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Terrorists and Social Media Messages: A Critical Analysis of Boko Haram's Messages and Messaging Techniques

Chris Wolumati Ogbondah and Pita Ogaba Agbese

Introduction

Post-colonial Nigeria has been plagued with various types of violent conflicts. A bloody civil war in which an estimated 1 million people were killed ravaged the country from 1967 to 1970. Accounts of the war, both real and in fictional forms, have been provided by several writers, including Amadi (1973), Achuzia (1986), Shillington (2005), St Jorre (1972), Madiebo (1980), Forsyth (1969), Kirk-Greene (1971), Iroh (1979), Ademoyega (1981), Adichie (2007), and Johnson (2017). Interethnic and intra-communal conflicts have also shaken the foundations of the nation since 1960 when colonial rule ended.¹ Other violent conflicts that have plagued the country are religious conflicts in Kano, Bauchi, Kaduna, Kafanchan, Zaria, Jos, Maiduguri, and many other places. Blood-letting in the name of religion in these and other places in Nigeria has left thousands dead and wounded. Destruction of property in the course of religious violence in Nigeria has also wreaked economic calamity on the country. For instance, wanton destruction of property during the Maitatsene religious uprising in Kano from 1980 to 1985 resulted in the loss of lives and of

C. W. Ogbondah (✉)

Department Communication Studies, University of Northern Iowa,
Cedar Falls, IA, USA

P. O. Agbese

Department of Political Science, University of Northern Iowa, Cedar Falls, IA, USA

millions of dollars.² Clashes between members of the militant Shi'ite religious sect and the Nigerian army in 2016 led to the demolition of an entire neighborhood in Zaria city.³ Violence perpetrated by militants agitating for greater control over the oil resources of the Niger Delta has also taken a heavy toll on lives and property in the region.

Armed robbery and kidnapping for ransom are other deadly acts that have plagued Nigeria in the last two decades. For many years, some Nigerians from the eastern part of the country who live in other parts of the country could not visit their ancestral homes because they were afraid of being kidnapped. Kidnapping for ransom that began in the Niger Delta region has now spread to other parts of the nation, including Lagos and Abuja. Other forms of violence in Nigeria are those perpetrated by the Niger Delta Avengers and cult groups, including the Badoo Boys.⁴ Nigeria's most recent orgy of violence is the ongoing killing and destruction of lives and property perpetrated by the so-called cattle herdsmen who have wreaked havoc in places such as Kaduna, Plateau, Benue and Taraba states. The image of nomadic cattlemen is no longer that of nomads who carry long sticks used in corralling their cattle; it is the image of battle-ready men who are armed with AK-47 rifles.

By far the biggest security issue that Nigeria has faced since 1999 when the country transitioned from military autocracy to civil democracy is the Boko Haram Islamic insurgency. A militant Islamic terrorist group whose official name is Ahlis Lidda'awati wal-Jihad (People Committed to the Propagation of the Prophet's Teachings and Jihad), but which is generally known as Boko Haram, has since 2009 carried out bloody bombing campaigns and armed attacks in its bid to overthrow the Nigerian government and establish an Islamic state (caliphate) over the country. Boko Haram began its bloody campaign in the city of Maiduguri but soon extended its influence over much of the north-eastern part of Nigeria. It initially concentrated its attacks on Bornu, Yobe and Adamawa states, but it soon successfully carried out suicide bombing campaigns and drive-by shootings in other parts of Nigeria including Abuja, the federal capital, Kano, Bauchi, Benue, Plateau and several other parts of the country.

A renewed offensive by the Nigerian armed forces since the middle part of 2015 has dealt Boko Haram some significant military losses; and on December 22, 2016 Camp Zero—the sect's headquarters in the Sambisa Forest—was captured by Nigerian soldiers. However, the sect is still able to successfully attack government targets and to launch suicide missions in several villages in the north-eastern part of Nigeria. In July 2017, it successfully ambushed members of a government team exploring for oil in north-east Nigeria during which the terrorists killed over seventy members of the team. Boko Haram's success in the attack clearly underscores the persistent threat it poses, despite the claim

by the government that the group is a spent force. Its success in the attack also shows that the jihadist group has continued to acquire enough resources to attack what it may consider as targets of high value in the country.

Boko Haram rejects the secularism of the Nigerian state and wishes to foist its own brand of Islamic ideology on the country. It views itself as being at war with the Nigerian state. Boko Haram also denies the legitimacy of the Nigerian government and constitution, and opposes secular Western-style education. The terrorist group opposes democracy and rejects Christianity in Nigeria, and it seeks to convert Christians and other non-Muslims to Islam. Other things that have incurred the ire of the group have included the consumption of alcohol and participation in civic activities such as voting and running for elective posts. The terrorist group, operating in the name of Islam, rejects any ideology and teachings of the faith that differs from its own. It sees itself as part of a global movement for the restoration of the glories of Islam.

Boko Haram shot its way into the global limelight in 2014 when it abducted 278 students from a girls' boarding high school and threatened to sell them into slavery or forcefully marry them off to its members. That successful operation, and its bombing of the United Nations' offices in Abuja in August 2011, as well as its pledge of allegiance to the Islamic State (IS) in March 2016, further beamed an international searchlight on its military capabilities and prowess. The Nigerian government, its armed forces and scholars have concentrated their analysis of Boko Haram based on its military exploits.

In contrast, this chapter examines the terrorist organization through the lens of its social media presentations and messaging. It provides a critical analysis of Boko Haram's media strategy and shows that its social media messaging is part of its overall military and ideological strategies. The authors examine Boko Haram's attempts to wage a battle for the hearts and minds of Nigerians through a deliberate use of social media to disseminate its messages. Focusing on statements and video appearances by its leader, Abubakar Shekau, Boko Haram's overt and subtle messages to Nigerians and the world at large are outlined. Using content-analytic methodology, the chapter examines the thrust of the messages to decipher their major themes, intents and target audiences. The authors contend that Boko Haram's messages reveal what the group thinks of itself, the Nigerian government and the Nigerian security establishment. We contend that Boko Haram deliberately uses crude and unsophisticated messaging techniques to convey its brutality, military invisibility and total disdain for the Nigerian government and its armed forces. We contend that Boko Haram uses its social media messaging to assert the righteousness of its interpretation of Islam, arguing that Boko Haram uses Islamic religious imageries and rhetoric to justify its atrocities. We have analyzed Boko Haram's

media strategy within the theoretical framework of propaganda and conclude that unlike IS, Al Qaeda and other terrorist organizations that use social media messaging as a recruitment tool, Boko Haram uses its messaging to instill fear and to convince its viewers of its inevitable victory over the Nigerian government. Our analysis reveals that not only does Boko Haram use its messaging to claim that the Nigerian government is anti-Islamic but also that it utilizes it to define good or proper Muslims.

