ANALYSIS OF GLOBAL TERRORISM FROM ACADEMIA AND MEDIA PERSPECTIVE

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Abstract

The global representation of terrorist groups is becoming a trend and drastically affecting negatively, societal peace and future development. The reoccurring attacks by terrorists' organizations accounts for the increase in terrorist affiliates around the world. In light of this, Opinion leaders such as academic, mass media and politicians interpret and build the understanding of terrorism in the minds of the public through their diverse influential opinions. These interpretations most times result in the escalation of the problem of terrorism and the reaction of the public to the interpretation unconsciously circulated by opinion leaders over the years. This study examines the definitions of two opinion leaders, namely media professionals and academics in predicting public view about the concept of terrorism, while reviewing the other definitions of terrorism as proposed by published authors. These reviews were done using qualitative analysis to extract common words used by media practitioners and published authors in defining and interpreting terrorism. These definitions were content analysed. Tugal word cloud was used to interpret the data gathered. Results revealed that opinion leaders interpret the act of terrorism as mainly political and violence, while journalist believes the act of terrorism is directed to disruption societal peace through threats and intimidation to seek political attention. The study therefore recommends political leader be more honest and truthful to the people about terrorist related problems in Nigeria to clarity perceptions.

Keywords: Terrorists, opinion leaders, media practitioners, media representation, academia and global

1. INTRODUCTION

Providing internationally accepted definition of terrorism remains problematic for authors, scholars, researcher, countries and international organisations. Diverse authors in the field of terrorism (Karagoz, 2012; Orhero, 2015; Sinia, 2008) identify the difficulty involved in proposing an acceptable definition. The ambiguity of several definitions in catering for countries' sentiments, weak and shallow definitions, and the political interest of country parties involved in the fight against terrorism are the major problems militating against efforts in defining terrorism. That is, countries involved in one form of military combat towards other countries stand the risk of being categorised as terrorists. Consequently, notable international organisations continue to change their definitions in order to establish an internationally acceptable definition without running the risk of referring to themselves and other neighbouring countries as terrorists. The journey of

defining the concept is interpreted to suit different interests. In defining terrorism, key concepts reoccur; this gives a brief understanding of the components of the complex concepts. Such key words include organisation, political, coercion, target, intimidation, and violence.

These reoccurring words in the understanding of terrorism persist in issues surrounding the acts perpetrated by terrorists. There are words commonly used by opinion leaders such as media practitioners, Politicians and academia in describing terrorism in this era. These opinion leaders' views, conceptualisation and interpretation of terrorism affect and determine the meaning the public give to terrorism. Opinion leaders are individuals who are active voices in their communities and influence the decisions of community members. For instance, celebrities, academic, journalists, local politicians, pastors, doctors etc. are examples of opinion leaders. Burt (1999, p.45) explains that "they are not people at the top of things so much as people at the edge of things, not leaders within groups so much as brokers between groups" but carry information across boundaries that are unreachable. Consequently, the opinion of these categories of people who influence opinion in the society could lead to a community accepting meaning, ideas, subjects and opinion, originating from opinion leaders.

In this light, the study examines the conceptualisation of terrorism by selected opinion leaders in determining or predicting public opinion about the concept, while reviewing other definitions of terrorism as proposed by published authors. This review is used as the basis for the creation and definition of a new concept.

2. LITERATURE

2.1 Terrorism and definition problem

The occurrence in a society results in the coining and creation of certain terms to describe the situation. This is especially applicable to situations that affect the society negatively. The concept of 'terrorism' is one of those concepts created as a result of several happenings and effects of this ideology groups worldwide. Terrorists are in the category of ideology groups because according to Van Dijk (1998, p. 78), they are usually defined "as political or social systems of ideas, values or prescriptions groups or other collectivities, and have the function of organizing or legitimating the actions of the group."

