

**IBN HALDUN UNIVERSITY  
SCHOOL OF GRADUATE STUDIES  
DEPARTMENT OF RADIO, TELEVISION AND CINEMA**

**MASTER THESIS**

**CRISIS COMMUNICATION IN SUB-SAHARAN  
AFRICA: MEDIA COVERAGE OF TERRORIST  
ATTACKS IN THE AGE OF SOCIAL MEDIA**

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**THESIS SUPERVISOR  
ASST. PROF. HAKKI ÖCAL**

**ISTANBUL, 2021**

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AFRICA: MEDIA COVERAGE OF TERRORIST  
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**by**

**NOUFOU OUEDRAOGO**

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fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts in  
Radio, Television and Cinema**

**THESIS SUPERVISOR  
ASST. PROF. HAKKI ÖCAL**

**ISTANBUL, 2021**

## THESIS APPROVAL

This is to certify that we have read this thesis and that in our opinion it is fully adequate, in scope and quality, as a thesis for the degree of Master in Media and Communication/Radio, TV and Cinema programme.

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This is to confirm that this thesis complies with all the standards set by the School of Graduate Studies of Ibn Haldun University:

Date of Submission

Seal/Signature

## ACADEMIC HONESTY ATTESTATION

I hereby declare that all information in this document has been obtained and presented in accordance with academic rules and ethical conduct. I also declare that, as required by these rules and conduct, I have fully cited and referenced all material and results that are not original to this work.

Noufou OUEDRAOGO



## ÖZ

### SAHRA ALTI AFRİKA'DA KRİZ İLETİŞİMİ: SOSYAL MEDYA ÇAĞINDA TERÖR SALDIRILARININ MEDYA KAPSAMI

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Temmuz 2021, 102 sayfa

Son yıllarda, Batı Afrika ülkelerinde terör saldırıları ciddi bir veba haline geldi. Ancak, Batı Afrika medyasının terör saldırılarını çerçevelediğine dair, özellikle de sosyal medyanın baskın olduğu bir bağlamda akademik bir araştırma yoktur. Terör olgusunun uygun bir şekilde anlaşılması, yalnızca terörizm, medya ve kamuoyu arasındaki karmaşık ilişkilerin dikkatli bir şekilde değerlendirilmesinden kaynaklanabilir. Böylece bu çalışma, medya profesyonellerinin terör haberciliğine ilişkin tutumunu teşhis etmeyi, analiz etmeyi ve gazetecilik mesleğini yöneten çeşitli etik ve deontolojik kurallar ışığında değerlendirmeyi amaçlamaktadır. Sonuç olarak araştırmalar, Burkina Faso ve Mali'deki ana dijital medyanın mülakatlara, anket veri analizlerine ve içerik analizlerine dayalı örnekler üzerinden yürütülmektedir. Bu nedenle, mevcut çalışma esasen niteldir ancak Sıralı Karma Yöntemi takip eder. “*Maliweb.net*” ve “*LeFaso.net*” sitelerinden toplam 219 haber makalesinin analizini, ankete katılan 98 kişilik bir kitleyi ve “kaynak kişiler” ile gerçekleştirilen 4 görüşmeyi kapsamaktadır. Bunu yaparken, bu araştırmanın temel amacı üç yönlüdür. İlk olarak, kriz iletişimi, medya çerçeveleme ve sosyal medya yaygınlığının ortaya çıkışı arasında bir bağ kurmayı araştırmayı amaçlamaktadır. İkinci olarak, bu çalışma, Batı Afrika medyası tarafından bilgi işlemenin gazeteciliğin profesyonel kurallarına saygı duyup duymadığını kontrol etmeye çalışmaktadır. Araştırmanın üçüncü amacı ise, Batı Afrika bağlamında dijital üretici tüketicilerin terörizmle ilgili sahte bilgilere yönelik davranışlarının anlaşılmasıyla ilgilidir.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** Batı Afrika, Çerçeveleme, LeFaso.net, Maliweb.net, Medya, terörizm.



