# Analysis of select Newspapers' reportage of the 2022 Abuja-Kaduna Terrorist Train attack

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| ARTICLE INFO | ABSTRACT |
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| | Insecurity remains a pressing national concern in Nigeria, yet the media is often criticized for not fully performing its watchdog role in sensitizing the public and holding institutions accountable. This study examined newspapers' reportage of the 2022 Abuja-Kaduna terrorist train attack between March and November 2022. The Nigerian Tribune and The Punch were selected, yielding 492 editions from which a sample of 217 was drawn using the Krejcie and Morgan sample size calculator. Purposive and simple random sampling techniques were employed, and data were generated through content analysis. Straight news stories, features, illustrations, and special reports served as the main units of analysis, while Critical Theory of Society and Priming Theory provided theoretical grounding. Findings revealed that coverage of the Abuja-Kaduna attack was initially frequent but gradually declined over time. Furthermore, the two newspapers accorded low prominence to the incident, with most reports placed on inside pages rather than front pages. The dominant thematic framing emphasized rescue efforts, while other critical dimensions such as accountability and root causes of insecurity received limited attention. The study concludes that the prominence and frequency of reportage were disproportionately low compared to the gravity of the terrorist attack. This research contributes to media and security scholarship by highlighting gaps in Nigerian newspapers' coverage of terrorism, particularly in terms of agenda-setting and priming functions. It underscores the need for continuous, balanced, and prominent reportage of security issues to promote public awareness, accountability, and resilience in addressing insecurity in Nigeria.<br><br> |

## 1. Introduction

The world is in jeopardy of insecurity and diverse challenges of development. Insecurity over the years in all ramifications of the globe has been seen as a troubling menace and challenging factor to economic, political and infrastructural growth of diverse nation. Based on the current situation of the country, it is clear that insecurity in Nigeria happens to be a major national risk. In Nigeria, the activities of Boko Haram, herdsmen and bandits have further escalated food insecurity in the affected areas as most of the farmers are displaced thereby making it difficult for them to access

their farmlands and engage in farming (Joda et al., 2021). This indicates that terrorism in this country has worsened different types of insecurity such as health insecurity, education insecurity and more. Similarly, bilateral and multilateral trades are affected while economic relations are also impinged on by the activities of terrorists. Everyone is now afraid of travelling, sleeping and even eating because no one knows the next person to be attacked or kidnapped.

Some scholars have observed that the state of security of a nation is reflects the state of the governing body of such nation. It was reported on October 30th, 2022 that bandits kidnapped Ex, UI Deputy Vice Chancellor Prof. Adigun Agbaje alongside two students of the Moshood Abiola Polytechnic. No fewer than 8,372 people lost their lives to security challenge in Nigeria in 2022 (Saharan Reporters 2022 cited in Ogunji et al., (2022), it is asserted that most of these deaths have a larger share in the Northern part of Nigeria. On 2nd of November, 2022, Punch newspaper reported the abduction of over 40 people including 39 children who were harvesting crops for a fee in a Farm in Katsina (The Punch, 2022). Daily Post also did a publication on 9 passengers kidnapped in Port Harcourt in November 2022, stating that the abduction took place at the boundary between Evekwu and Rumuodogo in Emohua Local Government area, River State. Most recently, the media has been awash with information on the abduction of NYSC corps members all over the country. As it stands, the menace is not about to end.

Nwankpa (2021) asserts that when conflicts break out, the media steps in. From this, the media are known to be problem solvers and builders of the nation; they help in bridging the gap between the government and the citizens. The media according to Asemah et al., (2012) cited in Oladele et al., (2021) are agents of social change that can bring about positive attitudinal change in audience. They perform the roles of information dissemination, attitudinal and behavioural change as well as educating, entertaining and surveillance function. The media are responsible for informing people on the state of security of the county as well as creating avenue for progressive panel discussions, public opinions and more, which may involve security experts and keys actors in government and public spaces, to proffer solutions and recommendations that can help the security state of the country. This made national security a principal agenda for the media as Ileonikhena (2015) observed that the level of insecurity especially terrorism in the North and kidnapping in the south in recent years in Nigeria has largely threatened our national security.