Importance of the Study

As noted earlier, Boko Haram's reign of violence has been the biggest national security threat that Nigeria has faced since 1999 when the country returned to civil rule. It has also been the biggest blood-letting since the end of the Civil War in 1970. From August 2014 until February 2015 when combined military operations by Nigeria and its neighbors—Cameroon, Chad, and Niger—reversed Boko Haram's territorial gains, the Jihadist group controlled a good portion of Nigeria. During that period, it controlled fourteen local governments areas, several major towns and many villages—swathes of Nigerian territories that amounted to over 70,000 square miles, about the size of Belgium, and six times more land than IS in Iraq and Syria controlled at about the same time. All of the territories amounted to about 20 % of Nigeria, according to a *New York Times* report.⁵ According to a November 15, 2015 report in the *New York Times*, Boko Haram was responsible for 6664 deaths in 2014, overtaking IS, which killed 6073 in the same year as the world's most number one terrorist organization. Like IS in Iraq and Syria, it decapitates some of its enemies by slitting their throats. In fact, it openly pledged allegiance to IS in March 2015. Like IS, it intends to create an Islamic caliphate. Unlike IS, however, what Boko Haram opposes is more certain than what it intends to do with power.

Since its violent phase began in 2009, the insurgency has led to the death of over 100,000 Nigerians, according to Adaramola (February 14, 2017). According to the report, Kashim Shettima, the governor of Borno State, noted that 2.1 million people had been displaced, and property worth \$9 billion destroyed by Boko Haram as at December 2016. In addition, Shettima said that 956,453 private houses, representing 30 % of the number of houses in Borno State, were destroyed across the twenty-seven local government areas of the state. In a single attack on the city of Baga in January 2015, for example, Boko Haram killed over 2000 people.⁶ Churches, banks, schools, markets, car parks, farms, government offices, police stations and military barracks have

been the principal targets of Boko Haram's attacks. Suicide bombings, motorcycle ride-by shootings, detonation of improvised explosive devices (IEDs) and invasions by a large contingent of its fighters are the main instruments of the terrorists' destructive strategies. In addition to creating millions of internally displaced persons (IDPs), Boko Haram has forced over 300,000 Nigerians to seek refuge in neighboring countries. An editorial in *The Guardian* (Nigerian) newspaper of November 13, 2014 stated that "there were in Cameroun alone, 33,000 Nigerians that fled Gwoza, a town in Borno State...." Although Boko Haram began its terrorist activities in Nigeria, it has become a regional menace in West Africa as it has spread its attacks to Niger, Cameroon, and Chad.

Boko Haram's terrorist activities, in addition to causing thousands of deaths in Nigeria, have virtually brought all economic activities in the north-eastern zone of the country to a halt. Apart from the humanitarian crisis created by the jihadist organization, the economic costs of the violence have been enormous. By September 2015, Boko Haram had destroyed infrastructure that would cost more than \$1 billion to rebuild in Borno State alone (Ibukun and Olukayode, 2015). Shehu (2015) has argued that violent attacks by Boko Haram paralyzed businesses, banking, tourism, transportation and investments in the affected region. The group has seriously disrupted agricultural production, the mainstay of the economy in the area. Drastic reduction in agricultural production has created a specter of famine for millions of people in the violence-ravaged areas. In 2014, the Nigerian government budgeted 12 billion Naira to feed people in internally displaced persons' camps. The government earmarked 47 billion Naira in the 2017 budget for that purpose. According to the Presidential Committee on North-East Initiatives (PCNI), this was grossly inadequate as the figure to feed the IDPs at the displaced camps should have been 108 billion Naira. Quoting a United Nations estimate, *The Economist* magazine in its September 1, 2016 issue reported that "240,000 children in Borno are suffering from severe acute malnutrition—the deadliest category of it. More than 130 persons will die each day without assistance. Across the wider north-east part of Nigeria, a population equivalent to New Zealand's, is in need of food aid." Searcey and Santora (November 18, 2015), noted how Boko Haram's violence has caused food shortages in Cameroon. According to their report in the *New York Times*: "Farmers have fled, leaving behind fallow fields. Herdsmen have rerouted cattle drives to avoid the violence. Throughout the region, entire villages have emptied, leaving a string of ghost towns with few people for Boko Haram to dominate—and little for the group to plunder."⁷ Boko Haram's attacks on Baga and other fishing communities in the Lake Chad area have drastically

reduced the quantity of fish harvested in the area. Attacks by Boko Haram have also curtailed tourism in the north-western part of Cameroon as well as various parts of north-eastern Nigeria. In addition, the Nigerian government has expended billions of dollars in extra defense in response to Boko Haram.

Boko Haram's bloody attacks have naturally led analysts to focus on its military strategies and capabilities, but the group recognizes the potency of propaganda, and hence it devotes time and resources to the dissemination of its messages through statements and video appearances. We contend that a comprehensive understanding of what Boko Haram stands for and the implications of its attacks can be understood by adding succinct analyses of its media strategy to what is already known about its military strategy. Boko Haram uses its media strategy to advance its military goals as it frequently utilizes video appearances by its leader, Abubakar Shekau, to threaten military attacks. We also seek to demonstrate, using Boko Haram for illustrative purposes, that social media make it relatively easy for extremist groups such as Al Shabaab, IS, Al Qaeda, and other jihadist groups to articulate and disseminate their messages to a worldwide audience, a global reach that would not have been possible without the commitment of enormous resources. A group such as Boko Haram may be particularly successful in articulating its messages when it is not confronted with counter-narratives by governments and other entities, or when the counter-narratives appear less persuasive than the propaganda that the group is churning out.

An examination of Boko Haram's attempts to win the battle for the hearts and minds of Nigerians through a deliberate use of video propaganda as well as a critical analysis of the statements by its leader, Shekau, will provide governmental and institutional policymakers in Nigeria a deeper understanding of the nature and operations of Boko Haram. In particular, this chapter will provide government policymakers in North Africa, Middle East, and Europe with a further understanding of major terrorist organizations in these parts of the world. An understanding of the nature and operations of one terrorist organization—whether Al Qaeda, IS, Boko Haram, or Al-Shabaab—can help shape the formulation of governmental policies on how to counter the efforts of such organizations to radicalize potential recruits. Therefore, this chapter is significant in the sense that its conclusions can be useful in the formulation of policies on global terrorism.

Terrorists have discovered that social media can be important tools for recruitment of fighters and supporters and for the dissemination of their world views. IS has been very deft in using Twitter and its English language magazine, *Dabiq*, for its propaganda. According to Koerner (2016), Tashfeen Malik who, with her husband Syed Farook, shot and killed fourteen people in San

Bernardino, California, in December 2015, used Facebook to pledge allegiance to IS leader Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi a few minutes after the killings began. Berger (2015) acknowledged the indispensability of social media to terrorism. As he noted, “jihadists have figured out how to use social media to make an impact, even though their numbers are minuscule in comparison to the overall user base ... its highly organized social media campaign uses deceptive tactics and shows a sophisticated understanding of how such networks operate” (p. 1). Blaker (2015), examining IS’ use of social media, asserted that:

ISIS has made great use of the Internet and online social media sites to spread its message and encourage others, particularly young people, to support the organization, to travel to the Middle East to engage in combat—fighting side-by-side with other jihadists, or to join the group by playing a supporting role—which is often the role carved out for young women who are persuaded to join ISIS. (p. 1)

This chapter is also significant because by analyzing the speeches made by Boko Haram’s leader in the social media and in particular YouTube videos and major acts of terrorism carried out by the group, Nigerian and West African leaders and leaders elsewhere in the world might further understand how the minds of the leaders of terrorist organizations work. The more they are understood, the more the world will be able to know what motivates them to commit such heinous, atrocious and acrimonious crimes.

