 101-102*.
[34] Berger, John M. "The evolution of terrorist propaganda: The…11
[35] Berger, John M. "The evolution of terrorist propaganda: The …..11

School." It existed for a longer time, gradually became dormant and then vanished

What remains now as Boko Haram (English) Twitter account is @Boko Haram watch with the slogan: "western education is sin." It is not certain how many of suspended jihadist accounts have sprung up again under some guises. Third, social media makes it easy to access terrorist propaganda even accidently, without having to locate a terrorist website. Individuals may stumble across terrorist content by clicking on a link posted by a friend and unintentionally lands on a Jihadist forum.[36] Also, most smart phones are connected to the Internet with WhatsApp enabled interfaces; thus, more people are online 24 hours and are vulnerable this way. As it presently, WhatsApp hosts over 200 terrorists' channels for sharing their propaganda and recruiting.[37] Fourth, Internet postings are not regulated as sources of news; thus, Jihadists can post inaccurate information unhindered. Again, readers are often prone to consuming terrorist propaganda as facts, and misleading stories and messages may just go on to achieve terrorist propagandist objectives. Fifth, because the Internet supports anonymity, terrorists exploit it to promote higher levels of violence in people. They use anonymity to encourage hatred and draw sympathy to their cause, while evading detection by law enforcement agents. Sixth, terrorist use social media to distort the prevalence and ranking of their messages on search results. Twitter in particular allows them "to amplify their messages by posting links to their propaganda and 'hashtag' at an unnaturally fast pace, causing the postings to place higher in search results and in content aggregated by third parties. ISIS and al Qaeda reportedly both use 'bots,' which are computer-controlled Twitter accounts that automatically send out content in a similar manner,"[38] Seventh, the Internet enables multidirectional communication between terrorists and potential recruits, and this allows terrorists to send propaganda to specific types of individuals. When interaction is established, a sense of cohesion and unity is generated with potentials recruits. This creates some kind of virtual community between the terrorists and recruits. Eight, Jihadists use social media to search for and target individuals who might be particularly vulnerable to their ideology.

As highlighted above, ISIS utilizes social media platforms that are popular with children and teenagers to attract and recruit young people, who are more prone to their propaganda. They can also select and weed out less susceptible populations by blocking them (i.e. nonbelievers) from their communities. ISIS for example have used Facebook and Twitter to target youths and have attracted thousands of views, comments and posts; and through videos posted on YouTube had embarked on its "one billion campaign," which calls on Muslims to join ISIS. The videos were accompanied with the words "proudly

[36] Lieberman, A. V. Terrorism, the internet, and propaganda: A deadly combination. *Journal of National Security Law & Policy,* (2017), *101-102*.
[37] Alcantara. *Facebook terrorist propaganda*. Retrieved from https://www.uscybersecurity.net/ , (2018).
[38] Lieberman, A. V. (2017). Terrorism, the internet, and propaganda: A deadly…p.101.

support the Muslim course"[39] and specifically called on Muslim young men around the world to fight for ISIS. The videos were broadcast in different languages and countries like Algeria, Libya and Egypt.[40] The ninth point made by Lieberman about encryption is very important and states thus as reproduced here:

> …encryption allows terrorists to maintain private networks of communication without law enforcement oversight. Encrypted communications cannot be easily accessed by law enforcement, and as such, recruitment efforts and other terrorist activities can take place in relative secrecy. As more websites and smartphone applications turn to encryption, its ability to hide such communications and actions will likely be a growing concern…Two encrypted messaging applications, WhatsApp and Kik, have been especially popular with ISIS. These applications make it much more difficult for law enforcement to intercept communications than would otherwise be possible on Twitter or Facebook. Furthermore, extremist propaganda that might be filtered out on Twitter due to its violent or graphic nature can be transmitted freely through encrypted platforms…[41]

The end-to-end encryption aspect of Whatsapp correspondences makes it difficult if not impossible for third party to gain direct access to such form of communication.