Nyeenenwa (2025) highlighted some unforgettable kidnapping cases in Nigeria which include the Kankara school boys kidnapping on 11th of December, 2020, Chibok school girls kidnapping on April 14, 2014, and the Dapchi school girls kidnapping on 19th February, 2018, among many othersIn many of these aforementioned cases, female victims are sexually abused and this act exposes them to the risk of contracting sexually transmitted diseases, getting impregnated by criminals and many victims losing their lives to kidnappers (C.E. & S.D., 2021). On this note, it may be said that the prevalence of kidnapping as a security discourse is not new in Nigeria and given its strain on security, there is a need to investigate it thoroughly.

Scholars around the world have carried out series of researches on the activities of Boko Haram, the high rate of kidnapping and other forms of insecurity in Nigeria. Abioye & Ogundare, (2024); Ndinojuo, (2024) established that kidnapping and terrorism are twin demons eating up the nation's sense of identity and security as it affects virtually everybody. Kidnapping and terrorism has hugely affected the state of security and sustainable development of the country as it is not only affecting some particular part of the country but every part of the country. In Nwankpa (2021) phraseology, terrorism supplies sensational and horrifying stories which aid the media in selling the news and in return, the media provides terrorist organisations with an outlet for circulating their message and causing fear and panic among the population. Also, several articles have been written on

terrorism and national insecurity and many critiques have opined that amateur journalist over time may be susceptible to underreporting, sensationalism or reporting issues with element of bias.

Despite the works done on terrorism and insecurity in Nigeria, and in spite of the civil and societal uproar caused by news of the Abuja-Kaduna terrorist train attack till date, there seems to be a notable lack of studies focusing specifically on newspaper reportage of this train attack from March, 2022 to December, 2022. This study aims to fill this gap by analysing the coverage provided by Nigerian Tribune and The Punch newspapers, assessing their efforts, successes, and failures in highlighting this critical security incident and in challenging key actors in government, security and public welfare to action.

The urgency of this research lies in the increasing frequency and severity of terrorist incidents in Nigeria, which continue to undermine national security, public trust, and socio-economic stability. Despite the central role of the media as a watchdog and agenda setter, there is limited empirical evidence on how Nigerian newspapers report high-profile terrorist attacks such as the 2022 Abuja-Kaduna train attack. Examining this gap is critical not only for academic discourse but also for guiding media practitioners in adopting more responsible, consistent, and impactful approaches to security reportage. By focusing on reportage patterns, prominence, and thematic framing, this study provides timely insights into how the media can shape public perception, influence policy responses, and strengthen collective resilience against insecurity in Nigeria.

The following questions guided the study: What is the frequency of reportage attributed to the 2022 Abuja-Kaduna terrorist train attack in Nigerian Tribune and The Punch newspapers? To what level was the reportage of the 2022 Abuja-Kaduna terrorist train attack given prominence in Nigerian Tribune and The Punch newspapers? Which story slants were used in reporting the 2022 Abuja-Kaduna terrorist train attack in Nigerian Tribune and The Punch newspapers? What were the dominant themes of Nigerian Tribune and The Punch newspapers coverage of the 2022 Abuja-Kaduna terrorist train attack?.

## 2. Theoretical Framework

This study was anchored on Critical Theory of Society and Priming Theory. Critical Theory, also known as the Frankfurt School, emerged from the intellectual works of Marx and Freud and was further developed in the 20th century. The theory emphasizes political, cultural, economic, and social relationships within a society, particularly in terms of power distribution. It provides tools for understanding existing social conditions, their historical evolution, and how they are sustained or transformed (Olaoye et al., 2022). Importantly, it also enables critical analysis of media portrayals of societal events.

