

NEWSPAPERS' COVERAGE OF SPECIAL MILITARY OPERATIONS IN NIGERIA: A REVIEW OF SELECTED NATIONAL DAILY NEWSPAPERS

Abstract

The Nigerian military, that is, the Army, Air Force and the Navy is an integral part of the nation's history long even before independence in 1960 (maintaining law and order against internal and external aggressors). Military security activities became more prominent with Nigeria's return to democracy in 1999. New forms of threats began to emerge requiring superior firepower to suppress them. In all these, the media has worked closely with the military. Extant literature has shown that public confidence over the military's capacity to maintain law and order, as well as enhance democratic governance could increase or decrease as a result of the direction of media reportage. This study, examined media's access to Special Military Operations (SMOs) information for news content development from January to December, 2022. Four newspapers (Vanguard, The Punch, The Nation and Premium Times) were purposely selected due to their national coverage. A total of three hundred and eighty-eight (388) stories were reviewed from the selected newspapers. Two theories, that is, the social responsibility and agenda-setting theories underpinned this study. As qualitative study, content analysis was deployed to analyse the selected stories via the frequency (attention), sources, tone (direction) and depth. Findings revealed that the media had limited access to information on the SMOs; the military had strict control of the contents the media could access. More so, the study found that because the media sometimes slanted the SMOs stories in favour of the military. Therefore, the study concluded that the selected national dailies, in terms of the reportage of the SMOs from

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January to December 2022 could not be said to be performing the 'watchdog' responsibility. Rather, their SMO stories were 'serving' the military interests. Among other things, this study advocates that the Nigerian media finetune their 'investigative' and 'watchdog' responsibility to present SMOs and other military activities on a balanced pendulum in order to increase the public confidence on their mandates.

Keywords: Special Military Operations, Coverage, Newspapers, Nigeria

I. INTRODUCTION

The Nigerian military is part and parcel of the history and development of the country. The military, that is, the Army, Air Force and Navy has been at the forefront of national security, especially at the wake of the 4th Republic in 1999. Although, its core mandate of protecting the nation from all forms of external aggression might not have been seriously tested in the last 60 years, the involvement of the military in internal security matters is without doubt commendable. This development is not unconnected with the humongous security challenges the country is faced with from time to time with resultant inability and incapacity of the Police and other security components saddled with the responsibility of internal security to tackle the issues alone.

For instance, since 2009, the land and air components of the military had to deal with the Boko Haram insurgency in the North East geopolitical zones and some parts of the north-central and western zones. This became so, following the overwhelming security challenges which greeted the actions of the Boko Haram group with obvious inability of the Police to handle them alone. Presently, the military's participation in maintaining law and order could be seen in virtually all parts of the country as men and materials are often deployed to combat insecurity peculiar to respective theatres of operations. In the course of executing assignments, the texture of press-military relations has always been called to question with regards to media representation of its operations across the country against unwholesome activities which include:

1. Terrorism/Insurgency;
2. Armed Banditry/Cattle rustling;
3. Oil theft/Pipeline vandalism;
4. Farmers/ Herders clashes;
5. Smuggling of contraband items;
6. Kidnapping for ransom;
7. Armed robbery/Sea piracy.

The aforementioned threats are within the purview of internal security but given that they continue to morph untowardly; the participation of the military has to be justified through specialised operations with accompanying timelines for suspension or conclusion depending on the level of the threat.

Aside specialized operations which the Nigerian Armed Forces embark upon with the use of force they are also involved in other activities which often bring them in contact with members of the public via non-kinetic strategies aimed at maintaining good civil-military relations. These include; deradicalization of repentant criminals; post-conflict rehabilitation, resettlement and reorganisation of ravaged areas, social engagements like Tombola nights and sports with sister security agencies, provision of medical assistance to civilians through several military-owned hospitals, provision of security coverage to Internally Displaced Persons camps, farmers on their farms and assistance to flood victims, among others. For instance, John Enenche (Major- General/Rtd), then Coordinator, Defence Media Operations disclosed through the media (Daily Nigerian online news) that the Nigerian military sometimes in October, 2020, drilled 81 boreholes, renovated 14 schools and constructed 14 clinics and dispensaries in host communities. Also, being an organization, the Nigerian

Armed Forces endeavour to keep the system functional through the engagement of their internal publics in diverse activities like seminars, workshops, courses, trainings, recruitment, discipline, transfers/ postings, promotions, etc.

For all these activities, the Media often make attempts to provide coverage in a bid to keep the public informed adequately. The desire of the media is not unconnected to their mandate of transmitting messages about the society regarding people, places, ideas and or situations.

Various metaphors have tried to capture the different aspects of the media. For example, McQuail (2005) refers to eight metaphors: media are *windows* that enable us to see beyond our immediate surroundings, *interpreters* that help us make sense of experiences, *platforms or carriers* that convey information, *interactive communication* that includes audience feedback, *signpost* that provide us with instructions and directions, *filters* that screen out part of experience and focus on others, *mirrors* that reflect ourselves back to us and *barriers* that block the truth.

In Nigeria, the media could be adjudged to have come a long way, with history that precedes the country's independence from British rule in 1960. The first edition of the first newspaper Iwe Irohin fun awon Egba ati Yoruba (the Newspaper for the Egba People) was printed on 23rd November 1859 in Abeokuta, Ogun State by its publisher, Henry Townsend. After the publication of this paper, the journey of print journalism in Nigeria has continued unhindered. In 1932, radio broadcasting began with the coming on board of British Broadcasting Corporation.