## ABSTRACT

### CRISIS COMMUNICATION IN SUB-SAHARAN AFRICA: MEDIA COVERAGE OF TERRORIST ATTACKS IN THE AGE OF SOCIAL MEDIA

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In recent years, terrorist attacks became a serious plague in West African countries. However, there is no academic research about the framing of terrorist. In this research, I will analyse and assess the media agenda setting and crisis communication strategy implemented by media practitioners in West African countries following terrorist attacks. Thereby, this study aims to diagnose the attitude of media professionals in relation to the coverage of terrorism, analyse it and evaluate it in the light of the various ethical and deontological rules that govern the profession of journalism. As a result, the investigations are carried out on samples based on interviews, survey data analysis and contents analysis of the main digital media in Burkina Faso and Mali. Therefore, the current study is essentially qualitative but follows a Sequential Mixed Method. It encompasses an analysis of a total of 219 news articles from “*Maliweb.net*” and “*LeFaso.net*”, along with a corpus of 98 surveyed population and 4 interviews realized with “resource persons”. In doing so, the central purpose of this research is threefold. Firstly, it aims to investigate and establish a nexus between crisis communication, media framing and the advent of social media prevalence. Secondly, this study attempts to check whether the processing of information by West African media respects the professional rules of journalism. The third purpose of the research concerns the comprehension of the digital prosumers’ behaviours towards counterfeits information related to terrorism in West African context.

**Keywords:** Framing, Maliweb.net, Media, LeFaso.net, terrorism, West Africa.

## DEDICATION

To my family

Who, with love,

Sacrifice and advice,

Has worked for my success.

For all your assistance and presence in my life;

Receive, my dear parents,

The expression of my feelings and eternal gratitude.



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Noufou OUEDRAOGO

ISTANBUL, 2021

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## LIST OF ACRONYMS & ABBREVIATIONS

ACHR: African Commission on Human Rights

AMB: African Media Barometer

AQMI: Al-Qaïda au Maghreb Islamique [English: Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb]

CNEAME: Comité National de l'Egal Accès aux Médias d'Etat du Mali [English: National Committee for Equal Access to State Media in Mali]

CSC: Conseil supérieure de la communication [English: Superior Council of Communication] ECA: United Nations Economic Commission for Africa

EEC: European Economic Community

FAMA: Forces Armées Nationale [English: National Armed Forces]

FDS: Forces de défenses et de sécurités [Security and Defence Forces]

ECOWAS: Economic Community of West African States

GIA: Group Islamic Armé [English: Islamic Armed Group]

HAC: Haute Autorité de la Communication [English: High Authority of Communication]

IBK: Ibrahim Boubacar Keita [Name of Mali former president]

MFWA: Media Foundation for West Africa

MNLA: Mouvement National pour la libération de l'Azawad [English: National Movement for the Liberation of Azawad]

MPP: Mouvement pour le Peuple et le Progrès [English: Movement for People and for Progress]

MUJAO: Mouvement pour l'Unité et le Jihad en Afrique de l'Ouest [English: Movement for Uniqueness and Jihad in West Africa]

ODDH: Observatory for Democracy and Human Rights

OSRFEAPI: Office of the Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Expression and Access to Public Information

RFI: Radio France Internationale [English: French International Radio station]

RTI: Radio Télévision Ivoirienne [English: Ivorian Radio and TV broadcasting]

SMCC: Social Mediated Crisis Communication

SML: Social Media Literacy

TV: Television

UDHR: Universal Declaration of Human Rights



# CHAPTER I

## INTRODUCTION

In July 1985, the British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher stated that “If Media can stop propagating news about terrorists’ actions, terrorism will end”<sup>1</sup>. However, news about terrorism floods more and more the media ecosystem. Media frame the most violent images, not only because they have a duty to inform the public regarding every major incident, but besides, the remarkably dramatic side of terrorism captivates a large audience. Hence, terrorists today exploit this dynamic and act in a way that attracts as much attention as possible. In these mechanisms of framing terrorism, or setting terrorists’ agendas, the media obviously play a central role. In the current context of the global fight against terrorism in West Africa, it seems therefore interesting to study the impact of terrorist attacks in Sub-Saharan Africa and the media coverage that follows.