Applied to media studies, Critical Theory allows for an examination of how power dynamics shape news coverage. For example, media outlets may privilege government perspectives while marginalizing the voices of victims or communities, thereby reproducing power imbalances. The theory also helps assess whether media coverage encourages accountability and public discourse or whether it reinforces narratives of helplessness that undermine the media's role as an agent of social change. In this study, Critical Theory guided the analysis of how the Abuja-Kaduna terrorist train attack was reported, focusing on the interaction between media, government, and society as well as the factors that influenced the coverage of the incident.

Priming Theory, on the other hand, extends from Agenda-Setting and Framing theories. Developed by Iyengar, Peters, and Kender (1982), the theory posits that the way media present and prioritize issues stimulates related thoughts in the audience's mind. According to Frings et al., (2014), priming occurs when news content encourages audiences to use specific issues as

benchmarks for evaluating the performance of leaders and governments. This framework is relevant to the present study because insecurity is a recurring theme in Nigerian media (List et al., 2013; Murphy, 2011). Often, coverage emphasizes goodwill messages from government officials or religious and ethnic undertones, while downplaying fundamental issues such as accountability and long-term solutions (Estes & Jones, 2009). By applying Priming Theory, this study evaluates the extent to which Nigerian newspapers fulfilled their responsibility to continuously highlight and prioritize national security issues, particularly the 2022 Abuja-Kaduna terrorist train attack.

According to Heavens (2021), the mass media play a central role in society by promoting peace, unity, tolerance, and orderliness through news, editorials, features, opinion articles, and other forms of content. They make the unknown known and provide possible solutions to societal challenges by engaging key actors capable of offering recommendations. Newspapers, in particular, have long been a prominent medium for educating and raising public awareness (Oriel, 2024; Schuster & Collins, 2024). In the context of national security, the media serve as a crucial voice, disseminating reports that can aid in combating insecurity and resolving ethno-religious conflicts. They achieve this through information dissemination, education, agenda-setting, advocacy, mobilization, and sensitization functions. Further emphasize that the surveillance and correlation functions of the media are essential for mobilizing society against acts of insecurity (Borys, 2021; Knustad, 2020; Zhang, 2022).

Historical examples demonstrate this influence. For instance, following the September 11 attacks, media coverage in the United States emphasized the immediate impact and emotional responses, framing the incident as an assault on American values. Entman (2020) observed that this framing not only shaped public perception but also influenced government policy, particularly with a stronger emphasis on national security and military responses (Entman, 1993).

Similarly, Berlian et al., (2024) found that newspapers have become a credible source of information for the majority of people, providing citizens with opportunities to stay informed and contribute to national discourse. Newspapers therefore play a vital role in mobilizing communities, promoting awareness, shaping attitudes, and influencing behavioral and social change. However, Muobike (2018), cited in Abba & Abbas (2021), argued that kidnapping has remained a persistent issue in Nigeria for over two decades, and the media have yet to consistently report such conflicts in a manner that fosters collaboration between government and citizens. This divergence is reflected in Adeyemi (2011); Bello & Famoroti (2023) who noted that the media's emphasis on terrorism has led the public to prioritize security concerns over socio-economic issues. Such selective coverage risks producing a misinformed public perception that frames terrorism as the sole threat to national security, complicating governance and development discourse.

Comparative studies further illustrate these dynamics. Cottle (2006) examined British media coverage of the 2005 London bombings and found that, while the press emphasized the risks of radicalization and the need for heightened security, it also engaged in sensationalism that stigmatized Muslim communities (Saputra & Salih, 2023; Sedaghati et al., 2023; Soraya & Nugraheni, 2024). This dual narrative complicated public understanding and response to terrorism. In contrast, French media coverage of the Charlie Hebdo attack highlighted freedom of expression and solidarity against terrorism (Adedeji, 2012; Bennett, 2001). This framing galvanized public demonstrations and reinforced national identity and resilience. These cases underline the significant role of media in shaping public discourse, either fostering unity or deepening societal divides. Findings from studies conducted in the U.S. and France demonstrate that media framing significantly influences public perception and government responses to terrorism. In Nigeria,

similarly, the framing of insecurity by the media has the potential to shape public attitudes and influence policy decisions.