Oyekanmi (2018) revealed that the mass media has grown consistently into different stages both in terms of technology and experiences from several military and democratic administrations. Since then, the growth of the Nigerian media has been on the steady rise with relative commensurate efforts at keeping the public informed of happenings around their respective and extended environments through diverse reportage. However, despite the consistency of the media at keeping up with their identified mandate of information sharing with resultant creation of public awareness, the phenomena which play out in the course of media products delivery to the audience are worthy of attention after all.

II. STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Special Military Operations (SMOs) are federal government's response strategy through its Armed Forces in tackling threats of national security dimensions across the country. As enshrined in Section 217(2c) of the 1999 Constitution as amended:

The Federation shall, subject to an Act of the National Assembly made in their behalf, equip and maintain the armed forces as may be considered adequate and effective for the purpose of suppressing insurrection and acting in aid of civil authorities to restore order when called upon to do so by the President, but subject to such conditions as may be prescribed by an Act of the National Assembly.

A special military operation is usually on a long- or short-term basis, with a primary objective of suppressing an act of insurrection and restoring peace in a given area. Achieving this objective should not be left for the government or military alone, the involvement of the media is also very crucial. This is with regards to the relative power of the media reflective in the attention and prominence they accord to any issue through coverage or publicities with resultant impact on the public. In their emphasis of media power, Littlejohn and Foss (2008), maintained that the media provide us with varieties of programmes available at the same time in different channels and by seamless efforts, the audience are able to make choices on any preferred subject matter ranging from surgery, animals, wars, cooking, science to art. Beginning from the year 2009 when the Boko Haram insurgency began in Nigeria, particularly in the north-east geopolitical zone, the swift responses of the military in combating this insurrection and the coverage of the media are noteworthy.

The relationship between the media and the military could be tough at times as there are some schools of thought whose stance reflect a no-love-lost between the duo based on perceived unprofessionalism of the media against the military. At other times, the military may frown at negative coverage, what they perceive the media as projecting them in bad light. In spite of this feeling, the media's vital role as the Fourth Estate of the Realm remains unarguable as they strive for openness in favour of the public which is necessary for legitimacy and accountability. Without the press, both the citizens and military leaders will be in the dark with regards to activities around them.

Overtime, the media-military relations in Nigeria has been a subject of debate within the context of national security and public interest. While the media is obligated to ensure the public is aware of happenings around them from an informed position, the military despite its critical placement within the sovereignty called Nigeria is a relatively closed system. Both parties are open and closed to the public, respectively for same reasons supposedly. By training anchored on the oath of secrecy, the military is wired to be secretive while it is an aberration for the media by her journalistic ethics to hoard information of value from the public. However, given that special military operations are geared towards suppressing insurrection and restoring peace in a given area, the importance of publicising these operations for awareness and knowledge about the military and the government cannot be overemphasised. This is in view of the overwhelming benefits that can be derived from a well-informed public especially when the issues at hand are directly related to their safety and wellbeing.

There were, and still are, several Special Military Operations across the country targeted at restoring peace. These include: Operation Lafiya Dole, Sharan Daji, Shirin Harbi, Harbin Kunama II, Operation Dokaji, Operation Egwu Eke, Crocodile Smile, Harbin Kunama I, Operation Karamin Goro, Operation Ayem Akpatuma, Operation Last Hold, Egwu Eke aka Python Dance II, Operation 777, Operation Egwu Eke III, Operation Python Dance III, Operation Harbin Kunama III, Operation Python Dance I, Operation Positive Identification, Operation Atilogwu, Operation Rattle Snake, Operation Yancin Tafki, Operation Long Reach, Exercise Sahel Sanity, Operation Ruwan Wuta I, II, and III, Exercise Mugun Bugu, Exercise Steel Waters, Exercise Enduring Peace, Exercise Golden Dawn, Operation Tura Ta Kai Bango, Operation Sharan Fague, among others.

However, it is of concern if the media had access to the avalanche of the above operations and where there was access, if the information available to the media were sufficient enough for public consumption.

III. AIM OF THE STUDY

The aim of the study is to establish how the Nigerian print media can improve access to, and reportage of Special Military Operations in Nigeria.

IV. OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

1. To establish the number of times the selected newspapers published stories about the Special Military Operations in Nigeria in 2022.
2. To ascertain the sources of Special Military Operations' information accessed by the selected newspapers in Nigeria in 2022.
3. To examine the tone of Special Military Operations stories by the selected newspapers in 2022.
4. To determine the depth of the Special Military Operations' stories published by the selected newspapers in 2022.

V. RESEARCH QUESTIONS

1. What is the frequency of reportage of the Special Military Operations by the selected newspapers in Nigeria in 2022?
2. What are sources of the Special Military Operations stories used by the selected newspapers in Nigeria in 2022?
3. What is the tone of the Special Military Operations stories published by the selected newspapers in 2022?
4. How comprehensive were the Special Military Operations stories by the selected newspapers in Nigeria in 2022?

VI. SCOPE OF THE STUDY

The media comprise television, radio, internet, newspapers, and magazines. They can also be categorised into traditional and new media, as well as print and electronic media. For the purpose of this study, the in-print/online media of four selected newspapers were utilized. This comprised: Vanguard, The Punch, The Nation, and Premium Times. The choices of the newspapers were informed on their respective national spread and reach.

VII. SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

This study will contribute to existing body of knowledge on media-military relations as its intention is geared towards determining the extent to which media are providing prominence and attention to military related activities for onward creation of requisite awareness and knowledge for the public about their military.