Understanding the mindset(s) of these groups and how they operate is critical for the governments of Nigeria and other West African countries, so that policymakers can predict major acts of terrorism in the region and nip them in the bud. If government policymakers had been able to predict the abduction of 278 secondary school girls in Chibok, and heinous massacres in Baga and elsewhere, they would have been able to stave off the colossal loss of innocent lives and billions of dollars in property in those acts of terrorism. This is why this chapter, which highlights the motivations and operations of a terrorist group such as Boko Haram is unquestionably significant and potentially enormously valuable.

As a concomitant outcome, the chapter will enrich the literature on the nature of global terrorism, and the terrorism that is now on the rise in sub-Saharan Africa. As the number of studies like this increases, scholars and experts on global terrorism will be able to analyze the media coverage of terrorism more holistically. They will be able to compare, for example, acts of terrorism committed by Boko Haram and those committed by other terrorist organizations.

Boko Haram: A Brief Background

Boko Haram was formed in Maiduguri, Borno State, in 2002 by a young Muslim cleric, Mohammed Yusuf. After his expulsion from two mosques for preaching a radical brand of Islam, he set up his own mosque and was able to attract a large following among the city's young men. The group became better known in 2009 when it clashed with the police, attacking police stations and other public institutions in Maiduguri. When the police could not contain the group, the federal government deployed the armed forces. The military fought pitched battles with Boko Haram fighters, and its mosque and headquarters were destroyed. Yusuf was apprehended by the military and handed over to the police; he was subsequently shot to death while being held in police custody. According to Mu'azu (2011), the police stated that he died during gunfire exchanges with their officers. Yusuf's father-in-law and about eight hundred members of Boko Haram were killed during the fighting in 2009. Some of the group's survivors fled to the neighboring countries of Chad and Niger. Boko Haram was able to recover from its losses, and, as subsequent events clearly demonstrated, it became even more deadly. It is now led by another young cleric, Abubakar Shekau. However, one Abu Musab al-Barnawi claims that he leads another faction of the group.

Boko Haram views its members as warriors in a holy war between Islam and the rest of Nigeria. In a statement rejecting calls for it to cease hostilities, the leader of the insurgency spelled out its mission:

We want to reiterate that we are warriors who are carrying out jihad in Nigeria and our struggle is based on the traditions of the holy prophet. We will never accept any system of government apart from the one stipulated by Islam because that is the only way that Muslims can be liberated. We do not believe in any system of government, be it traditional or orthodox except the Islamic system and that is why we will keep on fighting against democracy, capitalism, socialism and whatever. We will not allow the Nigerian Constitution to replace the laws that have been enshrined in the Holy Qur'an, we will not allow adulterated conventional education to replace Islamic teachings. We will not respect the Nigerian government because it is illegal. We will continue to fight its military and the police because they are not protecting Islam. We do not believe in the Nigerian judicial system and we will fight anyone who assists the government in perpetrating illegalities.⁸

The sophistication of Boko Haram's bombing operations and its simultaneous and co-ordinated attacks on multiple targets indicate its ability to tap

into external resources in the form of weapons, training, logistics and financing. Evidence of the group's military capability is the use of rocket-propelled grenades and anti-aircraft guns in its May 2013 attacks on Bama and its September 12, 2014 downing of a Nigeria Air Force jet plane.⁹ While its immediate grievances are directed against the federal government of Nigeria, Boko Haram operates under a global brand of Islamic fundamentalism. It is thus a grievous error to view the group solely through the prism of the internal dynamics of Nigerian politics. Its ability to attract fighters from Niger and Chad as well as its pledge of allegiance to IS in March 2015 and the acknowledgement that some of its fighters are trained in Somalia and Mali are clear pointers to its global dimensions. Even though some of its complaints are wrapped around Nigeria-specific issues, Boko Haram is motivated by a global Islamic radicalism. As was the case with Al-Shabab in Somalia and Al Dine in Mali, Boko Haram has struck with a deadly force in Nigeria because the country's poor governance made it a target of opportunity. The group merely capitalized on the weakness of the Nigerian state, and exploited existing ethno-religious tensions to launch its insurgency against the country. The external dimensions of Boko Haram are also signposted by the similarities between its tactics and those adopted by Islamic insurgents in Iraq, Afghanistan and North Africa. This is not a mere coincidence. Boko Haram's suicide-bombing, co-ordinated simultaneous attacks on multiple targets, the use of IEDs and the utilization of motorcycle ride-by assassinations are precisely the methods that have recently been used by Islamic terrorists in other parts of the world.

The ruthlessness and brutality of Boko Haram, such as slitting the throats of schoolchildren, their teachers and other victims also mirror those in Iraq and Afghanistan. Its opposition to secular education recalls the ideology of the Taliban in Afghanistan. It is therefore fallacious to argue that Boko Haram is a political tool of Northern Nigerian elites who were unhappy with the President Goodluck Jonathan administration. The 2009 clashes between Boko Haram and security forces that marked the group as a serious threat to Nigerian security pre-dated the Jonathan administration. It was a Northerner, Umaru Yar'Adua, who was president of the country at that time. Moreover, given the opportunity, Boko Haram will go after the elites as ferociously as it has gone after ordinary Nigerians. Its January 2013 attempt to assassinate the former Emir of Kano, Ado Bayero, during which the Emir's driver and some of his loyal bodyguards were killed, is a testament to its loathing and disdain of the elites. This was also attested to when the group warned the elites in Sokoto to avert the replication of the Kano attack

by releasing its members who had been detained in that state. In a January 2012 letter, its leader, Shekau, said:

This is an open letter to the Emir of Sokoto (Sultan of Sokoto) Alhaji Muhammad Sa'ad Abubakar 111, the Speaker of the House of Representatives, Alhaji Aminu Tambuwal and the Acting Governor of Sokoto State. Before we visited Kano, we wrote open letter [*sic*] to senior citizens on the imperative of releasing our members but nobody cares [*sic*] to talk. Indeed, we sent three warnings to Kano before strike" [*sic*]. What happened in Kano will be inevitable in Sokoto unless you (Sultan and others) intervene and ensure the immediate and unconditional release of our members who were specifically arrested in the city of Sokoto...¹⁰

Former President Goodluck Jonathan belatedly recognized the dangers that Boko Haram poses not just to security in Nigeria but also to the territorial integrity of the country. He vowed in March 2012 that the insurgency would be defeated by June that year, but this did not happen. By August 2014, Boko Haram was operating with impunity, seizing many towns and villages. It intensified its attacks, and it increased the frequency of such attacks. Its ability to strike well beyond the geography of its home base was expanded with its attacks on Kano, Kaduna, Abuja and other cities several hundred miles from its home base. By the end of 2014, its ability to strike terror into the hearts of many Nigerians and its ability to seize swathes of territories at will made the north-eastern region and several other parts of northern Nigeria virtually ungovernable. As the group's mayhem intensified in 2013, a Nigerian national daily newspaper, *The Nation*, in its editorial commentary on January 8, 2013 aptly noted that:

The scourge of Boko Haram has inflicted dislocations on our country on a number of levels. Some point to its psychological damage, others to the physical and geographical fissures and a few others to the decimation of families. We experience these instances almost daily, showing that the Nigerian government is grasping with futile energy to curb this modern day spasms of savagery.