Propagandist Tools of ISIS, Taliban, and Al Qaeda: The Boko Haram Version

It is a common knowledge that ICT and internet media has created a borderless world where countries, non-state actors and people are easily connected technologically. Consequently, Propaganda as the terrorist's armoury and perhaps as a decisive weapon of survival has emerged potently aids by ease of information transfer in record time without any need for physical move.[42] Thus, the greatest challenge countering the Boko Haram's propaganda is traceable to its religious dogmatism and affiliations with foreign radical groups such as the ISIS, Taliban and Al – Qaeda whose beliefs, enunciated goals, targets and activities revolve around consistent exploitation of ideas and grievances that reverberates with various audiences, and using warped ideology as a decoy to recruit dis- satisfactory youths by offering them a false sense of purpose,

[39]Irshaid, F. (2014). How Isis is spreading its message online. *BBC News*. Available at: http://www.bbc. co.uk/news/world-middle-east-27912569
[40]Awan, I. (2017). Cyber-extremism: ISIS and the power of social media. *Conflict Trend*, *54*(2), 138–149.
[41]Awan, I. Cyber-extremism: ISIS and the power of …103
[42] D. M. Kotz, Globalization and Neoliberalism. Available on http://people.umass.edu/dmkotz/Globe and NL. 02.pdf>.accessed 2 May 2023.

belonging, and religious obligation and reward.[43] In this section attempt is made to assess certain propaganda tools common to these global jihadists. Though such tools are not exhaustive, but rather give clear insights to types and features of propaganda that have been innovated by ISIS and other Jihadists at different times and places which of course readily adopted, modified and seamlessly applied by the Boko Haram group in Nigeria and its environs.

Propaganda Targeted at Children

Some propaganda strategies that are specifically crafted and targeted at children have been used to lure underage children into terrorist acts. According to the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime,[44] about 8,000 children have been recruited by Boko Haram since 2009 and used as fighters, or to carry equipment and weapons. Some abducted boys are also used to identify those who refused to join the group. Children abducted by ISIL (as young as 7 years old) are often used as human shield, or used as spies and scouts, to transport military supplies, conduct patrols, man check points, videotape attack for propaganda purposes and plant explosive devices. Young girls are forced to marry, clean and cook for their Jihadist captors, and some are trained as suicide bombers. In 2015, for example, a girl of about 12 years detonated a bomb at a bus station at Damaturu, Yobe state (Nigeria) killing seven people. In 2015 alone, the United Nations verified 274 cases of children having been recruited by ISIL in Syria.[45]

Unfortunately these children were victims of deceptive propaganda strategies and mind game. Colourful propaganda online cartoons and games are aimed at children. Some high-level propaganda targeted at children include highlighting the advantages of joining the group, such as offering status and prestige, smart uniforms and weapons. Children and youth who lacked education and employment are often swayed by the opportunity for employment and power. ISIS also applies the strategy of portrayed "victimhood," using images that show the "crimes of the enemy" in order to provoke anger and empathy with those injured or killed and creating a desire for revenge. The groups also use communication materials that attract and engage children, such as cartoons and computer games to spread their message. Other interactive media and colourful content that are popular on the Internet are often designed and used by terrorist groups to glorify terror acts including suicide attacks.[46]

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[43]Tugwell, M.,Terrorism and propaganda: Problem and response. Conflict Quarterly: Journal for the Centre for Conflict Studies,(1986) 5-15.p.1

[44]United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, 2017. https://www.unodc.org/documents/terrorism/Publications/HB%20Children/Handbook_on_Children_Recruited_and_Exploited_by_Terrorist_and_Violent_Extremist_Groups_the_Role_of_the_Justice_System.E.pdf

[45] Adomi, Esharenana E., and Stella E. Igun. "Combating cybercrime in Nigeria." *The Electronic Library* 26, No. 5, (2008): 716-725.

[46] Berger, John M. "The evolution of terrorist propaganda: The Paris attack and social media." *The Brookings Institution* (2015).

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Beheading of Victims

In 2014, ISIS beheaded some American journalists namely James Foley, Steven Sotloff and Peter Kassig. They also killed a British aid worker, David Haines; a French citizen, Hervé Gourdel; and a British humanitarian worker, Alan Henning. In 2015, they beheaded two Japanese journalists, Haruna Yukawa and freelance video journalist Kenji Goto. These execution-style murders were videotaped and shown by ISIS. This is where propaganda of the act (not just of the word), is used to raise awareness of the terrorist organization and to consolidate its brand identity.[47]In order words, beheading of their victims becomes a symbol for creating their brand, which according to Simon, is "the basis of forming the expectations as to the nature and quality of political relationships that are formed with various stakeholder groups."And significantly "potent and powerful symbols to publics are key historical events, their propagation and perception in the consciousness of publics."[48] The Jihadist propaganda of beheading creates the image and symbol of a brutal group, and this has been an essential element of psychological warfare and subversion used for waging wars and promoting political ideologies.[49] Psychological warfare is achieved by the destruction of the enemy's will to resist and helps a nation to impose its will on an adversary without using a military force.[50] The beheadings by ISIS served the purpose of portraying them as very powerful and also ensuring the group's international media coverage, and ensures that ISIS is introduced to a larger number of people. Because of these killings, large media companies no longer permit their employees travelling to ISIS-controlled areas, and this will mean that ISIS's propagandist means of deterrence have succeeded.[51] Similarly, the Boko Haram group released a video purporting to show it beheading two men in its online posting using advanced graphics and editing techniques similar to footage from Islamic State.[52]The ruthlessness and brutality of this sect could also been seen in the slitting of the throats of schoolchildren, teachers and other victims also mirror those happenings in Iraq and Afghanistan.[53]