Terrorism is referred to as "the threat, the preparation or the actual act of serious violence directed against human beings, or acts aimed at creating damage disruptive to society in order to bring about social changes, terrify the population, or influence political decision-making" (Council of European Union, 2015). Also, Orhero (2015) believes that "the concept, terrorism, is complex and surrounded with confusion, because of its political implication and some violent groups, consider themselves as freedom fighter not terrorists." In the same vein Sinai (2008), stressed that, defining the term, 'terrorism' is most ambiguous in terrorism studies because, the definitions that presently exist does not differentiate attacks against armed military and civilian non-combatants. However, the author believes that guerrilla organisation overthrow the government using military and political methods, while terrorist groups "aim at provoking a harsh government response in response to their operations" (Sinai 2008 p. 2). To further, explain the idea of the term, Sinai (2008) notes that "unlike guerrilla forces, terrorist groups are less capable of overthrowing their adversaries' governments, than inflicting indiscriminate destruction that they hope will coerce them to change policy."

Sinai [7], therefore propose the definition of terrorism as "a tactics of warfare involving premeditated, politically motivated violence perpetrated by subnational groups or clandestine agents against any citizen of a state, whether civilian or military, to influence, coerce, and, if possible, cause mass casualties and physical destruction upon their targets." The ideology of terrorism falls under Jihadism, which is a specific type of terrorism. According to Brinkel and Ait-Hida [1], "Jihadism is an extreme political ideology characterised by the divine endeavour to spread Islam over the world by waging a holy war against all unbelievers. They oppose corrupt regimes in their own countries as well as in a more general sense, the economic, cultural, and political dominance of the west." This common ideology drives their activities locally and internationally as a group.

However, it is believed that "terrorism does not have a clear-cut and internationally recognised definition" (Brinkel and Ait-Hida, 2012) because, as violent attacks continues to emerge, the need to categories the perpetrators of such terrorist attacks becomes necessary and therefore difficult. Karagoz (2012) then maintained that "it would be misleading to try to define terrorism only from one perspective, since it is a multidisciplinary subject, a historical and political phenomenon as a sociological and psychological one and its motives can differ, as can the counter-measures." Chaliand and Bin (2007, p. 54) then concludes, "usually, people use the term as a disapproving label for a whole range of phenomena that they do not like, without bothering to define precisely what constitutes terroristic behaviour."

One of the major problems in terrorism is having an understanding of the concept that could be acceptable to the world. This problem of conceptualisation is general knowledge to scholars. It is however obvious why the problem exist and will persist for a long time. Many countries and organisations especially dominated by western influence, have defined terrorism with sentiments, mostly to exempt themselves from being called terrorists. All parties involved seem to be protecting their interest, course and actions. These sentiments are known to go on for a long time to ensure justification of previous actions perpetrated by these parties. This is probably why some definitions are unnecessarily ambiguous. Also, actions perpetrated by terror acts in the future could also affect the conceptualization of terrorism in the future as terrorist organisations are employing new techniques, weapons, methods, technology, etc, to establish their ideologies.

2.1.1 'Terrorism' reviewed

For the United State government, terrorism is "the calculated use of unlawful violence or threat of violence to inculcate fear; intended to coerce or to intimidate governments or societies in the pursuit of goals that are generally political, religious, or ideological." The United States government emphasised the use of unlawful violence in instilling fear. The use of violence is a common term know to terrorists but the act of violence instilling fear in people is rather subjective than general. Though their purpose could be to cause fear, there is no certainty that all victims experience such fear. On the other hand, violence perpetrated by terrorist acts, cause lots of damage to people in the society; however, these terrorist acts are far from intimidating the government. Walsh (2010) affirms that terrorists in most cases distort societal order but incapable of winning the war they fight against the government. The United Nations identified the general goal of terrorist as political and religious. Terrorists pursue a political course, rather than admit to pursuing a religious course; they argue they fight for the freedom of expression, which could also be discharged through religious beliefs. This author should have restrained from the use of the word religion, as the religion of a nations also represents a societal norm. Because they are societal norms, every society gives citizens the freedom to express these beliefs.