VIII. LITERATURE REVIEW

Literature review for the paper is segmented into three parts viz; Theoretical framework, conceptual and empirical studies.

IX. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The theoretical foundation for the research is the Agenda Setting and Social Responsibility theories of mass communication considered most appropriate in view of their respective postulations regarding the operations of the mass media.

1. Agenda-Setting Theory: Agenda-setting theory was propounded between 1972/1973 by Maxwell McCombs and Donald L. Shaw. Baran and Davis (2012) stated that the theory proposes that the media remains the source of public awareness about issues as the people can hardly participate in matters of public interest without the media. Also, that public importance accorded to issues appear to be proportionate to the amount of attention the media give to same subject matter. The theory assumes that the media sets the agenda for general discussion as they may not always determine what is thought but what is being thought about presumably because audience/ readers tend to think most of those things the media highlight as relevant.

Furthermore, Tejumaiye (2009) noted other determinants of the agenda setting hypothesis to include the frequency of reportage with the aid of headlines and pictures as well as reports that provide opportunities for statements and rejoinders. According to Chaffe and Berger's (1997) criteria for scientific theories cited in Anaeto *et al.* (2008) the theory is important in understanding the workings of the media due to its powers of explanation, prediction, parsimony and organization, among others.

2. Social Responsibility Theory: According to McQuail (2010), the theory of social responsibility assumes that media ownership is a form of public trust or accountability and not an unlimited private entity. The theory took its roots from the American Commission of 1947. McQuail (2010) said the theory reflects media's obligation to society which should be based on truthfulness, accuracy, fairness, objectivity and relevance. Also, the author emphasized the need for media freedom rooted in self-regulation while not forgetting to stick to acceptable ethical standards and professionalism. Nevertheless, government may need to intervene in the interest of the public whenever the need arises.

Therefore, both theories are not only relevant to the study but also complement each other. This is because the media in their coverage of special military operations do so not only to set the agenda for public discourse but equally out of obligation which must be done within the boundaries of truth, accuracy, fairness, objectivity and relevance.

3. Conceptual/Empirical Studies: It remains the duty of the media to inform the public about issues for the purpose of fulfilling their obligation to society and to do this, they critique and evaluate the activities of other people and institutions. Without doubt, what they publish can influence the people, businesses and institutions they cover. For this

cause, media reports are expected to reflect truth, fairness and sincerity which are hallmarks of journalistic integrity.

Snow-Capparelli (2013) advocated the need for media practitioners to be much concerned about leveraging on the intelligence of sources from all representative strata. Report writers are required to concentrate on both those who are advantaged and disadvantaged to ensure balanced portrayals particularly of the groups under examination. This study strongly aligns with the above principle and desires that when reporting about special military operations, the media should ensure balanced reportage which will depict them as carrying every side along, in this case- the military, residents in the area, civil society organisations, academia and where necessary, the enemy forces who received the actions of the military.

In another study by Ndinojuo, et al., (2020) on sources of news about military operations against Boko Haram, findings indicated that the media relied majorly on the military without corroboration from other sources. The findings refuted the claims by the military that the media was bias in their reportage of special military operations in favour of the Boko Haram terrorists. Rather, the media relied more on sources within the military on the issue in the period under review. Afomachukwu (2020) conducted a study on Newspaper Framing of the Nigerian Armed Forces Operation Python Dance II in South-East Nigeria. The study analysed the various frames used by the newspapers to report on Nigerian military's special operations (Operation Python Dance II). The study's aim was to identify the dominant frames in the stories published. With the use of content analysis research methodology, findings revealed that the human-interest frame was the dominant frame of reportage, while the security and attribution of responsibility frames had a considerable number of stories as well. Findings from the study recommended that for future operations, both the military and media should properly sensitise the public ahead through press conferences or announcements in a bid to forestall misinformation.

In another study on Effects of Real-Time News Coverage on Military Decision-Making, Adamson (1997) stated that the preparation stage of any military operations could be affected by the way the media cover such activities. The research showed political and military leaders are forced into making moves on issues they know less about without weighing in on the implications. Also, that reports on tactical events, when done on the spot, real-time, will impact on both the operational and strategic plans. Adamson (1997) in reference to news coverage during the Somalia special military operation (operation Restore Hope) noted unprofessional conduct of the media. Using their gadgets, such as cameras and flood-lights, they trailed the Navy SEAL teams as they made their way onto the beaches. The action of the media was in contravention of the operations security of the mission. The SEALs could not conceal their emotions as even the live telecast of the operation, showed thus. Therefore, they became uninterested in relating with the media as their target was to fulfil their goal.

Waters (2004) in a study titled, "Influencing the Message: The Role of Catholic Missionaries in Media Coverage of the Nigerian Civil War" recollected the heavy reliance on Catholic missionary priests of Irish nationality in the Biafra region by some foreign Journalists in the coverage of the war. These persons include; Frederick Forsyth formerly with the British Broadcasting Corporation turned freelance Journalist and Allen

Hart of the British Television. Both reporters at different times relied on the eyewitness accounts of Kevin Doheny, a veteran missionary of the ongoing war. Others were; William Bernard of Mark press Agency, Norman Kirkhan of the Daily Telegraph, Walter Parlington of the Daily Express, William Norris from the Times of London, Brian Dixton of the Life tabloid. Also were, John Sullivan, a reporter for the National Catholic Reporter, John M.C Lauglin of the Catholic Weekly America, amongst others. Waters (2004) maintained that the above-mentioned journalists with sources mainly amongst catholic priests from Europe, Biafran soldiers and some humanitarian aid workers from France presented their respective accounts of the war from the perspective of Biafra.