Although, Boko Haram claims that it was motivated to take up arms against Nigeria because it was incensed by corruption, moral decadence and immorality, it has waged much of its war against ordinary and innocent Nigerians who themselves are victims of the corruption and misgovernance that characterizes the country. Moreover, its tactics of kidnapping schoolchildren, bombing churches, public buildings and schools, and cutting the throats of children and their teachers cannot build a better society than the one that Boko Haram is purportedly seeking to replace. Its latest strategy of abducting

women and children and holding them hostage as well as forcefully taking women, even under-age girls as wives for its members is as repulsive as its other dastardly acts. There is also much arrogance in Boko Haram's utterances and ultimate objectives. For instance, it aims to cleanse the north-eastern region of Nigeria, if not the entire country, of Christians and Christianity. It wants southern Nigerians living in the north to leave the region. Even if Boko Haram was truly fighting for Islam, it should embrace the southerners who are themselves Muslims.

Literature Review

Propaganda, which we define in this chapter as communication used by individuals, groups, institutions or organizations to inform, persuade or scare others to adopt their beliefs, ideas and creed or to mobilize attitudes in order to win minds or to convert them to a cause, is as old as human history. As Gambrill and Reiman (2011) have noted, propaganda aims to promote ideas and actions that would serve the interests and benefits of those promoting the ideas and actions. The word, propaganda, was derived from *Sacra Congregatio de Propaganda Fide* (Congregation for the Propagation of the Faith), a Vatican organization, created in Rome on June 22, 1622 by Pope Gregory XV (Bernays, 1928; Jackall, 1995; Pratkanis & Aronson, 2001). The organization's duty was to spread the faith and to regulate church affairs in heathen lands. Therefore, the Roman Catholic Church used the term first (Black, 2001). Combs and Nimmo (1993) pointed out that this early form of propaganda was considered as "a moral endeavor by the church" (p. 201), but interest in the subject today has expanded owing to its importance in international politics (Chapman, 2000). According to Lasswell (1927a, 1927b), propaganda refers solely to the control of opinion by using pictures and other forms of social communication; it is concerned with the "management of opinions and attitudes." Qualter (1962) argues that propaganda is the deliberate attempt by an individual or group of persons to form, control or alter attitudes of other individuals or groups. He suggests that propaganda is any form of persuasion aimed to change attitudes.

Jowett and O'Donnell (2006) point out that "Propaganda is a form of communication that attempts to achieve a response that furthers the desired intent of the propagandist" (p. 7). They argue that the use of the terms propaganda and persuasion interchangeably is inappropriate—hence they propose that, in as much as propaganda makes use of persuasive strategies, it differs from persuasion in its purpose. Thus, they categorize propaganda as a specific

class of communication that is a “subcategory of persuasion, as well as information” (pp. 6–7). British historian and scholar, Taylor (1979), identifies three main reasons why propaganda gained prominence in international relations. These are:

- (i) A general increase in the level of popular interest and involvement in political and foreign affairs as a direct consequence of World War I
- (ii) Technological developments in the field of mass communication which provided the basis for a rapid growth in propaganda as well as contributing towards the increased level of popular involvement in politics, and
- (iii) The ideological context of the inter-war period, sometimes known as the ‘European Civil War’ in which an increased employment of international propaganda could profitably flourish. (pp. 19–20)

Taylor strongly suggests that an increase in the use of propaganda to influence opinions is due to advances in mass communication technologies. This is to say that media play a vital role in propaganda. Analyzing the use of propaganda to manipulate opinions or attitudes, Ellul (1965, 1981) argues that propaganda is the inevitable result of the various components of the technological society, and plays so central a role in the life of that society that no economic or political development can take place without its influence. This suggests that a society, organization or group that seeks development or change of any sort uses propaganda to achieve its goals.

Baines and O’Shaughnessy (2014) argue that political leaders manipulate myth, symbolism and rhetoric in influencing opinions and ideologies. Ogden and Wilson (2015) describe what they termed “propaganda techniques” as:

- **Name Calling:** This involves giving an idea a label, either good or bad, to encourage the public to accept and praise or reject and condemn the idea without examining evidence.
- **Glittering Generality:** This technique associates something with a “virtue word” designed to encourage the public to accept and approve the idea without examining the evidence.
- **Plain Folks:** Transferring the aura of authority and prestige of a celebrity or opinion leader to a product, person or idea in order to persuade the public to accept or reject it.
- **Testimonial:** A technique used to endorse a product by a celebrity or opinion leader who uses the product.
- **Plain Folks:** This is a technique used to convince the public that a speaker’s (often politician’s) ideas are good because s(he) is “of the people” or “one of us.”

- **Card Stacking:** Selective use of facts to tell only one side of the story, often obscuring the other side(s).
- **Bandwagon:** This is an appeal to line up with the opinion of the majority on an issue—a method that tries to persuade by encouraging people to join their friends and neighbors because “everybody’s doing it.”
- **Emotional Stereotypes:** Evoking an emotional image such as the “ugly American.”
- **Illicit Silence:** Withholding information that would verify a situation or correct a false impression or assumption.
- **Subversive Rhetoric:** As a strategy used in political campaigns, this appeal involves attacking the spokesperson rather than an idea.

Propagandists employ all these techniques to achieve their goals. Propaganda goals generally aim to shape public opinion in the particular direction that is desired by the propagandist. Adolf Hitler was one of the best-known persons to use propaganda, with his shaping of public opinion in Germany during the Second World War having been documented by many scholars, including Welch (1983, 1993), George (1973), Steinert (1977) and Kershaw (1983).

Published material on Boko Haram has examined various aspects about the group and its reign of terror. They include the following: (1) the origins and objectives of the insurgency; (2) Boko Haram’s tactics and strategies; (3) Nigerian military campaigns against Boko Haram; (4) threats that Boko Haram poses to Nigeria’s unity and stability; and (5) the place of Boko Haram within the context of ethnic and religious violence in Nigeria. Other published materials on the group further examined the following: (6) The character of Boko Haram as a terrorist group; (7) the Nigerian government’s response to the insurgency; (8) links between Boko Haram and other Islamic terrorist groups; (9) Boko Haram as a reflection of the weaknesses and failure of the state in Nigeria; and (10) the impact of the insurgency on civil–military relations, including human rights violations committed by Nigerian security forces as they countered Boko Haram attacks. Some studies have attempted to situate Boko Haram within the overall ambit of other security issues, such as kidnapping for ransom, armed robbery and militancy in the oil-producing Niger Delta region.

One of the best-known books about Boko Haram is *Boko Haram: Islamism, Politics, Security and the State in Nigeria*, an edited volume by Marc-Antoine Perouse de Montclos.¹¹ Kyari Mohammed’s chapter in the book examines Boko Haram’s message and the methods used by the group for disseminating it.¹² Another notable chapter, written by Manuel Reinert and Lou Garcon, chronicles the Islamic sect.¹³ It highlights Boko Haram’s evolution from a

relatively peaceful and little-known group to its manifestation as a violent and dreaded organization. In this same volume, Rafael Serrano and Zacharias Pieri analyze how the Nigerian government has responded to the insurgency.¹⁴ The chapter highlights the inadequacy of the government's responses and notes how the successes recorded by Boko Haram in its military attacks against Nigerian security forces are largely a reflection of the weaknesses and failures of governmental responses.