Several factors have exacerbated insecurity in Nigeria. Edafejirhaye (2011), cited in Nwabueze and Wozniak (2021), identified the destructive activities of herdsmen, including crop destruction, kidnapping, sexual violence against women, and killings of innocent civilians, as key contributors to the country's deteriorating security situation. In the northern region, for instance, Benue State Governor Samuel Ortom publicly accused the federal government of shielding armed herders despite their widespread violence. Such dynamics highlight the risk of stigmatizing communities, a concern also evident in the UK study. Thus, the media's responsibility to avoid sensationalism and promote balanced narratives is critical for fostering social cohesion and cooperation among affected groups.

The media play a pivotal role in shaping public perception and discourse on terrorism, particularly in highly insecure contexts such as Nigeria. By reporting on security incidents, the media influence governmental responses and societal attitudes. Hoffman (2017) noted that media coverage often emphasizes certain narratives that may either heighten or reduce public fear and anxiety. Despite counter-terrorism measures by the Nigerian government, terrorism remains a persistent and escalating challenge (Hans, 2023; Kosiuk, 2021). According to the U.S. Bureau of Counterterrorism (2019), over two million people have been internally displaced in northern states such as Borno, Adamawa, and Yobe, with an additional 240,000 refugees fleeing to neighboring countries. Although governments at various levels have introduced security strategies and campaigns, these measures have not adequately addressed root causes. For instance, the Nigerian Senate passed a law mandating a minimum of 15 years' imprisonment for individuals who pay ransom to kidnappers, aiming to reduce abductions for ransom (Uduma et al., 2022). However, beyond legislation and military efforts, broader socio-economic issues, such as poverty, unemployment, hunger, weak technological development, poor social infrastructure, unjust policies, and human rights violations, must be addressed to mitigate insecurity effectively.

Comparative experiences reinforce this argument. The Lindt Cafe siege in Sydney, for example, received extensive media coverage that highlighted the victims' experiences and emphasized national unity and resilience. Scott (2020) observed, however, that the coverage also generated debates about how mental health issues of perpetrators were represented, underlining the importance of contextualized reporting. Such human-interest approaches could benefit Nigerian media by enhancing empathy, fostering public engagement, and amplifying advocacy for victims' rights, while also drawing attention to the socio-economic drivers of insecurity (Baker, 2015; Walt, 2020).

Nwamaka & Stephen (2018) further argue that the alarming rise in insecurity has increased crime and terrorist attacks across Nigeria, with severe consequences for the nation's economy and sustainable development. Insecurity has undermined business growth and long-term resilience. Sustainable development, which entails both economic growth and environmental protection, cannot be achieved without national stability. Lessons from the French and Australian cases illustrate how media coverage can promote solidarity and resilience. Nigerian media, therefore, should adopt narratives that encourage collective action rather than fear and division. As Li et al., (2022) emphasize, prioritizing investigative journalism that explores the root causes of terrorism can foster a more informed public discourse, strengthen accountability, and encourage proactive responses from government actors.

Terrorism remains a common challenge to national security worldwide, having transcended geographic boundaries to become a global threat (Alexander, 2019; Martin, 2021). Obasanjo

(1999), cited in Helbling & Meierrieks (2022), conceptualized national security as the aggregate of the security interests of all individuals, communities, ethnic groups, and the political entity at large. He further argued that preserving the safety of Nigerians at home and abroad, eliminating corruption, fostering development, and improving citizens' welfare constitute the core concerns of national security.

Onodugo et al. (2016) investigated the effects of insecurity on Nigeria's sustainable development. Their exploratory discourse established a strong link between national security and development, concluding that insecurity is a global problem. They argued that the government's inability to decisively address insecurity has turned the phrase "security threat" into what increasingly resembles "security collapse." The authors emphasized the need for good governance, where leaders discharge their duties with patriotism, integrity, and accountability. They recommended that individuals who enter politics primarily for personal enrichment should be constitutionally removed from office.