Terrorism is "seriously intimidating a population, unduly compelling a government or international organisation to perform or abstain from performing any act, seriously destabilizing or destroying the fundamental political, constitutional, economic or social structures of a country or international organisation" (Council of European Union 2015, p. 5).

The definition proposed by the European Union restrain from restricting the target of terrorists to the government. The Union includes international organisations and general population as possible targets of terrorists. The definition also suggests that terrorists react only to attacks perpetrated by government or international organisations. This means that the act of terrorism only occurs when a group or organisation reacts to an incident committed by government or international organisation.

Definitions by the United States Department of State Publication (2014) and Council of European Union (2015) above have not identified violence as a tool used by terrorist in achieving their goal. Instead, the author used intimidation. It is pertinent to note that intimidation can be minimalistic. It is impossible to refer to an incident as, act of terrorism especially in a case where intimidation is minimal. The use of extreme violence is significant in conceptualizing terrorism because, it differentiates diverse forms of violence, thereby establishing the intensity and level of damage perpetrated by terrorists acts compared to other forms of violence. Sinai (2008) define terrorism as "a tactic of warfare involving premeditated, politically motivated, violence perpetrated by subnational groups or clandestine agents against any citizen of a state, whether civilian or military, to influence, coerce and if possible, cause mass casualties and physical destruction upon their target". Sinai's (2008) perspective on terrorism ended up employing terms that suggest terrorists' targets as small groups or individuals. In trying to ensure the term is conceptually captured, ambiguity becomes inevitable. Attacks by terrorist groups are usually extreme and with the magnitude of the dangerous attacks common with terrorist organisations, attacks cannot be restricted to an individual or small group. In fact, terrorists are identified as large organisations and with the intention and purpose of spreading beyond original location. Their aim has always been to acquire territories. Small groups or individuals do not have the capacity to acquire territories. The definition proposed by Sinai also suggests the pre-planned attacks by terrorists. This is usually true with terrorists, because they plan attacks that could cause government to enforce their goals. Their acts include constant plan to distort social order.

Federal Bureau of Investigation (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. The US Code also share the same definition, which from its content, is motivated by the responsibilities of the organisation, that is as security agents who are involved in carry out attacks with the use of force. In their definition, they have clearly identified the type of force or

violence that can be categorised as lawful and unlawful. This is because of their role as security agents. Terrorism is a global phenomenon; therefore, in this case what is lawful or unlawful is bound to be subjective to different countries. The U.S code of federal regulation and FBI's conceptualisation of the term seem political and intentionally structured considering the use of the phrase "unlawful use of force or violence". This compels one to believe that any organisation, country or individual determines what is unlawful. After reviewing 100 definitions using word cloud to determine the frequent word used by publishing authors in defining terrorism, it was discovered that terrorism is commonly referred to as political, coercion, involving a target and involves an organised body of persons. Considering the purpose and target of terrorist organisations, we therefore define terrorism as dangerous and brutal actions taken against the public and government by a group of person with or without international connection, to forcefully achieve a societal cause common to the group.

3. METHOD

Qualitative method of analysis was employed for this study, to understand respondents' interpretation of terrorism. Two categories of opinion leaders namely 'media practitioners' and academia's understanding of the term 'terrorism' was collated, content analysed and presented using word cloud. Word cloud is a technological device or application used to identify dominant themes or words in a transcript or document. Tagul is a type of word cloud application that also zooms in on dominant character in a document but in an artistic way (using art).