A myth about Boko Haram that seems to endure is that Nigeria's Muslim population has not vigorously condemned the group, and that they tacitly support its insurgency. Johannes Harnischfeger in an analysis of this claim clearly shows that Boko Haram has many Muslim critics.¹⁵ His chapter in Montclos' (2014) volume draws on criticisms of Boko Haram from Islamic clerics in Yobe State. In the same volume, Henry Gyang Mang examines how Christians in Nigeria view the insurgency, providing a detailed examination of Nigerian Christians' attitudes towards and perceptions of Boko Haram.¹⁶ Mang maintains that Nigerian Christians consider Boko Haram as Islamic radical fanatics who are intent on imposing Islam on the entire country.

Another collection of analyses appears in Boko Haram Ioannes Mantzikos' edited volume *Boko Haram: Anatomy of a Crisis*.¹⁷ In his chapter Jideofor Adibe examines what is actually known of Boko Haram.¹⁸ He deftly separates facts from fiction and mythologies. The volume also contains a chapter by Osumah Oarhe that analyzes the challenges that the Boko Haram insurgency has posed to the Nigerian military and security establishments.¹⁹ It details the growing inability of the Nigerian military services, including its intelligence services, to suppress the insurgency. While Oarhe's chapter specifically looks at the responses of the Nigerian defense and intelligence establishment to Boko Haram, Hakeem Onapajo's chapter in the same volume provides a general overview on the failure of Nigeria to defeat the insurgents.²⁰ Focusing specifically on the handling of the insurgency by Nigerian security forces, A. Abolurin highlights the challenges that Boko Haram poses for the Nigerian armed forces.²¹

Boko Haram's choice of targets for its attacks has been a major source of debate in the media. Focusing specifically on the targeting of telecommunications infrastructure by Boko Haram, Freedom Onuoha outlines the motivations behind Boko Haram's choice of targets.²² Onuoha argues that by targeting telecommunications infrastructure, Boko Haram seeks to isolate the geographical areas of its attacks from the rest of the country. He also contends that the choice of telecommunications infrastructure as a target is to frustrate the ability of Nigerian security forces to monitor the movement of its members.

The response of the rest of the world, particularly the United States, to Boko Haram, has equally been a subject of scholarly analyses. Caitlin C. Poling, for instance, has examined how the US Congress has reacted to Boko Haram.²³ Poling argues that US responses to terrorism in the aftermath of 9/11 are framed within the context of those attacks. She posits that the American Congress, alarmed by Boko Haram, views the group as a dangerous Islamic terrorist organization in the tradition and mold of Al Qaeda.

Other publications have analyzed Boko Haram within the context of Islamic terrorism in other parts of the world. Freedom Onuoha, for instance, has examined Boko Haram in light of the ideology of an Islamic sect, the Salafists. Onuoha contends that the Salafists' Jihadist ideology provides an important window for understanding the threat that Boko Haram poses to Nigerian security.²⁴ Sean M. Gourley has shown that the ideology, rhetoric and strategies of Boko Haram are similar to those of Al Qaeda.²⁵ He cautions that this should raise serious concerns by those pursuing the war on terrorism. Shannon Connell has also explored the linkage between Boko Haram and other Islamic terrorist groups.²⁶ Similarly, Ely Karmon has explored the international dimensions of Boko Haram.²⁷ Karmon notes that Boko Haram's attack on the United Nations offices in Abuja, Nigeria, in 2011 marked its transformation from a purely Nigerian and localized terrorist outfit to an international one. Pinpointing connections between Boko Haram and other Islamic terrorist groups is also the subject of Machael Tanebam's long piece in the *Israel Journal of Foreign Affairs*.²⁸ Tanebam sees a direct link between Boko Haram and Al Qaeda, and argues that Islamic terrorism in both Mali and Nigeria represents the expansion of Al Qaeda to Africa.

The role of primordial identities such as religion, ethnicity and regionalism in framing the discourse on Boko Haram is the subject of Hussein Solomon's chapter "Boko Haram, identity and the limits of counter-terrorism."²⁹ Solomon examines how ethnic, religious and regional identities have shaped the Nigerian war against Boko Haram. He notes that those identities have made the struggle more challenging. For Abimbola Adesoji, Islamic revivalism in Nigeria provides the best prism for analyzing and understanding Boko Haram.³⁰ To some Nigerian scholars, the biggest challenge posed by Boko Haram is its potential to disrupt the country's delicate ethnic and religious balance. Some even fear that the insurgency could lead to the break-up of Nigeria. Daniel Egiegba Agbibo has analyzed Boko Haram from the perspective of religious identities in Nigeria.³¹ He also uses the relative deprivation theory to examine Boko Haram's origins.³²

Jidefor Adibe, in his book *Nigeria without Nigerians? Boko Haram and the Crisis in Nigeria's Nation-Building*,³³ warns that an inability to suppress

the insurgency could lead to the demise of Nigeria as a single political entity. He views Boko Haram as a frontal challenge to the desire of many Nigerians for a strong, viable and united country. Boko Haram's threat to national unity is also the subject of another volume by two Nigerians, Adeyemi Ademowo and Matthew Olusola.³⁴ Ademowo and Olusola analyze Boko Haram against the backdrop of Nigeria's fragile national unity. Similarly, Oluwaseun Bamidele has examined Boko Haram against the backdrop of the threats that it poses to Nigeria's peace and stability. He cautions that failure to rein in the insurgency could threaten peace, security and economic development in Nigeria.

Boko Haram's Social Media 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.

Themes of Boko Haram's Videos

In our analysis of the messages embedded in Boko Haram's propaganda videos we found that they 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 IS, 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 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 speaks in these videos directly to Nigerian, Cameroonian, and Nigerien leaders, 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 presents 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 intends 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.

Boko Haram is Strong and Nigeria is Weak

In one of his propaganda videos, Shekau displays Boko Haram's formidable stock of sophisticated weapons as a way to persuade his followers to believe that the sect is militarily well equipped—in fact, so richly equipped that it is stronger than the Nigerian government. In the video, he states that Boko Haram began its insurgency with sticks and knives but has grown strong with its acquisition of armored personnel carriers, multi-purpose vans, AK47 and Pump Action rifles, heavy machine guns (HMGs), mortars, artillery shells, anti-aircraft guns, heat-seeking missiles, bombs, rocket-propelled grenades, hundreds of motorbikes, pick-up trucks and so on. As an evidence of Boko Haram's military strength, Shekau displays the groups's sophisticated assault weapons in some of his propaganda videos. The aim is to illustrate the sect's strength as well as persuade his followers to believe that Boko Haram is rich and wealthy—hence it can afford to purchase all these weapons. Ironically, Boko Haram leaders claim that the group does not condone Western

civilization, but they make use of Western technological gadgets such as cellular phones and video recorders to disseminate their propaganda (Maiangwa, 2013). An added dramatic effect when they display these sophisticated weapons is the fact that some of them were seized from fleeing Nigerian soldiers.