Ugah & Ortesega (2022) examined insecurity in Northern Nigeria, focusing on the Boko Haram insurgency, government responses, and its impact on Nigeria's external image. The findings revealed that insecurity in the region poses a national problem that requires sincerity of purpose and collective responsibility from leaders and citizens alike. Similarly, Usman and Singh (2021), employing a mixed-method approach, analyzed the persistence of banditry and insecurity in Northern Nigeria. They argued that Nigeria, as a developing state, continues to struggle with nation-building, requiring strong institutions, effective policies, and negotiation-based conflict resolution to address security challenges sustainably.

Ndubuisi-Okolo and Anigbuogu (2019) examined insecurity in Nigeria and its implications for industrialization and sustainable development. They concluded that rapid industrial growth and sustainable development are impossible without addressing insecurity. They recommended that government must prioritize good governance, redress issues of injustice, marginalization, and discrimination, and create a safe environment for investment to enhance citizens' livelihoods.

Nwankpa (2021) studied Nigerian newspaper coverage of militant terror tactics during the Niger Delta crisis, using quantitative and qualitative content analysis. Findings revealed that kidnapping was the most reported tactic, followed by oil facility vandalism, oil bunkering, and killings. The study further showed that groups not officially designated as "terrorists" could perpetrate acts of terror comparable to those of recognized terrorist organizations. Nwankpa recommended that, in reporting terrorism, journalists should carefully frame stories to emphasize widespread condemnation and official responses, thereby supporting societal recovery rather than inadvertently amplifying the terrorists' agenda.

While these studies provide valuable insights into insecurity in Nigeria and the role of the media, most focus on general security challenges, government responses, or broad patterns of media coverage. Few have examined in detail how Nigerian newspapers reported the specific case of the 2022 Abuja-Kaduna terrorist train attack. This study addresses that gap by analyzing media reportage of the incident, assessing the role of the press in shaping public understanding, and evaluating how such coverage can inform policy and future crisis management.

## 3. Method

This study focused on the coverage of the 2022 Abuja-Kaduna train attack in selected Nigerian newspapers. Two national dailies, Nigerian Tribune and The Punch, were purposively selected for analysis. The study population consisted of all editions of these newspapers published between

March 29, 2022, and November 29, 2022, covering an eight-month period. This resulted in a total population of 492 editions (246 days × 2 newspapers).

To determine the sample size, the researchers adopted Krejcie and Morgan's (1970) sample size table. With a population of 492, the required sample size was 217 editions. The sample was divided equally between the two newspapers, resulting in 109 editions each from Nigerian Tribune and The Punch. Simple random sampling was employed to select the editions for analysis (Holbrook & Horgan, 2019; Martin, 2017).

Data were collected using a structured coding sheet, which examined straight news stories, feature stories, special reports, and illustrations as the primary units of analysis. The content categories included placement, direction, frequency, and themes, thereby ensuring construct validity. Placement and frequency were used to measure prominence: reports appearing on the front page were scored 4 points, back page 3 points, center spread 2 points, and inside pages 1 point. To enhance inter-coder reliability, three researchers independently analyzed a subset of the sampled editions using the coding sheet. The high level of consistency achieved in coding minimized the potential influence of individual bias and ensured the reliability of the findings.

## 4. Result and Discussion

**Result**

This section focuses on the presentation and analysis of data. All analysed media contents within the stipulated period are presented thus.

**Table 1.** Units of analysis cross tabulation

| | | Select newspapers | | Total |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | Nigerian Tribune | The Punch Newspaper | |
| Straight News | Count | 45 | 19 | 64 |
| | % Total | 70.3% | 29.7% | 100.0% |
| Features Stories | Count | 2 | 0 | 2 |
| | % Total | 100.0% | 0.0% | 100.0% |
| Illustrations | Count | 4 | 3 | 7 |
| | % Total | 57.1% | 42.9% | 100.0% |
| Special Reports | Count | 0 | 1 | 1 |
| | % Total | 0.0% | 100.0% | 100.0% |
| Total | Count | 51 | 23 | 74 |
| | % of Total | 68.9% | 31.1% | 100.0% |