In fact, habitually mass media seem to be guilt-ridden of nourishing extremism, by contributing to give a platform that allows terrorists to communicate. By generating an anxious environment full of tension, terrorists use mass media to arouse the manufacture of public opinion to discuss about their extortions. However, terrorism must not have a negative impact on press freedom and freedom of expression since these are one of the vital fundamentals of democracy. This supposes that the public has the right to get news about issues of general interest such as extremism, extortions, violence, etc. including the reactions given by local governments and worldwide news agencies.

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<sup>1</sup> British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher addressed the American Bar Association on July, 15, 1985; and stated substantially that “*We must try to find ways to starve the terrorist and the hijacker of the oxygen of publicity on which they depend*”. For more details, see Thatcher, M. (1985); Quoted by Lopez, F., (2016). Perspectives on terrorism. Available online at the following link: <http://www.terrorismanalysts.com/pt/index.php/pot/article/view/490/html> - Vol 10 No 1. The British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher addressed the American Bar Association on July, 15, 1985; and stated substantially that “*We must try to find ways to starve the terrorist and the hijacker of the oxygen of publicity on which they depend*”.

The adequate comprehension of terrorism could result from a cautious reflexion on the multifaceted nexus that exists between extremism, mass media and public-opinion. Contextually speaking, one of the crucial features is undoubtedly the nature of mass media in sub-Saharan Africa, their interdependence to political issues and the fragmented audiences. Thereto, it is indispensable to mention that, as a common rule, the more political personalities are overwhelmed in tackling terrorism, the more mass media will be involved in setting agenda around terrorist acts. Consequently, a handful of eminent authors such as Marshall McLuhan (1962) suggest a “complete censorship” of news on extremism, through the strategical use of “black out” principle. However, this strategical censorship appears to be discordant because of the global nature of terrorism; and correspondingly, it is also inadequate seen from a democratic perspective.

The most brutal and mediatized terrorist attack in modern history is the destruction on September 11, 2001, of the twin towers of New York's World Trade Center by hijacked civilian planes. This gave a new dimension and redefined the impact of media and crisis communication in society. Likewise, the brutal beheading of Iraqi hostage Nick Berg has been seen, via the Internet, around the world in 2004. Yet, terrorism is not a new phenomenon, but its permanent presence in both traditional media and social networks, its intrusion into everyday life and its now global reach underline more than ever the need to rethink the role of the media in a particular context of crisis.

Modern democracy, however, is to a large extent characterized by freedom of expression and the ability of media to access relevant political and societal information in contexts of crisis or not. Once terrorism-related information is blocked by governments or other similar institutions, terrorists may have achieved one of their goals, which is to undermine the values of today's democracy. Thus, the democratic institutions, like media, are faced with a serious dilemma between, on the one hand, the instrumentalization of media by terrorists to gain maximum attention and, on the other hand, censoring information in defiance of press freedom and freedom of expression and opinion, which is a principle and a fundamental value.

As part of this work, I propose to analyse and assess the media agenda setting and crisis communication strategy implemented by new media practitioners in Mali and

Burkina Faso following the terrorist attacks in these two West African countries. As a matter of fact, we are attempted to wonder how, in a situation of terrorist attack or conflict, is public communication organized and carried out in Sub-Saharan Africa. What constraints or difficulties does it face in this new digitalized public sphere? How do social media influence the flow of public information in times of conflict or terrorist attack? What interactions do communicators from public institutions have with journalists and what are the difficulties that arise in these relationships?