At the height of its power in January 2015, Boko Haram had taken over swathes of Nigerian territories amounting to over 70,000 square miles—about the size of Belgium, and six times more land than IS at the time; about 20 % of Nigerian territory (Schmitt, December 31, 2014). Nigerian territories under Boko Haram's control by January 2015 included Michika, Konduga, Munguno, Gambaru, Mafa, Mallam Fatori, Abadam, and Marte. The group made videos of its control of those territories, an indication to its members that Boko Haram was militarily stronger than the Nigerian state.

In one of his propaganda videos, Shekau prominently shows Boko Haram's black and white Islamic caliphate flag flying over the above-mentioned Nigerian territories. The video, with an Islamic Caliphate song in the background, shows Boko Haram fighters confidently roaming around the seized territories without any challenges from Nigerian soldiers. The aim is to persuade and convince his audiences that Boko Haram has grown so strong and powerful that it was able to capture these territories from the "weak" Nigerian government. Shekau also used the video to inform his followers that Boko Haram's successes in capturing those swathes of territories was an unquestionable demonstration of the superiority of the sect's military might and strength. The video's purpose was to portray the weakness of the Nigerian government as well as the cowardice of its fleeing soldiers.

In one thirty-six-minute YouTube video that the authors accessed at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MgdKblgzzgQ>, Shekau boasts that the avalanche of weapons that Boko Haram captured from fleeing Nigerian soldiers including those seized during its attack on Baga in Borno State would be enough for the Jihadists to successfully prosecute the entire war. An account of Boko Haram's military invasion of Baga town was provided in a BBC news report on January 8, 2015. The report can be accessed at <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-30728158>. Shekau appears in the video, standing in front of three patrol jeeps mounted with an anti-aircraft gun, dressed in his usual expensive-looking military khaki with an AK47 hanging from his shoulder across his chest. In the video, he warns that Boko Haram will bring Nigeria to its knees following which he will unleash a punitive attack on the neighboring countries of Cameroon, Chad, and Niger. The Boko Haram leader ends his speech in that video by burning the Nigerian flag, part of his propaganda to show the group's contempt for the Nigerian nation.

The video showing Shekau and Boko Haram officers wearing expensive-looking military khaki and three-color desert camouflage pattern of dark brown, mint green and beige desert fatigue uniforms was used to send a direct message to the group's members. It was used to subliminally persuade his audience to believe that Boko Haram is a rich and wealthy professional military organization and not a rag-tag army of poor criminals in search of relevance. Yet in another video, posted on YouTube on April 29, 2013 (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=El-O37TNI4>), Shekau shows off Boko Haram's assorted military weapons, including those that it claimed to have seized during its raids on Nigerian military barracks, one of them, the Munguno Barracks. This is another propaganda video that Shekau used to persuade his followers to believe that the organization and its fighters were stronger than the Nigerian nation and its soldiers.

Shekau appeared in several other propaganda videos that were made after a series of the group's successful attacks in various parts of north-eastern Nigeria. The subliminal message in those videos was that Boko Haram had the capability to successfully attack government facilities time and again. One of these attacks was carried out at the United Nations Headquarters in Abuja on August 26, 2011. According to a BBC news report of the incident, eighteen people were killed in that attack (<http://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-14677957>). Another attack was on the 79 Composite Group Air Force Base at the Maiduguri International Airport on December 2, 2013. In the video of this, Shekau shows how Boko Haram fighters set five Nigerian Air Force aircraft ablaze as well as the sect's destruction of the airport. A BBC report of the attack said that "the large-scale, coordinated attack was a big setback for the Nigerian military" (<http://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-25187142>). The airport remained closed to civilian aviation from December 2, 2013 until June 9, 2015. The objective of the video was to convince Boko Haram fighters and its followers that the sect is stronger than the Nigerian state, and that the Islamic sect was so strong that it would prevail over Nigeria in the long run.

Earlier, on November 25, 2012, Boko Haram suicide bombers penetrated the Armed Forces Command and Staff College (AFCSC) at Jaji, a security hub of the Nigerian military. It successfully attacked St Andrew's Military Protestant Church inside the college. On November 26, 2012, members of the sect attacked the Special Anti-Robbery Squad (SARS) police headquarters in Abuja, where they killed several Nigerian police officers before freeing scores of suspected criminals, including their own members who were detained in the facility. A BBC report of the incident titled "Nigeria gunmen attack Abuja Sars police HQ" may be found at: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world->

[africa-20493739](#). Then, on December 28, 2012, Boko Haram fighters attacked and burned down the divisional police station, the prison, customs area office and the presidential lodge in Maiha, Adamawa State. They killed dozens of people in the attack, and freed scores of prison inmates. *The Vanguard* newspaper, one of the Nigerian dailies, reported the attack in its edition of December 28, 2012.

On January 15, 2014, Boko Haram fighters attacked and sacked the police station in Banki, Borno state. In January 2014 alone, the jihadist group sacked thirty-seven communities in Kwaljiri, Kaya, Ngawo Fate, Limanti, Njaba, Yahuri, Mude, Wala, and Alau, among others in Damboa, Konduga and Gwoza council areas in the north-eastern part of Nigeria. In those attacks, members of the group killed thousands of people and many more were forced to take refuge in neighboring villages in the Republic of Cameroon and other Nigerian towns. An editorial in the November 13, 2014 issue of the *Guardian*, one of Nigeria's leading newspapers, pointed out that "there were in Cameroun alone, 33,000 Nigerians that fled Gwoza, a town in Borno State..." In January 2015, the jihadist group attacked Baga and killed hundreds of its residents. Amnesty International has published aerial photographs of Baga town before and after the attack to illustrate the mayhem Boko Haram unleashed on the town. The "before" images taken on January 2, 2015 were part of its report on the atrocities, while the aftermath was documented in pictures taken on January 7. The aerial photos may be found at <http://www.dw.de/amnesty-publishes-before-and-after-satellite-images-of-boko-haram-nigeria-attacks/a-18192546>.

Boko Haram made a propaganda video of these violent attacks. Its leader intended to use this on one hand to scare Nigerians and on the other to convince its own members that the Islamist group is strong, that Nigerian soldiers were cowards and that the establishment of a caliphate rule in Nigeria was a matter of when rather than whether. In the video, Shekau said: "We killed the people of Baga. We indeed killed them, as our Lord instructed us in His Book ... We will not stop. This is not much. You'll see" (Anon, 2015). Another video it utilized to scare Nigerians was made in November 2014, following its successful attack and destruction of Vintim, hometown of the then Chief of Defence Staff, of the Nigerian military, Air Vice Marshal Alex Badeh. The insurgent group burned down Badeh's country home as an illustration of its contempt for the Chief of Defence Staff and the Nigerian military that he represented. The video also showed the group's successful attack on Mubi, the commercial nerve center of Adamawa state and in particular its destruction of the 234 Army Battalion of the Nigerian army that had been based in the city.

As Lasswell (1927a, 1927b) noted, propaganda refers to the control of opinion by using picture and other forms of social control. This was indeed what Shekau intended to achieve with these videos.