As seen in Table 1, the data above reveals that a total of 74 issues were published on the 2022 Abuja-Kaduna terrorist train attack by the two select newspapers within the period under review. The Nigerian Tribune Newspaper published a total of 51 issues while 23 issues on the 2022 Abuja-Kaduna terrorist train attack were published by The Punch newspaper. In all, there were a total of 64 straight news stories, 2 of feature stories, 7 of illustrations and 1 of special report. This is a fairly high return, though not unexpected as the researchers purposively selected two of the most vibrant Nigerian dailies in the Nigerian Tribune and The Punch newspapers.

According to the data above, as seen in Table 2, April had the highest number of publications on issues regarding Abuja-Kaduna terrorist train attack with 20.3%, followed by the month of August with a total of 12 stories (16.2%). This data implies that after the month of April which was the month of the incident, the newspapers didn't publish as many stories on the incident compared to the first fresh months (April and May).

**Table 2.** (Research Question 1): Assessment of how frequently Nigerian Tribune and The Punch newspapers reported the 2022 Abuja-Kaduna terrorist train attack

| Placement | Nigerian Tribune | | | | The Punch | | | | Total | % |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | SN | ILL | FS | SR | SN | ILL | FS | SR | | |
| March | 4 | 2 | 0 | 0 | 2 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 8 | 11% |
| Aril | 9 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 4 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 15 | 20.3% |
| May | 8 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 3 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 11 | 15% |
| June | 3 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 4 | 5.4% |
| July | 5 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 2 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 8 | 11% |
| August | 5 | 1 | 1 | 0 | 3 | 1 | 0 | 1 | 12 | 16.2% |
| September | 4 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 2 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 6 | 8.1% |
| October | 4 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 5 | 6.7% |
| November | 3 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 5 | 6.7% |
| Total | 45 | 4 | 2 | 0 | 19 | 3 | 0 | 1 | 74 | 100% |

Note: SN is Straight news, ILL is Illustrations, FS is feature stories, SR is Special Report

**Table 3.** (Research Question 2): Determining the level of prominence Nigerian Tribune and The Punch newspapers gave to the reportage of 2022 Abuja-Kaduna terrorist train attack?

| Placement | Nigerian Tribune | | | | The Punch | | | | Total | % |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | SN | ILL | FS | SR | SN | ILL | FS | SR | | |
| Front page | 18x4= 72 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 5 x 4 = 20 | 3x4=12 | 0 | 0 | 26 | 104 |
| Back page | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1x3= 3 | 1 | 3 |
| Center spread | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Inside page | 27 x 1 = 27 | 4 x 1 = 4 | 2 x 1 = 2 | 0 | 14 x 1 = 14 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 25 | 47 |
| Total | 45 | 4 | 2 | 0 | 19 | 3 | 0 | 1 | 74 | 154 |

As seen in Table 3, the data in the table above implies that most of the stories published by the two select newspapers are published on the inside page of the issues. With this, it can be said that the select newspaper outfits gave low prominence to the reportage of the 2022 Abuja-Kaduna terrorist train attack.

**Table 4.** (Research question 3): Evaluation of the story slants used in reporting the 2022 Abuja-Kaduna terrorist train attack?

| Direction | Nigerian Tribune | | | | The Punch | | | | Total | % |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | SN | ILL | FS | SR | SN | ILL | FS | SR | | |
| Positive | 17 | 3 | 2 | 0 | 7 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 30 | 40.5% |
| Negative | 19 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 7 | 2 | 0 | 0 | 29 | 39.1% |
| Neutral | 9 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 5 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 15 | 20.2% |
| Total | 45 | 4 | 2 | 0 | 19 | 3 | 0 | 1 | 74 | 100% |

The data in Table 4, above reveals that positive slant had the highest point of 40.5% in all the units analysed in this study. Negative direction had 39.1% and Neutral direction had 20.2%. This implies that the two newspapers analysed in this study positively slanted the reports of the events of the 2022 Abuja-Kaduna terrorist train attack and this should have had a positive bearing on public discourse.