In doing so, this study aims to diagnose the attitude of media professionals in relation to the coverage of the issue of terrorism, analyse it and compare it to the various rules that govern the profession of journalism. Hence, this research work pursues four distinct parts. The first part focuses on the general framework of the research with the theoretical and conceptual aspect, the problematic, and the research questions; as well as the context of the study which deals with the framing of terrorism in West African Sahel; particularly in Mali and Burkina Faso. The second part deals with the literature review by depicting similar works focusing on media and terrorism. The third part of the study is all about the research methodology and the last part will present the results of the investigations carried out on samples based on interviews, survey data, and contents analysis of the main digital media in the two respective countries.

## **CHAPTER II**

### **THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

This chapter of the study establishes a nexus between media and terrorism, and then sets the global context of the research and its problematic; and eventually, discusses the theories, notions and ambiguous concepts in line with the research topic.

#### **2.1 The nexus between Media and terrorism**

The role of media in battlefields (warzones, terrorism or any kind of conflictual situation) is not a new phenomenon. The American academic and political scientist, Brigitte Nacos (2005), set a difference between criminal violence and its media coverage on the one hand; and the media framing of terrorism on the other hand:

Most criminals who commit violent acts do not do so for propaganda purposes to promote a political cause. By contrast, those who engage in political violence see in their actions a means of gaining media attention and an echo of their struggle, their demands and their political goals (Nacos, 2005)<sup>2</sup>.

Therefore, terrorism constitutes, in fact, an action of communication. The most important thing for the victimizers is rather the publicity about their extortions than the victims and other damages. As the sociologist Raymond Aron (1956) put it, “the terrorists do not want many people to die; they want many people to know about what they did”. Hence, today's terrorists are looking forwards to making the news in order create more audience. The media offer them enough space for advertising by devoting news columns, reports, radio debates and TV interviews about the issue.

In a nutshell, terrorists use media to get a bigger and bigger audience. That is why the US diplomat Richard Holbrooke (2001) stated after the September 11 attack that the world's biggest terrorist “Osama bin Laden appears to many as a great communicator capable of using against the West the instrument on which he relied to seduce the rest of the world: the screens”. Otherwise, wondered Holbrooke (2001),

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<sup>2</sup> Brigitte Lebens NACOS (2005). Media and terrorism: The central role of media in terrorism and counter-terrorism, Ed. Nouveaux Horizons, ARS, Paris, P13.

“how could a guy living in a cave win the informational power<sup>3</sup> against the world's first information society?” This shows how much crucial role the media play in terms of proliferation of news related to terrorism. Talking about informational power, Hillary Clinton addressed the American Foreign Policy Priorities Committee in March 2011 with the following terms: “the United States of America is in an information war and we are losing that war (...) Aljazeera is winning the war” (Savigny, 2000: PP.7).

However, the French war reporter Adrien Jaulmes (2014) set a different understanding of the relationship that exists between media and war/terrorism:

This relationship is a dangerous but exotic sport that changes its nature with the World War I (1914-1918). Journalists are not only mobilized to support the war effort but also to portray the enemy. Therefore, the credibility of the press becomes doubtful because reporters choose their side. Their works are no longer objective<sup>4</sup>.

Similarly, the English Critic George Orwell (1949) argued that in a conflictual situation such as war or terrorism, “a journalist must work with his heart as much as with his mind”<sup>5</sup>. In addition to that, investigating and reporting news in very restrictive and dangerous conditions is not everyone’s cup of tea. Such journalistic practice involves a combination of several factors such as logistical issues, easy access to battlefields, controversies over the truth, the distinction between facts and opinions and especially how to tell the story impartially and objectively.

Another dimension of the nexus between media and terrorism is the amplification of the terrorists' messages. According to the American Scholar, Charles W. Kegley Jr (1999), “all terrorism is international”. Thus, the international dimension of terrorism is made possible by the media (TV, radio, digital media, and social media platforms today). An insignificant fact in a very distant land is put in the spotlight by the media, picked up by as many media as possible. As an illustration, the very scenes of terrorist attacks turn out to be ‘the heart of the mediated messages’; and accordingly,

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<sup>3</sup> In 1959 the psychologists John Robert French and Bertram Raven distinguished five different bases of powers: Legitimate Power, Reward Power, Coercive Power, Expert Power and Referent Power. Then six years later, in 1965, Bertram Raven added Informational Power that he considered as very influential in every domain.