- 4. Mass Media and National Security in Nigeria:** Croteau and Hoynes (2003) assert the importance of the media in our lives to the effect that life is meaningless without the media because with no television, radio, newspaper or the internet, we would have a great deal of time in our hands. According to Oloyede (2008) ever since its foundation the Press throughout the world has generally been in the forefront of social, educational and political progress. It has been a standard bearer in the struggle against poverty, oppression, deceit, tyranny and other clogs of mankind. It has remained a most important and indispensable entity in jostling entrenched atrocity and dismantling robust oppression.

The American Press, for instance fought in the struggle against British rule until independence was attained in 1786. Similarly, the Nigerian Press fueled the hostility against British colonialism until it terminated in 1960. Without the Press, it is doubtful whether there could have been an American or French Revolution neither could there have been a return to Democratic governance in Nigeria in 1999. Furthermore, Oloyede (2008) maintained that the roles which the Press perform in modern society are numerous. Beyond the traditional functions of the Press to inform, educate entertain and help sell goods and services, they now perform other equally important and indispensable duties in the service of the modern society.

- **Social-Cultural Role:** the role which the press plays in the transmission and advancement of culture is generally beyond question. It constantly feeds both the adult and upcoming generation of society with the acceptable modes and norms of social behaviour. It also helps to enforce these norms by publicizing sanctions against transgressors.
- **Mirror of Society:** As an imitator and reflector of the modes of human apprehension and judgement, the press function to mirror the society. The nature and perception of every community is easily perceived through the press
- **A Forum for the Free Expression of Opinions and Ideas-** the media serves well in this capacity particularly under the relatively free press environment because whoever has anything new or newsworthy to say simply says and the press beams the information to the world.
- **A Bearer of Danger Signals:** The Press foresees, predicts and warns society against impending dangers and catastrophes.

- **A Crusader for Social Justice:** they also crusade for social justice and function as the tribune of the people. Whenever and wherever any individual or a group of people are unduly harassed or their fundamental rights trampled upon, the Press put up a crusading mantle and champion their causes. It is for this reason the mass media is commonly referred to as the voice of the voiceless.
- **A Mass Mobilizer:** Given the right direction and necessary paraphernalia, it mobilizes people for political and economic causes. Such causes include effecting positive change in health habits, prosecuting economic revolutions, fighting national wars, and others.
- **Pillar of Public Opinion:** the press serves as the foundation and sustainer of public opinion in society. Without the press through which society feels the pulse of its entire membership and without the news media which simultaneously encodes the aggregate of such feelings to the generality of the people, it will be extremely difficult, if not totally impossible to collate the feelings of the mass of the people.
- **A Most Indispensable Instrument of Governance:** The press serves as an intermediary between the governments and the people by ensuring that the people are not oblivious of the workings within government circles. It painstakingly dissipates adequate efforts in conveying the programmes of government to the citizens.

The media perform the aforementioned functions through news gathering, compilation, news presentation and news explanation on daily basis. It communicates to the people what is happening around them; in different sectors and spheres of society. It also provides explanations of news stories telling people how a particular news event or story affects them. (Duyile: 1987). The Nigerian media, remain a force to be reckoned with in Africa being the biggest in terms of size. They are the rallying point of Nigeria's civil society and their contributions to national development cannot go unnoticed. They fought the military head on and saw to the restoration of democracy and have consistently been the voice of the voiceless. Nevertheless, the Nigerian media are faced with myriads of challenges such as poor salaries, large presence of quacks, corruption, partisanship, delay in payment of emoluments, subtle dictatorship by the government, among others.

On national security, Holmes (2015) defined the concept from the perspective of power, military strength, force and national defence. As power, it implies the undisputed status of a country's sovereignty such that external forces are incapable of harming its people. National security as military strength refers to capacity and the capabilities of the armed forces, which are sometimes docile and often understood as a static measure of national power. However, in practical terms, military strength is a variable that is factored on the relative strength of opponents, the degree to which it is used or not used judiciously. Using force inappropriately has the propensity reducing one's power and strength, while when used appropriately can enhance power. Another variable is national defense which means the ability of the armed forces of a nation to defend its sovereignty and the lives of the citizenry.

According to Ali (2013), national security means the protection of the lives, rights, dignity, and property of citizens. It can equally be referred to as a condition achieved when the resources, cultural integrity, territory, sovereignty and lawful institutions of the nation are safeguarded from threats. Former President of Nigeria, Chief Olusegun Obasanjo in appreciation of the need for closer co-operation and collaboration among the various security agencies and all other components that make up the Nigerian society stated in March 2001, that the concept of national security shall be the aggregation of the security interest of the individuals, communities, ethnic groups, political entities and institutions which inhabit the territory of Nigeria. In Nigeria, national security has suffered several threats since independence in 1960 and the mass media has also not helped to salvage the situation as their focus shifted towards reinforcing tribal and sectional loyalties in preference to national unity, identity and integration.