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[47]This position was well captured by Simons in 2018 and many others to justify the drive of the terrorist groups

[48] Ibid

[49]Samoilenko, S. A. (2018). Subversion: From Coercion to Attraction. In E. Bridgen& D. Verčic (Eds.), *Experiencing Public Relations: International Voices* (2018)174–193. Oxon: Routledge.

[50]Macdonald, S., *Propaganda and Information Warfare in the Twenty-First Century. Altered Images and Deception Operations*, (2007) New York: Routledge.

[51]Ali , M.-R., ISIS and propaganda: How ISIS exploits women

[52] Isaac Abrak, Julia Payne, Nigeria's Boko Haram releases beheading video echoing Islamic State: World News,March 3,2015. Retrieved from: reuters.com/article. Accessed 2 May 2023.

[53] C.W Ogbondah and P. O Agbese, Terrorists and Social Media Messages: A Critical Analysis of Boko Haram's Messages and Messaging Techniques. The Palgrave Handbook of Media and Communication Research in Africa. 2017, 313 -345. Available online. Accessed 2 May 2023

Manipulation of Media Information

Terror organisations such as the Taliban and Al Qaeda have at one time and another faked cooperation with journalists as a useful tool to deliver their propaganda. This "cooperation" allowed them to establish friendship with media personnel and writers, enabling them (terrorists) to manipulate journalistic stories to some degrees. They do this by providing the relevant person exclusive access to a certain area, or an interview with a very important Jihadist personality. In exchange, they expect the journalist to write a good piece on them while utilising an opportunity to manipulate information for their own benefit in the journalist's report. Jihadists have also professionalised their own propaganda techniques by providing packaged, ready-made material of high quality. They write and offer reports from daily life inside ISIS and Boko Haram areas, exclusive interviews and pictures, and ensure that the information is disseminated through the social media.[54]

Boko Haram Social Media Videos Messaging

Boko Haram has made several propaganda videos that it has distributed through YouTube, Twitter, news wire services, etc. The group uses its propaganda videos to scare Nigerians as well as to, radicalize and persuade potential recruits, many of them young boys and under-age girls, to adopt its creed and ideas, and to enlist as suicide bombers and fighters and believe in the group's mission to carve out an Islamic caliphate in Nigeria. While analyzing the messages embedded in Boko Haram's propaganda videos shows that they portrayed and contained the following themes:

a. Boko Haram is strong and powerful;
b. Boko Haram is rich and wealthy;
c. Boko Haram is a professional military outfit (and not a rag-tag army of insurgents);
d. Boko Haram is honest, sincere and truthful;
e. Boko Haram's leader, Abubakar Shekau, is invincible and unpredictable;
f. Boko Haram is contemptuous of Nigerian and Western European leaders, especially Presidents Barack Obama, François Hollande, Chancellor Angela Merkel, and Prime Minister David Cameron;
g. Nigerian government is weak and feeble;
h. Nigerian government is untruthful and untrustworthy;
i. Nigerian soldiers are cowardly and bumbling incompetents.