The data presented in Table 5, above implies that the dominant theme used in reporting the 2022 Abuja-Kaduna terrorist train attack is Rescue effort theme. The rescue effort theme reveals

that many of the news and illustrative reports centered on how the victims would be rescued from the kidnappers' den.

**Table 5.** (Research question 4): What are the dominant themes of *Nigerian Tribune* and *The Punch* newspapers of reporting 2022 Abuja-Kaduna terrorist train attack?

| Themes | Nigerian Tribune | | | | The Punch | | | | Total | % |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | SN | ILL | FS | SR | SN | ILL | FS | SR | | |
| Economic Threat | 3 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 3 | 4.0% |
| Life Threat | 3 | 1 | 2 | 0 | 3 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 9 | 12.2% |
| Rescue effort | 15 | 3 | 0 | 0 | 10 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 29 | 39.2% |
| Political | 6 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 3 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 10 | 14% |
| Religious | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0% |
| Others | 18 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 3 | 2 | 0 | 0 | 23 | 31% |
| Total | 45 | 4 | 2 | 0 | 19 | 3 | 0 | 1 | 74 | 100% |

**Discussion**

The data presented in this research established that the frequency of reportage of the 2022 Abuja-Kaduna terrorist train attack was frequent as at first two months of the insurgence which was March and April, but gradually, the reportage lessened. This, as observed was due to media agenda setting naturally shifting to other news. The frequency rose up again in August when another attack was launched in Kuje prison, given it was also an insecurity issue but afterwards, the frequency of publications fell again.

This mirrors Cottle's (2006) examination of the media's portrayal of the 2005 London bombings. It was found that early on, the British media was intentional in the coverage of events and even stressed the need for increased security measures. However, Cottle also pointed out how the British media began to sensationalise certain aspects of the issue, which could led to stigmatisation of Muslim communities and generally complicated public understanding and response to terrorism. These findings from this study and Cottle's establish a similar pattern of the tendency of the media in different countries of the world to lose tenacity with the coverage of socially relevant issues such as the 2022 Abuja-Kaduna terrorist train attack (Alexander, 2019; Lutz, 2019).

The information presented under this research question showed that a total number of 74 issues of straight news, features, illustrations and special reports were published on the events of the Abuja-Kaduna terrorist train attack by the two newspapers selected for this study within the period under review. Nigerian Tribune newspaper published a total of 51 issues and Punch newspaper published 23 issues. Out of the 51 issues published by Nigerian Tribune newspaper, 18 were on front page; 33 were on inside page while none was on center spread and back page. The Punch newspaper published a total of 23 issues where 8 were on front page, 14 on inside page, 1 on the back page and none was placed on center spread. Of the points scored by all the published news stories, features, special report and illustration, those placed on the front page scored 104 points with 77% of the entire issues.

The fact that less stories about the 2022 Abuja-Kaduna terrorist train attack appeared on the front, and back page and center spread indicates that significant prominence was not given to the reportage of the event by the two newspapers. Therefore, it is safe to conclude that the 2022 Abuja-Kaduna terrorist train attack was given a low level of prominence in the select newspapers. This is reflective of the Priming theory developed by Iyengar, Peters, & Kender in 1982, which assumes that the way media present and place their messages stimulates related thoughts in the minds of audience members (Holbrook, 2022). The theory also provides that media responsiveness to issues

may be gauged by how messages are placed in hierarchy of importance (Hakobyan, 2020; Meng, 2021; Tarigan, 2020). This issue may not have been accorded a great deal of importance because informative stories on the 2022 Abuja-Kaduna terrorist train attack appeared mostly on the inside and not front page. Meanwhile, front pages are likened to prime time on television or radio where burning issues are best addressed as it is a common belief that stories found on the front page are the critical issues and happenings in the polity. Hence, this finding established that not enough prominence was given to the reportage of the 2022 Abuja-Kaduna terrorist train attack.