- 5. Research Method and Analytical Tool:** This is qualitative research that extract its primary contents from selected newspapers. Thus, content analysis was deployed as the analytical tool for the 388 Special Military Operations stories from January to December, 2022 by four selected newspapers. Tejumaiye (2017) said content analysis as a research methodology is one of mass communication’s great contributions to scientific inquiry. That the main unit of analysis in content analysis is written or recorded messages. Three in-print newspapers: The Punch, Vanguard, The Nation and one online news paper-Premium Times were selected based on their national spread, accessibility and wide availability. Digital versions were used because the Internet provides the technical capability for researchers to scrutinize an article, assess its sources, and communicate using channels that other media do not provide. This has been validated in a number of studies (Freyenberger, 2013; Wang and Riffe, 2010) in Ndinijuo, et.al (2020). The choices of newspapers for the study was their prominence as manifest in circulation and regional representation. Vanguard was the highest rated Nigerian newspaper; Premium Times was the most read online newspaper in Nigeria (Alexa, 2017) The Nation was rated as the third best newspaper in Nigeria (Adewuyi, 2023).

Within the study period, the total editions of dailies published and circulated by the Punch, Vanguard and Nation were 1,095, being 365 editions multiplied by the three newspapers. That is the three papers produced copies every Monday to Sunday. However, that was not the case with Premium Times as it released posts on daily basis but did not post issues related to the military on such basis. A total of 25 stories on military activities were posted across all the months except July. Of all the stories, only 13 were on Special Military Operations (SMOs). Table 1 below highlights the breakdown of the numbers of stories published in the year 2022.

Table 1: All Military Related Stories Published in 2022

Newspaper	Military Related Stories	Special Military Operations Related Stories
Vanguard	534	195
The Punch	230	113
The Nation	120	67

Premium Times	25	13
Total	909	388

All editions were painstakingly searched out in order to avoid missing out on any military related issue reported in the period under review. Also, the search was necessary so as to enable a proper selection of SMOs related stories from general stories on the Nigerian Military. At the end of the exercise, a total of 909 stories on military related activities were published out of which 388 were reportage on SMOs. For the purpose of this study, the population of study is the military related stories (909) while the sample of study is the reportage on SMOs (388). Tejumaiye (2017) defined a sample as a subject of the population that is taken to be representative of the entire population. Majid (2018) explained that a population of interest is a target population that a study intends to investigate. Adamu-Iria (2006) defined population as a collection or set of individuals or objects whose properties are to be analysed.

6. **Unit of Analysis:** The units of analysis are the frequency of publications; sources relied on by the newspapers, direction of reportage and depth of the reports on Special Military Operations (SMOs). The frequency of publications was represented by the numbers of stories on SMOs published in the period under review. Sources relied on by the newspapers were explained taking into cognizance the numerous categories of people who provided information about SMOs such as the military, Government officials, civilian eye witnesses, embedded journalists, NGOs and anonymous. Direction of reportage reflects the tone deployed by the newspapers in reporting SMOs in the period under review, whether positive, negative or neutral, while depth represents the extent of comprehensiveness of the reports relative to the name of special operation, nature of operation, location of operation, confirmation of information on SMOs from other sources, date operation executed, military components involved, exact figures of casualties during SMOs, etc.
7. **Data Collection Instrument:** The coding sheet was used as a means of collecting data on written reports in the selected newspapers about SMOs from January to December, 2022. The coding guide also served as a guide on the units of analysis and contents categories under study.
8. **Method of Data Presentation:** Data from the investigation were presented in tables and simple percentages given the fact that the study is concerned with the examination of the manifest contents of newspapers on Special Military Operations in the year 2022.

Table 2: Frequency of Newspapers' Coverage of SMOs in 2022

Variables	Vanguard	The Punch	The Nation	Premium	Frequency	Percentage
January	15	17	10	2	44	11.34
February	9	8	0	0	17	4.38
March	12	12	4	2	30	7.73
April	16	5	2	3	26	6.70
May	23	7	4	2	36	9.28

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June	9	4	2	1	16	4.12
July	10	9	8	0	27	6.96
August	21	8	8	1	38	9.79
September	25	12	5	0	42	10.83
October	20	9	4	1	34	8.76
November	24	9	12	1	46	11.86
December	11	13	8	0	32	8.25
Total	195 (50.26%)	113 (29.12%)	67 (17.17%)	13 (3.35%)	388	100

From the data in table 2, it can be seen that the newspapers reported the issue adequately in the reviewing period. This is as it appeared three hundred and eighty-eight (388) times in the pages of the four newspapers concerned, being an average of one story on SMOs per day. The Vanguard had the highest number of stories on SMOs with 50.26% of the total stories for the year, a representation of 195 reports from 126 editions. The Punch followed after with 29.12% representing 113 reports from 83 editions, while reports on the issue by the Nation stood at 17.27% which reflected 67 stories from 29 editions and 3.35% of the total reports was from Premium Times being 13 stories from 11 posts. The adequacy of media coverage in this instance may not be unconnected to the state of insecurity in the country occasioned by myriads of threats to national security. These include; terrorism in the South-East, insurgency in the North-East, oil theft in the South- South, armed banditry in the North-West, crime and criminality in the South-West and Ethno-Religious/ Farmers-Herders conflicts in the North-Central geopolitical zones. The foregoing underscores a seeming synergy between the media and the military in efforts to combat the above threats with one waging the war using guns and the other putting its pen to active use. The table further implies that as the challenges against national security persists across the nation, the military continues its offensive and defensive while the media relentlessly provides coverage accordingly.