Unlike ISIS, which uses deftly produced videos and magazines as part of its social media messaging to inspire disaffected Muslim youths in Europe and North America to join its cause, Boko Haram's videos are crude and poorly

[54] Ali, M.-R., *ISIS and propaganda: How ISIS exploits women…*

produced. However, the crudity of the production is itself part of its messaging technique: the rawness is intended to instill fear and dread of the terrorist organization in the Nigerian viewers. Boko Haram's social media messaging is not directed specifically at potential recruits. In fact, members of the Nigerian armed forces are the target audience, the aim being to convince them of the futility of fighting against a superior force. Boko Haram's leader also frequently address Nigerians, Cameroonians, and their leaders directly, warning them or calling them liars. Boko Haram does not use its social media messaging to galvanize populist support for its ideology but rather to discredit the Nigerian state by demonstrating that it could not offer security to its citizens. The Jihadist group presented itself as a fearful and marauding force that cannot be stopped by the incompetent, corrupt and visionless Nigerian state. Its leader, Shekau, in his propaganda videos intended to contrast the weak, inept and vacillating persona of then President Goodluck Jonathan with his bold and vigorous persona. Boko Haram recognizes the barbarity of its actions but uses social media to justify such actions in the name of Islam. It tries to convey the notion of the righteousness of its interpretations of Islam, and hence the legitimacy in the eyes of Islam of any of its atrocities.

Propaganda and Psychological Operations in the Fight of Boko Haram

The rivalry between conflict movements and the state to create a superior image of dominance has risen as a result of new media channels. Conflict groups employ new media channels to conduct psychological operations and propaganda by utilizing storylines that mirror the previously outlined dynamics (dominance, superiority especially in creating fear in people). In the case of Boko Haram, this technique has proven critical to the group's narrative. Its use of ICTs to represent and develop such dominant dynamics in the conflict has increased the group's local and worldwide prominence.

In other words, new media platforms, the Internet, and ICTs have emerged as th e primary means of communicating the group's propaganda and psychological o perations. For example, narratives of power and superiority have frequently pre sented themselves via the movement. A video posted on YouTube by Sahara TV showing how the Boko Haram insurgents govern their captured territories is particularly telling of how the movement validates its superiority, dominance and creates fear in the public using ICTs. In the video, an unidentified man is buried alive in a shallow grave and stoned to death; another unidentified man has his hands chopped off.[55]

The sect takes care in producing the videos to show gory details of their activities. Members are seen hoisting the flag of the Boko Haram sect and jubilant following decapitations and murder of their victims. Besides instilling fear in the territories in which the assailants hold sway, the publication of such videos creates fear in the Nigerian public domain. In the same video, other

[55]Saharatv (May 5, 2014). Boko Haram Leader Shekau Releases Video on Abduction of Chibok Girls. Retrieved from: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wrfWS_vL0D4

victims of the group are assaulted. This way the movement demonstrates how it is in control of its captured territories. Having shot down a Nigerian fighter jet and captured a Nigerian Air Force pilot, another video emerged online. The video begins with the sounds of a gunshot in the background, music, a voice-over and video images of the wreckage of the jet. The voice-over fades out a few minutes into the video, surrounded by Boko Haram militan ts and with the movement's flag flown in the backdrop, and the camera then sho ws an injured pilot kneeling

before the camera, announcing himself, his place of duty, and purpose. The com mander of the movement interrupts this introduction with a quick prayer, whic h is followed by a speech. 'God has established a pact with us that unbelievers w ill not have victory over us, and he has made a covenant with us that we will alw ays have victory over them, in spite of their might and might,' he says. He is a Ni gerian Air Force pilot, as he indicated... God gave us victory, and we brought down their jet. Here also lies the pilot we captured.' In the same video, global leaders and the Nigerian president (as at the time of writing) receive threats 'we would do to you what Allah has prescribed for you', and then the pilot is hacked to death'[56] Similar beheadings of those considered infidels by the group have been posted online, especially on YouTube. There are reasons to believe that, such postings have had a great deal of psychological effect on the Nigerian public and the Nigerian armed forces executing an offensive against the group. Media reports have revealed scenarios in which Nigerian troops had abandoned the fight, escaping the insurgents. For instance, in a 2014 Telegraph, United Kingdom reported online, key public figures in Nigeria had expressed disappointment over the failings of the military. The document, while quoting a top Islamic cleric in Nigeria explained that "soldiers take to their heels and abandon their bases, arms, ammunition and other military hardware on the approach of the insurgents... Nigerian Security Forces only surface after the deadly attacks and terrorise an already terrorised people by installing roadblocks and searching homes."[57] Shekau also made similar claims. Referring to weapons seized from the military in a YouTube video, the sect leader claimed that, "the war equipment that you see on display on the screen are from Baga and Doro. Your army kept deceiving the world that you can't fight us because you have no arms. Liars! You have all that it takes; you are just coward soldiers."[58] By and large, the propaganda and psychological operations of Boko Haram account for one reason for low morale on the part of the Nigerian military. Other reasons for the lack of confidence as argued by some military