For this study, 50 media practitioners were selected from a private and public broadcast media organisation. Participants selected from all units in the media organisation are broadcast and print journalists, producers, reporters, correspondents, photojournalists, newscasters etc. Broadcast journalists considered for the research were restricted to the senior rank. For academic respondents, the selection of 50 respondents was also limited to senior lecturers and professors from private and public universities. The selection of respondents was restricted to senior rank among media practitioners and academia because of many years of experience in their various fields. The public and private organisations were equal represented for the study to ensure accuracy.
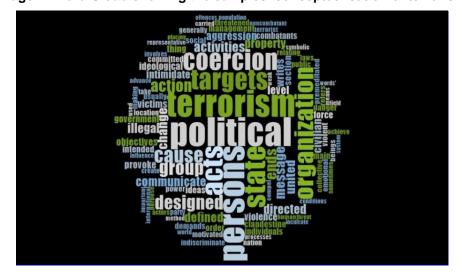
4. RESULTS AND FINDINGS

Image 1: Word Cloud showing the samples' conceptualisation of terrorism

Dominant themes in the Concept of terrorism by media practitioners and Academics

The word cloud above shows that of all 100 reviewed definitions of terrorism, most authors believe the act of terrorism is political, coercion, involving a form of target at people. Furthermore, terrorism is seen as a form of planned activities by an organised body**.** Since authors influence societal/public opinion because of the role they play, their opinion about the meaning of terrorism goes a long way to influence their worldview.

Image 2: Word Cloud showing media practitioners' conceptualisation of terrorism

Dominant themes in the Concept of terrorism by media practitioners in a tagul word cloud.

The word cloud above reveals that media practitioners interpret the act of terrorism as political, violent, intimidation and an act against peace. Chiluwa (2016) an author in the area of terrorism and media discourse also emphasised the major aim of terrorists, which is to intentionally intimidate people by causing physical harm and threats to change the existing political system. Other dominant interpretation of terrorism identified in the study describes terrorists as a group, destructive and working against societal peace. As the media is delegated with ensuring peace, it is expected they define terrorist in such manner. Dominant beliefs about terrorism are projected through media as media practitioners. Because of the significant role and influence of the media, the public has the tendency to adopt interpretations as presented by media practitioners. Media practitioners set the agenda for how people should think about the issues surrounding terrorism.

Image 3: Word Cloud showing Academics' conceptualisation of terrorism

Dominant themes in the Concept of terrorism by Academic in a tagul word cloud.

The word cloud above presents dominant themes used by academia in defining terrorism. Analysis using word cloud reveals that, Academia mostly describe terrorist as an act of violence, involving a group which involves force, fear and terror. As people who make impact the younger generation by giving knowledge, their opinion can easily imbibed. Young people tend to adopt the idea as true because such information is frequently transferred through teachings. This result informs why Peter (2017) stresses the need for Nigeria as an emerging economy to pay attention to cyber penetration especially by terrorists who use the cyberspace to attract the youths.

5. DISCUSSION

After examined definitions of represented opinion leaders as selected in the Nigerian society, the study

discovered that media practitioners and academia (who are opinion leaders) describe and interpret terrorism in slightly different ways. They see it as an organised group, involving violence, intimidation, destruction of peace, a form of terror, and attacks, sees it as a political act. The study further observe that most academic define terrorism based on the political arena, while the media describes the concept considering the effects terrorists attacks could have on the people and the society.

6. CONCLUSION

Considering the place and significance of this category of persons, the public is sure to imbibe the same understanding of terrorism. This is because the public naturally through previous researches pay attention to, retain and in most cases adopt interpretations by opinion leaders on societal matters. Although terrorism from the analysis is identified with all forms of negativity, respondents tend to attach such negative attribute of terrorism to politics or politicians. If this finding is the reality, then it gives Nigerian great concern as to whether the people are safe in the hands of politicians who are believed to use the act of terror for political gain. Although no strong evidence has proven this concerns, but the society is left to wonder the possible level of politician involvement in terrorist acts in Nigeria. On the other hand, conceptualisation by media practitioners only reaffirms the significant role they play and their dedication and social services to the public (social responsibility). Academics are more driven to conduct and seek answers through research by addressing political issues, while the media also reports on political or societal issues but place more emphasis on the implication of such issues on the ordinary man in the society.

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