The presented information under this research showed revealed the 3 slants adopted by the select newspapers to be Positive, Negative and Neutral. Coding showed that 40.5% of the stories published were reported towards positive directions, 39.1% were negative while 20.2% were slanted neutrally. The implication of this is that since 30 stories of 74 were reported positively by the two select newspapers, 29 stories were positive and 15 were neutral. The reportage of the 2022 Abuja-Kaduna terrorist train attack was presented positively, this means that it was presented in a way that demands for high attention and attitudinal change in the society.

This finding is supported by Asemah et al., (2017) cited in Oladele et al., (2021) who established that the media as agents of social change which can bring about positive attitudinal change in the audience. The way the media slant the reportage of this attack curb protest and some violent act that could have evolved as a result of this attack and this change some attitude of people towards the government. Similarly, Nwankpa (2021) in his investigation of Nigerian newspaper coverage of terror tactics of militants in Niger Delta paid key attention to language and hidden nuances. He recommended following his findings that in times of terrorism, journalists should carefully choose the angle to mirror and the scale to project on, as it is very easy to erroneously attribute names or appellations to subjects in the news. This error, if made may hamper the effect news coverage is designed to achieve.

The data presented in this research exposed the dominant themes used by the select newspapers in their reportage of the 2022 Abuja-Kaduna terrorist train attack. Coding revealed that there were 5 dominant themes used by the select newspapers - Economic Threat theme, Life Threat theme, Rescue Effort Theme, Political Theme and other themes. The economic threat theme scored 4.0%, life threat theme scored 12.2%, rescue effort theme scored 39.2%, political theme scored 31% and other themes scored 31%. This finding implies that rescue effort theme dominated the other themes used in the reportage of the 2022 Abuja-Kaduna terrorist train attack. The select newspapers reported the issues in a way that calls for rescue of the victims and also in a way that reveals how the victims are rescued and how they will be rescued. Other themes adopted by the select newspapers in the reportage of this event include sympathy theme, trauma theme, re-unity theme, child delivery theme, death, etc.

This may be related to the Critical theory of the society which emerged in the era of Marx and Freud in the late 90s. As earlier interpreted, this theory like in this case is relevant in assessing whether media coverage through the themes dominantly used encourages public discourse and action regarding tackling the issue being discussed and for putting strategic security policies in place for the future. KhosraviNik & Amer (2023) examined the media's portrayal of terrorist attacks in the Middle East, noting that coverage often focuses on the perpetrators rather than the socio-political contexts that foster terrorism. This selective framing can lead to a skewed public perception that fails to address the underlying issues contributing to terrorism. If media reports cannot elicit accountability or reform and instead reinforce a narrative of helplessness, then the media's potential role as an agent of social change is undermined.

## 5. Conclusion

This study critically analyded the coverage of the 2022 Abuja-Kaduna terrorist train attack by two prominent Nigerian newspapers, Nigerian Tribune and The Punch. The findings ultimately reveal that both newspapers did not accord sufficient prominence to the events surrounding the attack, as evidenced by the limited placement of stories on front pages and center spreads. Instead, the majority of coverage appeared on inside pages, indicating a lower level of urgency and importance attributed to the incident. Furthermore, it was identified from the analysis that the predominant theme in the reportage was the "rescue effort," which suggests a focus on the actions taken to address the aftermath of the attack rather than a comprehensive exploration of the incident's broader implications. While the coverage displayed a generally positive slant, it is key to recognise that this approach may not fully engage the public in necessary discussions about accountability and systemic changes required to combat insecurity.

This research contributes to the understanding of media dynamics in reporting terrorism in Nigeria and underscores how media framing can shape public perception and discourse regarding terrorism. In future cases, it is recommended for journalists to diversify themes. For instance, while focusing on rescue efforts is important in covering terrorism news, journalists should also explore themes related to the root causes of terrorism, governmental accountability, and victim narratives. Also, journalists are urged to avoid sensationalism and instead, engage with experts. That is, journalists should strive for responsible reporting which provides deeper insights into the complexities of terrorism and its impact on society, thus promoting understanding and solidarity rather than fear and division.

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