<sup>4</sup> See Patrick Cockburn (2014): *Le retour des djihadistes. Aux racines de l'État islamique - Éditions des Équateurs*. Preface and Translator Adrien Jaulmes.

<sup>5</sup> See 1984 by George Orwell (1949). “War is Peace” Ch. 17, p. 112.

the terrorist discourse is expressed through the images of the dead and wounded people rather than investigating the real sources of the problem. In doing so, traditional media news workers (newspapers, radio and TV journalists), YouTubers, bloggers, and even web activists are rushing to be the first to disseminate terrorists' messages through their various platforms.

More interestingly, information on terrorist attacks is most often taken in its raw form and is disseminated without any verification; and often no possibility of fact-checking. The imperative mission is to be the first to relay information to the 'global village' (McLuhan, 1962). That is how the world has become in the current era of social media proliferation. Media are therefore trapped; because they are used by terrorists to achieve their objectives. In this regard, the academic Brigitte NACOS (2005) put it this way:

When terrorists strike, they are sure to attract the attention of media professionals, and consequently, the attention of the audience and finally the government of the targeted country. In addition, given the globalization and the internationalization of modern communication systems, the perpetrators of terrorist acts are echoed in the digital media and social media platforms; and as a result, they benefit from the attention of a huge number of populations and governments outside the countries directly targeted (Nacos, 2005).

However, before deepening the discussions about crisis communication and Media Coverage of Terrorist Attacks in Sub-Saharan Africa, it is appropriate to have a glimpse at the West African media ecosystem.

## **1.2 West African media landscape**

Press freedom, access to information and the plurality of media ecosystem are advancing at several speeds in West Africa. According to the 2020 World Press Freedom Index<sup>6</sup>, the quality of press freedom has significantly increased particularly in three West African countries: Cabo Verde, Ghana and Burkina Faso. These three countries have achieved similar or better results than many other African countries. They have moved up in the standings and benefit from a multiplicity of media landscape. Elsewhere in West Africa, a new era for freedom of expression finally came to Gambia a year after the departure of President Yahya Jammeh that put an

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<sup>6</sup> Reporters Without Borders (RSF, 2020). Data of Press Freedom Index. In 2020, Cabo Verde was ranked 25 out of 180 by Press Freedom Index with a GLOBAL SCORE of (+0.34); Ghana was ranked 30<sup>th</sup> out of 180 with a GLOBAL SCORE (+1.45) and Burkina Faso 38<sup>th</sup> out of 180 with (-1.06) as global score. Online Access: [https://rsf.org/en/ranking\\_table](https://rsf.org/en/ranking_table).

end to 22 years of authoritarian regime. Journalists are no longer executed; new private media channels and new digital media have sprung up, and the government is working on legal reform to ensure freedom of expression and access to information (Bationo, 2019). At the bottom of the rankings, Mali, Nigeria and Chad still face difficulties related to the safety of journalists and censorship.

More generally, the media explosion of the late 1980s and the movement for democratic reforms in Africa transformed significantly the West African media landscape (Breton, 1996). It ended the monopoly of governments, paving the way for media pluralism. Overnight independent media exploded and newspapers appeared on the streets of African capital cities, breaking de facto the long silence. It is appropriate to remind that at the dawn of African independences, most newspapers were owned by private (often European imperialist) capital or, sometimes, linked to national political movements (Helmores, 1995). Hence, in the 1970s, the majority of newsworthy media (print newspapers, Radio stations, and Television channels) were owned by governments. Any newspaper expressing independent editorial positions was subjected to censorship or prohibition, and media professionals were occasionally persecuted. In a few countries (Gambia, Liberia and Niger for instance), the first daily newspapers appeared during the period of liberalization and the media explosion (Agnes, 2008). For instance, in Liberia, the Liberian journalist Kenneth Best created the first daily newspaper in 1981 and the first Gambian daily newspaper appeared in 1992. This marked the beginning of media explosion in the continent.