Nigerian Government Lies and Boko Haram is Truthful

Boko Haram produced another propaganda video after its brazen abduction of 278 female students from the Government Girls' Secondary School, Chibok, Borno State on November 14, 2014. The group intended to use this video to serve two purposes. First, it aimed to persuade his audiences to believe that the jihadist sect was stronger than the Nigerian government. Secondly, the video aimed to show that the Nigerian government was untruthful and could not be trusted. When Boko Haram abducted the girls, the Nigerian government at first denied that the group had successfully done so. The wife of the president at the time, Patience Jonathan, as well as some government supporters, denied Boko Haram's claim that it had abducted the girls. Mrs Jonathan said that members of the opposition political party had fabricated the abduction story as a smear campaign against her husband, who was getting ready to run in the 2015 presidential election. Kema Chikwe, a prominent leader of the then ruling People's Democratic Party (PDP), added her voice to President Jonathan's wife's denial. As Chikwe contended that Boko Haram did not abduct any girls in the school, on April 30, 2014 she challenged the authorities of the school to release the names and pictures of the girls as a proof of the abduction. Chikwe's comments were published in the May 1, 2014 issue of *National Leadership*, one of Nigeria's dailies. According to the paper, Chikwe said: "There are many questions to be asked and many more to be answered. How did it happen? Who saw it happen? Who did not see it happen?"

Another supporter of the then president, also the founder of the militant Niger Delta Peoples Volunteer Force, Asari Dokubo, described Boko Haram's claim of the abduction of the Chibok girls as fake news. According to a report of the *Daily Post* of May 8, 2014, in a terse message posted on his Facebook page after the abduction of the girls, Dokubo urged his friends to help disseminate the message that no girls at the school were abducted (Ameh, May 8, 2014).

Following all these denials by the federal government and its supporters, Shekau then posted propaganda videos of the girls on YouTube as proof to his audiences that his group had successfully abducted them, and that the

Nigerian government was not telling the truth about the abduction. To prove the veracity of his group's successful abduction of the Chibok girls, he released a video showing the girls squatting on the ground, wearing black veils over their heads and reciting the Quran. In the video, Shekau spoke in Hausa, Arabic and English. For the first fourteen minutes of the fifty-seven-minute video, he took a swipe at the concept of democracy, Western education and efforts by Muslims and Christians to live in peace. To persuade his audiences that Boko Haram was strong and that Nigerian government lied about the abduction, he said: "I abducted a girl at a Western education school and you are disturbed. I said Western education should end. Western education should end. Girls, you should go and get married." Shekau further said: "I will repeat this: Western education should fold up. I abducted your girls. I will sell them in the market by Allah. I will marry off a woman at the age of twelve. I will marry off a girl at the age of nine." The video can be viewed at <http://www.theguardian.com/world/video/2014/may/06/boko-haram-sell-girls-market-video>. Another video in which Shekau boasted that he had the girls can be seen at <http://search.tb.ask.com/search/video.jhtml?searchfor=video+of+Boko+Haram+leader+warning+Obama+and+western+leaders&cb=UX&p2=%5EUX%5Exdm297%5EYYA%5Eus&n=780bb3a2&qid=c8d89541b7ba4d8fbce02e89388c6bfd&ptb=EA9E0994-1131-4ABE-93A6-C018E0796C80&ct=SS&si=245051&pg=GGmain&pn=1&ss=sub&st=tab&tpr=tabsbsug&vidOrd=3&vidId=umkj50SUzck>.

Boko Haram further utilized a video of its downing of a Nigerian air force jet on September 11, 2014 to instill fear into Nigerian air force pilots and persuade its members and the public to believe that the Nigerian government was untruthful, whereas Boko Haram was sincere and truthful in its claims. The Nigerian government at first claimed that it never lost any air force jet planes. The former Director of Defence Information of the army at the time, Major-General Chris Olukolade, said: "We are definitely searching for the jet, it is too early to either talk of a crash or attack by the insurgents." (Alli, March 10, 2014). Following the government's denial, Shekau released a video that showed the wreckage of the jet plane and the captured pilot. In the video, he shows the pilot's own confession in the English language. The video also shows burned parts of a Nigerian air force plane in the bush, with the pilot in a camouflage vest kneeling on the ground, as well as a member of the Islamist sect hovering over him with an axe. Boko Haram later claimed that it would behead the pilot. In the video, the pilot identifies himself as a Wing Commander in the Nigerian Air Force, and says he was undertaking a mission in the Kauri area of Borno State on September 11, when his plane was shot

down by Boko Haram fighters. He says: “We were shot down and our aircraft crashed. To this day I don’t know the whereabouts of my second pilot.” Shekau used the video of the downed plane to persuade his followers and audiences to believe that the Nigerian government was being untruthful.

The government of Nigeria betrayed its soldiers by not rescuing the pilot, whose name was Chimda Hedima. Notably enough, the Nigerian government has remained silent about his whereabouts. It did not take any known action to seek how the pilot could be rescued or brought back alive. This was utterly in contrast to the Jordanian government’s reaction when IS downed and captured a Jordanian pilot, Lieutenant Moaz al-Kasasbeh, in December 2014 during a mission to support the US-led anti-IS military coalition. The Jordanian government sought the release of its pilot, perhaps in return for the release of IS prisoners. When IS burned the Jordanian pilot alive, the government decided to fly military missions into Syria to punish Jihadists.

In September 2014, the Nigerian government claimed that it had killed Shekau during its offensive against Boko Haram in Konduga. The Nigerian press published photographs of the severed head of a person whom the government claimed was Shekau. For example, the *Vanguard* reported in its September 22, 2015—to the jubilation of Nigerians—that:

Nigeria and Cameroon were, yesterday, locked in an argument over who killed Boko Haram leader Abubakar Shekau and where he was killed. In a rare public show by the Cameroonian army (Armée Camerounaise), photos of Shekau were made public alongside a statement claiming he was killed during a cross-border raid deep inside Nigeria by its military. A Cameroon military source, according to *Cameroon Concord*, said on Sunday night that Shekau was killed following an aerial bombardment of his hideout inside Nigeria. (Daniel et al. September 22, 2014)

The *Vanguard* further reported: “The Nigerian Army said its soldiers might have killed Shekau in Konduga, a town some kilometres away from Maiduguri, the Borno State capital” (ibid). Many Nigerians took to the streets in jubilation of the news.

The euphoria that greeted the government’s claim had hardly died down when Shekau appeared in a two-minute video which was released to the French news agency (AFP), debunking the government’s claim as false. In the video Shekau assures his audiences that he is alive and that only the *Allah* (God Almighty) could take his life, not the Nigerian government. In the

video, he says: “I am alive. I will only die the day *Allah* takes my breath.” The video can be seen at (<http://search.tb.ask.com/search/video.jhtml?searchfor=Boko+Haram+in+camouflage+outfits&p2=%5EUX%5Exdm297%5EYYA%5Eus&n=780bb3a2&ss=sub&st=tab&ptb=EA9E0994-1131-4ABE-93A6-C018E0796C80&si=245051&tpr=sbt>). Shekau also used this propaganda video to subliminally persuade his followers and audiences that he is invincible and unpredictable. In the video, he lashes out at the then Nigerian president Goodluck Jonathan and other world leaders, including Barack Obama, François Hollande, Benjamin Netanyahu, Angela Merkel and David Cameron. These authors accessed the video at <http://search.tb.ask.com/search/video.jhtml?searchfor=Boko+Haram+in+camouflage+outfits&p2=%5EUX%5Exdm297%5EYYA%5Eus&n=780bb3a2&ss=sub&st=tab&ptb=EA9E0994-1131-4ABE-93A6-C018E0796C80&si=245051&tpr=sbt>. In a different video, Shekau warns Western leaders that the Jihadist group will “enslave” all supporters of Hollande and Obama: “Whoever supports Hollande and Obama, as they supported Bush and Clinton before, and supported the state of Jewish Israel, he is an enemy and a target to us and we will enslave him and sell him in the markets.” He says that Boko Haram will unleash deadly attacks on those who believe in the democratic system of government. The video can be accessed at <http://universalfreepress.com/boko-haram-leader-threatens-enslave-supporters-obama/>.