[56]Boko Haram Militants Behead a Nigerian Air Force Pilot 2014.
[57]The Telegraphs report (November 25, 2014). Nigeria's top Muslim leader accuses military of running away from Boko Haram.
Retrievedfrom: http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/africaandindianocean/nig eria/11251843/Nigerias-top-Muslim-leader-accuses-military-of-running-away-from-Boko-Haram.html
[58]Audu, Ola. (January 21, 2015), Boko Haram leader, Shekau, brands Nigerian soldiers cowards; says Baga weapons enough to win war. Retrieved from:http://www.premiumtimesng.com/news/headlines/175372-boko-haram-leader-shekau-brands-nigerian-soldiers-cowards-says-baga-weapons-enough-win-war.html

officers, are tied to issues of corruption within the military (misappropriation of funding meant for officers and lack of proper machinery to prosecute the battle to mention but a few).[59]

Sequel to the idea that the leadership of the movement uses its sermons in mosques to construct anti-nationalist, and anti-Western ideologies embedded in a religious guise, these messages have emerged on YouTube and have been instrumental in expressing the ideology and other propaganda of the movement. A careful consideration of the Twitter handle of the group reveals a salient characteristic of the movement's manipulation and psychological operation. For instance, there are images of child soldiers posted on the site. In reality, the use of child soldiers and women as shields can be seen as a tactic to slow down the military onslaught on the movement.

This approach distracts the military and the government who know that various human rights issues had already tainted the military's image in their prosecution of the war against the insurgents who are not bound by these laws. The forceful enlisting of children into the army of the insurgents will make it difficult for the military to confront the sect in view to avoiding further human rights backlash. Also, the use of children demonstrates the reach and doggedness of the group. Other propaganda and psychological manipulations include hoisting of the logo and flag of the organisation synonymous with images of the Islamic state on Twitter.

Thus, the group in several of their videos have displayed weaponry and other military apparel, and artillery (displays of cars, anti-aircraft weaponry, thousands of live ammunition, videos of operations against the military) it has succeeded in seizing from the military during raids on army barracks. The display of such items demonstrates the group's penchant for positioning itself as the stronger side, winning the battle against the state security apparatus. The leader of the sect is fond of attributing such victories to the support of God, again embedding a religious philosophy to the support the group's activity when he declares:

> We announce our allegiance to the caliph of the Muslims, Ibrahim ibnAwadibn Ibrahim al-Husseini al-Qurashi and will hear and obey in times of difficulty and prosperity, in hardship and ease, and to endure being discriminated against, and not to dispute about rule with those in power,

[59]Ibekwe, N. (January 24, 2015). Full Text and Video of NSA SamboDasuki's famous presentation at Chatham House, London. Retrieved from: http://www.premiumtimesng.com/news/headlines/175497-full-text-video-nsa-sambo-dasukis-famous-presentation-chatham-house-london.html

> except in case of evident infidelity regarding that which there is proof from Allah.[60]

Again, relying on the ideological propaganda of religion which the group has consistently exploited, the text above extracted from an audio message broadcast on the internet from Boko Haram to ISIS demonstrates another salient feature of the group's propagandist and psychological operations, in its strides to connect with other jihadist movements across the globe. Shekau bases the movement's move towards allegiance on the Quranic provision that every Muslim must have a leader or risk dying, which implies that the movement was struggling with the conflict. Arguing that Shekau was exploiting religious texts for manipulative gains, a prominent rights campaigner explained that Boko Harams' message indicated a stronger ideological philosophy compared to previous messages and suggested that the government should exploit superior Islamic texts to counter the insurgent's psychological operation.[61] Another striking feature of Boko Haram since its inception is about the efforts to link up with similar jihadist movements directly and indirectly. This drive shows the group's quest to situate itself as a global player, especially within global jihadist circles. Before the evolution of ISIS, Boko Haram had made efforts in their (Shekau) speech, to connect to other similar movements. For instance, in one of Shekau's statements, he pledged that Boko Haram will carry out Usama Bin Ladin's goal in Nigeria. While such acts demonstrate Boko Haram's loyalty to global jihadist movements (from Al-Qaeda and the Taliban to ISIS), it also paints a scenario indicating some working relationship between Boko Haram and Al-Qaeda even though there is no sufficient evidence to suggest how (if at all) these groups work together. Following Boko Haram's declaration of allegiance to ISIS, the Islamic State through its spokesperson responded by accepting Boko Haram's loyalty in a similar audio message, which also circulated on the internet.