Table 3: Sources relied on by the Newspapers in Coverage of SMOs in year 2022

Newspaper	Sources				
	Military	Government Officials	Civilian Eye Witnesses	Journalists	Non-Governmental Organization
Vanguard	172 (88.21%)	5 (2.56%)	13 (6.67%)	0 (0.00%)	5 (2.56%)
The Punch	107 (94.69%)	2 (1.77%)	3 (2.66%)	0 (0.00%)	1 (0.89%)
The Nation	57 (85.08%)	3 (4.48%)	6 (8.96%)	0 (0.00%)	1 (1.49%)
Premium Times	11 (84.62%)	0 (0.00%)	1 (7.69%)	0 (0.00%)	1 (7.69%)

The above table shows that the newspapers relied more on military sources for information on SMOs as well as other issues related to the subject matter. The researcher presumes no one will be in a better position to inform the media about the operations better than the military themselves. Investigation revealed that sources such as

government officials and Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) whose views the newspapers captured were based on the assessment of the SMOs not necessarily the accounts of what transpired in the theatre of war. Also, since the study stretches its frontiers to issues related to the SMOs as well, these persons easily fit into those categories as stories in such directions were more of commentaries on the issue. In the meantime, civilian eye witnesses which the newspapers relied on were mainly community dwellers whose communities the military carried out operations which they witnessed. Eighteen of the eye witnesses supplied their detail to the newspapers, respectively, while 5 chose to remain anonymous. However, in the period under review, the newspapers did not receive any story on SMOs from journalists whether as embedded, correspondent (covert/overt) or freelance. The military either through their spokespersons or theatre commanders supplied information on the operations as they occurred. Also, on one occasion, account on SMO was given by a government official. For instance, the Punch of 19th January, 2022, reported that the Kaduna State Commissioner for Internal Security and Home Affairs, Samuel Aruwan, said troops of the Nigeria Army troops rescued eight kidnapped victims in the Chikun LGA of the State and killed three terrorists during the operation. This undoubtedly is at variance with investigative journalism and the principle of balanced reportage given the over-reliance of the media on one source which could result to bias and tendency of the dominant source controlling the pattern and direction of the news.

Table 4: Tone of Reporting on SMOs by the Newspapers

Newspaper	Tone		
	Positive	Neutral	Negative
Vanguard	177 (90.77%)	11(5.64%)	7(3.59%)
The Punch	100(88.50%)	9(7.97%)	4(3.54%)
The Nation	58(86.57%)	5(7.46%)	4(5.97%)
Premium Times	11(84.62%)	1(7.69%)	1(7.69%)

Table 4 above shows that the four newspapers reported SMOs for the reviewing period mostly in a positive tone. This was reflective in stories which portrayed the military as winning the fight against insecurity through diverse special operations across the country as well as positive commentaries from military high authorities and government officials on the efforts of troops at decimating enemy forces. However negative toned reports were those which the papers captured as either attacks on troops by terrorists or allegations of unlawful invasion of communities by the military and killing of innocent civilians during some airstrikes. Meanwhile, neutral tone was represented by reports which were neither positive nor negative. They were more from NGOs and institutions saddled with appraising SMOs and proffering solutions on ending insecurity. Below is one sample each of stories in positive, negative and neutral tone, respectively.

- **“Troops kill 10 Bandits, Destroy camps in Kaduna villages”**
Vanguard Newspaper, December 23, 2022.
- **Military invades Ebonyi Community in search of IPOB/ESN Camp**
The Nation Newspaper, December 12, 2022.

- **Support Troops with your Reports, Military Tells Media**
The Punch 22nd January 2022.

Table 5: Depth of Reportage on SMOs by the Newspapers in the Year 2022

Newspaper	Depth of Reportage						
	Code name of Special Operation	Nature of Operation	Location of Operation	Confirmation of information on SMOs from other sources	Date Operation was executed	Military Components involved	Exact Figures of Casualties during SMOs
Vanguard	Mentioned in all the reports	Mentioned in all the reports	Mentioned in all the reports	Nil	Mentioned in all the reports	Mentioned in all the reports	Not mentioned in all the reports
The Punch	Mentioned in all the reports	Mentioned in all the reports	Mentioned in all the reports	Nil	Mentioned in all the reports	Mentioned in all the reports	Not mentioned in all the reports
The Nation	Mentioned in all the reports	Mentioned in all the reports	Mentioned in all the reports	Nil	Mentioned in all the reports	Mentioned in all the reports	Not mentioned in all the reports
Premium Times	Mentioned in all the reports	Mentioned in all the reports	Mentioned in all the reports	Nil	Mentioned in all the reports	Mentioned in all the reports	Not mentioned in all the reports

In addition to frequency (attention), sources of news, tone (direction), the study was concerned about the representation of stories on SMOs by the newspapers with regards to the quality of information they passed to the public in the period under review. To ascertain the completeness of the reports, they had to be measured using the variable of depth. The table above shows that the newspapers mentioned the code names of the operations, nature of the operations, location, and date operation was carried out and the military components involved in a given special operation. However, none of the newspapers dedicated either a sentence or paragraph to verification of any of the stories on SMOs as provided by the military. Also, the military through the newspapers mentioned exact figures of casualties recorded against enemy forces but were not always exact with the number of civilian casualties who were affected negatively by their operations like in cases of air strikes.

X. DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

In the year under review, Vanguard, The Punch, The Nation and Premium Times published a combined total of nine hundred and nine (909) stories on Nigerian Military related activities. Out of this number, three hundred and eighty-eight (388) were on Special Military Operations as well as stories common to the issue. This figure represents 42.68% of entire stories on military in the period in focus. The attention accorded by the print media on SMOs through the frequency of reportage, being an average of one story daily could be adjudged as relatively good performance on the part of the media. The foregoing indicates that the Nigerian media had access to activities of the Military, despite the latter's usual

suspicion which often dictates the divulgence of information to the media. This may not be unconnected to the position of Rai (2000) who maintained that if the military fails to involve the media in their activities, they could become victims of rash or ill-informed public opinion. The sampled stories also showed that the media fulfilled their duty as explained in the role of media embedded in the social Responsibility theory. To further confirm the level of media involvement in SMOs, a call was put through to the Commander, 65 Battalion of the Nigerian Army, Lagos, Lieutenant Col. Mohammed Lawal. He maintained that the attention accorded the operations by the media was encouraging and motivating as the reportage were avenues to keep the public abreast of the fight against insecurity across the country. That, the frequency of reports on SMOs point to the continued strengthening of media-military relations towards overcoming the myriads of threats to national security.

The second research objective was to ascertain the sources of information, the newspapers relied on in publishing stories on SMOs and other items related to the issue in year 2022. Findings revealed that the newspapers relied heavily on the military to publish stories on SMOs in the reviewing period. A total of three hundred and forty- seven (347) out of three hundred and eighty- eight (388) publications representing 89.43% emanated from the military. This figure was distantly followed by information from civilian eye witnesses on the matter which stood at twenty-three (23) being 5.92% of the total figure. Also, the newspapers relied on Government officials and Non-Governmental Organizations concerning the issue but only ten (10)/2.57% and eight (8) 2.06% publications emanated from both sides respectively all through the reviewing period. Meanwhile, no story on SMOs was gotten from journalists during the period. Gamreklidze (2015) states that from the time the practice of journalism began, reporters were trained to rely on solid sources for information and perspective on the events. News making is an enterprise, which product can only thrive on trust and popularity among the audiences. In addition, Cozma, *et al.* (2012) notes that news stories cannot do without sources the way living things can't survive unless they oxygen. Another importance of sources is that they make the news authoritative, legitimate and credible, besides being vehicles of information dissemination.

Therefore, it suffices to state that the newspapers were justified for relying mostly on the military for stories on SMOs, as none other source would have been credible enough to provide insight into SMOs like the military. Perhaps this explains why no single Journalist served as source for their media outfits or those of others as they would have been accused of bias or influencing the stories against the military and could face possible litigation for compromising operational security. This is as Tiffen (2013) maintains that sourcing helps to forestall prejudice and shield a media outfit from litigation.

However, Berkowitz (2009) said that sources sometimes get interested in the stories they provide to the media as their intention(s) could be skewed towards influencing public opinion. Thus, sourcing seems to be a strategic symbiotic relation as both parties' goal is same. Again, some sources wield more power than others particularly those with special stakes in a report, they are known as official sources. In this instance, the military and government representatives who gave account on SMOs are considered as official sources. Notwithstanding, the dominance of one source in a story over others, stands the chance of being influenced by the domineering source, since the media has no say or input in the story. They only are vehicles for projecting the positive image of the originators, they publish only stories provided by the news source and from the source's angle or perspective, no need for

fact- checking as the issue is considered credible coming from a supposedly trust worthy and dependable source of news.

The 'parasitism' of the news institutions according to Berkowitz (2009) reflects a rather interdependent, symbiotic, and delicately conscious relationship between reporters and their sources in which each side relies on the other for reasons of self-interest. Self-interest here suggests that the media being a commercial entity with the goal to sell their products and the military in the quest to be viewed as winning the fight against insecurity both do so without taking into consideration the sensibilities of the public with regards to knowing the actual truth behind the projected story. The question remains, whose duty is it to determine the truth- the media, military or the public? All reports on SMOs particularly those which were generated from the theatres of operations, portrayed the military as winning against enemy forces, yet insecurity of varying degrees still thrive.

Another reason why the military dominated news items on SMOs may be tied to Kellner (1993) position that war coverage by the media is superficial due to love for country. For example, Mueller (1994) recalled that during the first Gulf War, media generally reacted with predictable boosterism instead of asking the military forces difficult questions about the war. They served as messengers for the military and deliberately avoided the negatives of war. But this stance is contrary to that of Paul and Kim (2004) as the authors maintained that the goals of the military and the press often conflict. The military wants the press to be on their side but the media's obligation to society in reporting on subjective truth will not let them succumb.

Still on press/military misunderstanding, Paul and Kim (2004) recollected the situation of the Vietnam War. This was as the encounters in the battle field as reported by the media and military were different, both entities worked at cross purposes. What the reporters saw at the theatre of the Vietnam war was different from the briefs given by the military during press conferences convened by the military for which the reporters were in attendance. The Journalists described the briefs as follies meaning they were already doctored before the conference. were flown to a combat unit, saw the combat operations, wrote their stories, and then returned to. In instances where the media projected the military in positive tone, they did so because the military was in control of such coverages. This phenomenon is common in cases where the media has no eye witnesses like it happened during the Gulf War as recounted by Brightman (2003). He said the Armed Forces took charge of what reporters saw and read the reporters' stories before sending those stories to news agencies in the United States because they were trying to ensure the safety of journalists and the security of the mission.