Baines and O’Shaughnessy (2014), Qualter (1962), Ellul (1965, 1981), Taylor (1979), Jowett and O’Donnell (2006) and others have pointed out that propaganda is a form of communication that attempts to achieve a response that furthers the desired intent of the propagandist. This is what Shekau intended to achieve with his propaganda videos. He distributed them to the powerful European news wire services as well as via different social media platforms, so they would receive maximum global attention.

Conclusion

Boko Haram utilized social media to disseminate its messages. Unlike other terrorist organizations, Boko Haram did not use social media as a primary tool to recruit followers but primarily to convey a message about its ruthlessness viciousness and its total disdain for the Nigerian government. It utilized its messaging to showcase its military prowess and the invincibility and nine lives of its leader, Shekau. Boko Haram employed social media to excoriate the Nigerian government for its ineptness, corruption, deceitfulness and incompetency. So long as Boko Haram achieved military successes against the Nigerian armed

forces, its ability to use the social media to its advantage was immense. Each spectacular military victory enhanced Boko Haram's social media messaging of brutality and military efficiency.

However, as the tide of the war turned against it, and Shekau was on the run, it became less effective in using social media to advance its cause. Moreover, while its astute use of brutality achieved its aim of scaring soldiers and civilians, it undercut its larger message that it was fighting on behalf of Islam, since the vast majority of the victims of its brutality were Muslims.

Shekau is able to turn his lack of fluency in English to his advantage by seemingly speaking a smattering of English in a disdainful manner in order to signal Boko Haram's rejection of Western-style education. He frequently speaks in Hausa and Arabic and tries to convey an air of expertise, but he is not able to pull this off as his rambling speaking style betrays his shallow understanding of Islam. Ironically, the urge to convince his viewers and listeners of his brutality undercuts the air of intellectualism that he seeks to portray.

Boko Haram initially succeeded in utilizing social media to its advantage because of a poor response by the Nigerian government. Claiming to have killed Shekau so many times provided fodder for Boko Haram's claim that the Nigerian government lied to its citizens. Moreover, the inability of the armed forces to crush Boko Haram under deadlines imposed by the government itself ended up reinforcing Boko Haram's claim that it could not be defeated. Boko Haram's ability to infiltrate the army, and the enormous corruption involving the purchase of arms to fight the terrorist group, all aided Boko Haram's success in depicting the Nigerian government as an inept and clueless entity.

Boko Haram's social media messaging lived by the sword and is apparently dying by the sword. The jihadist's fundamental message of its sheer brutality and invisibility was credible so long as Nigerian soldiers were fleeing in disarray from the terrorist group. However, as new military commanders, including Lieutenant-General Yusuf Buratai, the Chief of Army Staff, took over and began to take the fight to Boko Haram, the tables were turned against it. For over a year, Shekau was not heard from. He has begun to speak again but his threats now sound hollow. Although Boko Haram continues to launch deadly attacks, it has been uprooted from all the towns and villages which it had captured from Nigerian forces. In addition, it has been driven out of Sambisa Forest, which for many years served as its operational base for attacks. Shekau is now on the run and even his leadership of the group has been threatened from within. Boko Haram's serious military setbacks have not totally silenced its social media propaganda but its loud and boastful braggadocio has been reduced to an occasional whimper. As has been the case of IS,

military defeats blunt the allure of terrorist propaganda. They demystify terrorists and their seeming ruthless efficiency and invisibility. Initially, Nigeria did not have a credible means to counter Boko Haram's social media messaging but militarily routing of Boko Haram has proven to be the most effective response to the group's reign of terror both on the battlefield and on social media.

In June 2016, the largest social media platforms, Facebook, YouTube, Microsoft, and Twitter, agreed to set up a common database to identify terrorist propaganda in order to check the distribution of extremist ideology. This step was a recognition of the increasing use of social media by terrorist organizations and the dangers inherent in such usage. Terrorism cannot be curbed unless terrorists and their organizations are well understood. Social media messaging by extremist groups provide an important avenue for understanding terrorist groups' world views, goals and objectives. We have utilized the analysis of Boko Haram's social media messaging to demonstrate how this vicious and ruthless terrorist group has used social media to illuminate itself and what it stands for.

Notes

1. The most deadly and widely reported of these ethnoreligious conflicts involved: Ezza and Ezillo in Ebonyi state; Offa and Erinle in Kwara State; Aguleri and Umuleri in Anambra state; Enugu-I Aguleri in Anambra and Ashonwo/Odeke in Kogi State; Christian Ibos and Muslim Hausas in Abia state; Christian and Muslim youths in Kachia, Kaduna State; Jukun and Kuteb and Junkun and Hausa in Taraba state; Eggon and Alago and Eggon and Migili in Nasarawa state; Hausa and Yoruba in Ogun, Oyo and Kano states; Zangon-Kataf in Kaduna state; Hausa-Tiv-Jukun in Taraba and Benue states as well as Ologba and Egba communities of Agatu Local Government Area of Benue State. Others are the Fulani and Gwari in the Federal Capital Territory; Fulani and Tarok in Plateau state; Jukun and Fulani in Taraba state; Fulani and Southern Kaduna in Kaduna state; Ife and Modakeke and Ipetumodu and Ashipa in Osun state; Ijaw and Urhobo-Itsekiri in Delta state; Ijaw and Ilaje in Ondo state; Iva Egbe and Iva Egba of Ofodua Adun community as well as Ajasor and Efraya in Etung Local Government Area in Cross River state; Okrika and Ogoni in Rivers state; Okrika and Eleme in Rivers state; Ogoni and Andoni in Rivers state; Kalabari (Rivers state); Nembe Bayelsa state), Adadama in Cross River state and Ndiagu Amagu in Ebonyi state and indigenous communities and cattle rustlers (otherwise known as Fulani herdsmen).

2. For an understanding of scholarly analyses of the Maitatsene riots see, for example, Isichei, E. (1987). The Maitatsene risings in Nigeria, 1980–85: A revolt of the disinherited, *Journal of Religion in Africa*, 17 (3), pp. 194–208; Marvy Hiskett, M. (1987). The Maitatsene riots in Kano, 1980: An assessment, *Journal of Religion in Africa*, 17 (3), pp. 209–223.
3. For further understanding of the clashes between Shi'ites Islamic sect members and the Nigerian army see, for example, BBC world news report on May 16, 2016, retrieved from <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-36941986> on January 3, 2017. See also the report of the *New York Times* of August 1, 2016 and August 15, 2015 as well as *The Wall Street Journal*, April 12, 2016. For accounts of Nigerian newspapers report on the conflict see, for example, the *Vanguard*, April 11, 2016 and December 23, 2015; *ThisDay*, December 14, 2015; *Daily Trust*, December 23, 2015 and *Premium Times*, December 15, 2015 and December 23, 2015.
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