The tactic is of crucial significance to Boko Haram's struggle to assert hegemony, especially in the face of the ongoing onslaught on the movement. For instance, Boko Haram's most recent pledge of allegiance came in the wake of the regional military attack on the group which has dislodged them from their haven. Besides establishing itself as a global jihad player, the move to form alliance with global jihad groups helped Boko Haram maintain a greater sense of meaning and relevance among its supporters, members, and sympathisers at home and abroad. While in the face of conflict, morale among adherents may gradually fade out; the global allegiance may serve as an instrument for attracting more members mainly from the supporters and sympathisers of

[60]Tukur, S (march 8, 2015). Boko Haram pledges allegiance to ISIS'. Retrieved from: http://www.premiumtimesng.com/news/top-news/178135-boko-haram-pledges-allegiance-to-isis.html

[61](World Bulletin 2015).ref World Bulletin Report, (March 10, 2015). Experts: Boko Haram uses ISIL to recruit'. Retrieved from: http://www.worldbulletin.net/news/156375/experts-boko-haram-uses-isil-to-recruit

global jihad movements.[62] One point to note, however, is again how the movement uses religion as the basis for such alliance. Nonetheless, if successful in its propaganda, the assumption is that this tactic will be instrumental in recruiting more individuals into the group. Experts and political commentators have argued that Boko Haram uses global jihadi groups to boost its recruitment drive.[63] The move could also have other positive effects on the Boko Haram movement, especially regarding global jihadist groups providing training and funding to support Boko Haram activities in Nigeria.[64]

Conclusion

The main media publicity and propaganda objective of Boko Haram was accomplished by the sect's exhibition of strength and severity of Boko Haram, through the presentation of the gathering or stockpiling of complex weaponry in recordings; by depicting the gathering as an expert military; by publicizing on-going or late assaults and functional triumphs; and by showing pictures of the decapitation of prisoners and of assaults on towns. Through their promulgation, Boko Haram laid out an image that their triumph is inescapable and that their stockpile is better than that of the Nigerian military. The second point of Boko Haram's social media or ICT propaganda was the misleading of the public and the dishonouring of public authority by falsely exhibiting the government and government machineries as untruthful and powerless. There is no question that different aggressor bunches have arisen in Nigeria with the Boko Haram driving the recreation area. It has likewise been laid out that the gathering represented the most serious difficulties to the country with suggestions to checkmate it.

Security challenges in Nigeria lately have gone from partisan savagery in a northern parts of the country to hostility in the Niger Delta area. The spate of vicious wrongdoings in parts of the nation including seizing, outfitted burglary and deaths, were a portion of the contemporary security challenges confronting the country. Bomb impact and self-destruction psychological warfare is one more arising danger by some traitorous, undemocratic, merchants of death with awful hearts in the country.

The Boko Haram sect is believed to have several splinter groups who analysts believe have contacts with two other al-Qaeda linked groups in Africa. From what started with a few fighters that 'used fuel-laden motorcycles' and 'bows with poisoned arrows' to attack police stations has now escalated to an all-out war on Nigerians and foreigners alike. As it stands today, the group move in a

[62]Moftah, L. Boko Haram ISIS Pledge: Possible Alliance Would Reap Limited Victories For Militant Groups. (March 3, 2015). Retrieved from: http://www.ibtimes.com/boko-haram-isis-pledge-possible-alliance-would-reap-limited-victories-militant-groups-1842568.
[63]Moftah, 3 October 2015; Tisdall 8 March 2015; News24 3 September 2015).
[64]Matfess, H. How the ISIS-Boko Haram Alliance Will Alter Nigeria's Future. March 13, 2015. Retrieved from: http://www.defenseone.com/threats/2015/03/how-isis-boko-haram-alliance-will-alter-nigerias-future/107484/

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convoy of Hilux -Jeeps, well-armed fighters with multiple AK 47 guns, assorted rifles and many technicians who are bomb experts.

It is indisputably clear that the ICT and media propaganda aided in no little measure, Boko Haram's operations, and activities and helped project to those that believe in their course. Thus, through this, the sect was able to gain further access to funding and to recruitment for its manpower supply. This presented a new challenge and also introduced a new theatre of war; the cyberspace warfare, in the ever evolving security environment which the Nigerian government, the Nigerian military and other security agencies must keep advancing to stem the belligerent and unpatriotic activities of the terrorist group through a viable counter narrative.