The third research objective sought curiosity on the tone of the selected newspapers deployed in the coverage of SMOs. Data gathered indicate that the newspapers reported the issue positively in the reviewing period with a total of three hundred and forty-seven (347) stories that is 89.17% from the four newspapers published in favour of the Military. This outcome can be said to be predictable in view of the outcome of the second research question on sources of SMOs reports. However, only sixteen (16) and twenty-six (26) reports being 4.12% and 6.70% respectively reflected negative and neutral tones about SMOs. Findings showed the negative toned reports were basically reports from sources outside the military mainly civilians who witnessed such operations like air strikes and invasion with resultant

civilian casualties. Their accounts painted the military in bad light, while stories with neutral tones were mostly based on appraisal of the SMOs across the country with calls on government to prioritize welfare of troops and ensure their training/retraining for better output. According to Kendall-Taylor (2020) tone refers to the way a communication conveys or elicits emotion. Lengauer *et al.* (2012) in Asker, *et al* (2016), recommended the need to differentiate between positive, negative, neutral and ambivalent tonality. A news story is negative when the reportage reflects conditions such as disappointment, frustration, skepticism, threat and risk up to political failure, crisis and disaster. A positively toned report has such indicators as hope and enthusiasm up to solutions, successes and gains. When a news story, it balances elements of negative and positive tonalities, while a neutral tone occurs when the report is portrayed as neither negative nor positive.

Finally, the study was concerned about knowing how comprehensive the stories on SMOs were as reported by the selected newspapers. To gain understanding on this, six indicators were looked at which were: name of special operation, nature of operation, confirmation of information on SMOs from other sources, date operation was executed, military components involved and exact figures of casualties during SMOs. Starting with the name of the operation, investigation revealed all the newspapers mentioned the names of various special operations carried out by the military against diverse forms of insecurity. Some names of such SMOs include: Operation Tura Takai Bango, Exercise Golden Dawn, Exercise Golden Dawn, Operation Delta Safe, Operation Sharan Daji, Operation Hadin Kai, Operation Enduring Peace, amongst others. On nature of operation, all the papers mentioned them, some of which were; air bombardment/strikes, invasion, arrest, rescue, aggressive clearance, surveillance and reconnaissance mission, escort for humanitarian workers, gun battle, night ambush, patrols, close air support, etc. Also, all the papers mentioned locations where the operations were carried, date and time as well as the military components involved in the operations - the Army, Air Force or Navy.

In the meantime, the study stretched the phenomenon of depth further to confirmation of the stories provided by the military on SMOs from other sources. This was necessary as depth of a report should equally reflect balance reportage. It was discovered that none of the newspapers wrote on the account of the “other” about any story on SMOs. All stories were as told to the media, no line or paragraph was reserved for confirmation. In cases, where the military was accused of operational failure with resultant casualties, the military were always evasive in commenting as the papers’ comments often reflect such a statement as “efforts to reach the Army/Navy/Air Force spokesperson proved abortive as the phone was switched off or unreachable”. For number of casualties during SMOs, the newspapers were exact to some extent. For example, of the 195 stories on the issue, the Vanguard were exact in providing the number of terrorists decimated by the military in 88 stories, while 30 other stories did not provide exact numbers but estimate. Words like “no fewer than”, “scores” were common features in such stories. The remainder of 77 stories was issues surrounding SMOs not the operations parse; therefore, the need to look out for exactitude did not arise.

XI. CONCLUSION

The foregoing analysis on newspapers’ coverage of SMOs between January and December, 2022 suggests the active involvement of the media in the fight against threats to national security through their reports. The media’s core mandate of informing and educating

the public as tucked-in, in the social responsibility and agenda-setting theories of mass communication undoubtedly came to bear as a combined total of 388 stories on SMOs and other related matters to the issue by the newspapers were published in 268 editions and 11 posts in the reviewing period. The figure showed that the print media had something to write about the issue on a virtually daily basis, an indication of the military providing media access to its activities. As the fight against insecurity across the country rages on, the media relentlessly contributes significantly to keep the public abreast of the situations as they unfolded in the various theatres of operations. The stories projected the Nigeria military to be always battle-ready, equipped, tactical, strategic, motivated, professional and well-trained to take on enemy forces.

However, it appeared the media was the military's lapdog (captured media) as described by Olukotun (2018) rather than its watchdog given the overall positive tonality of the stories and the heavy reliance on the military for information on SMOs. Agreed that no one will be able to report on SMOs better than the military themselves, yet it was not out of place for the media to incorporate other sources of information for the sake of balanced reporting. The media rather than act as partners in the project of national security chose to serve as errand agents for the military. Whatever the military provided was reproduced without sieving. In instances where other sources provided negative stories about the military to the media, the former would always evade responses as desired by the latter and no follow-up reports would be published afterwards to show efforts towards the issue. It is good to project the country's military in a positive light because it enhances public confidence being that the military is one yardstick to measure State's power. Nevertheless, the media must not let anyone use them to the extent that they are ridiculed and relegated to the background. The media are professionally educators based on the avalanche of information that should be at their disposal, so beyond reeling out quantity, they should be after quality as well so that the public can be sufficiently knowledgeable. The aforementioned reports indicted the media as the outcome of media management strategy of the military, that is, they were controlled by the media as against growing advocacy for press-military relations which reflects symbiosis and partnership between both parties as reiterated by Rai (2000).

XII. RECOMMENDATIONS

Consequently, this study recommends that:

1. The Nigerian print media should sustain their news reporting efforts but in doing so, ensure to balance the contents by not reporting in favour of the source.
2. The Nigerian print media should as a matter of urgency, intensify their investigative capacity in order to be responsive to produce credible SMO stories not from the military perspective but for the security interest of the nation.
3. The print media should maintain a professional relationship with the military.
4. The Nigerian print media should invest in information communication technologies such as drones and high-definition cameras could help them support the coverage of SMOs as partners instead of scooping most of their stories from the military archive.
5. The Nigerian military must learn to trust and work with the print media by providing necessary information about SMOs for national reporting.

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