Henceforward, in the 1990s, independent media exploded. In 2006, according to a study conducted by the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (ECA), West African countries had more than 5,000 professional media including newspapers, radio stations and television channels. Today, this number has been quintupled, given the advent of digital media. More interestingly, the rise of private and independent radio stations as well as Web radios has threatened to eclipse public sector radio stations (Mucchielli, 2006). Across the continent, due to the Internet, the advent of online media and mobile journalism are adding a new wind to conventional media. This diversified the sources of information both for media consumers and producers. Today, more than 20 years after this media explosion in the continent, Eritrea is the only country in sub-Saharan Africa where the government continues to

exercise complete control over the media (Freedom House, 2017)<sup>7</sup>. Yet, the internationalization of media entailed whirlwind reforms in West African media landscape.

### **2.2.1 Media whirlwind reforms in West Africa**

With the wind of democratization which blew on the African continent in the 1990s, the rulers undertook the restructuring of the public media sector to adapt them to the changing political and socioeconomic context, as well as to the emergence of private competition (Ossama, 2001). These reforms included the revision of media management methods, the dismissal of part of the staff, a change in the media statutes and the efforts to renew the editorial lines. The aim of this triple economic, editorial and legal transformation was to transform governmental media into “public service media”. The aim was to promote media outlets whose contents met the needs and interests of all categories and groups of people in the society; including absolutely political perspectives. As a matter of fact, in December 2004, the Ivorian public Radio station and Television channel (RTI) changed from the status of “public limited company” to a “state company”<sup>8</sup>. This change obviously affected the editorial line.

In Burkina Faso, the very first public daily newspaper in the country’s political history was created in April 1984. The daily ‘*Sidwaya*’ which means in the local language Mooré ‘*the truth has come*’<sup>9</sup> had for principal mission: information, propaganda, agitation and the permanent mobilization of the citizens for the development and consolidation of governmental actions. In 1999, the government decided to transform the general management of ‘*Sidwaya*’ into a ‘Public Establishment’. In this regard, the former general director, Ibrahim SAKANDE, claims that:

It is undoubtedly the gigantic result of men and women who believed in what they did, and who still believe in what they do: to inform, to raise awareness, and contribute to

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<sup>7</sup> Freedom House (2017); Press Freedom's Dark Horizon. Available Online at: <https://freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-press/2017/press-freedoms-dark-horizon>.

<sup>8</sup> Governmental Decree n° 2004-678 of December 24, 2004, relating to the transformation of RTI.

<sup>9</sup> Excerpted from an interview with Rabanki-Boubakr Zida, General Director of “*Les Editions Sidwaya*” in July, 2019.



nation building through laborious participation in the emergence of a democratic culture in the service of development<sup>10</sup>.

Despite the particular circumstances of these new reforms in the global West African context, public newspapers, radio stations and television channels are symptomatic of the trampling of the public media reforms and indicative of the persistent political struggles to control information. The preponderance of executive power in the public media in West Africa is also perceptible through the hierarchization of information which, most often, begins with official activities of the presidency, institutional news, press releases, or governmental communications. For instance, the Burkinabe national television devotes most often the first 15 minutes of the breaking news to the presidential agenda (Balima, 2005). Beyond this constant subservience by political and institutional powers in the field of information, the public media, deprived of adequate means, struggle to satisfy the audience with a fictional program that allows citizens to rediscover images of their society.

Also, television in West African context remains characterized by hegemony of imported programmes, especially from Europe and the United States of America. This can be illustrated via the huge consumption of European, American or Brazilian TV series. This politicization of media ecosystem in West Africa leads me to question the issues of journalists' security, as well as media surveillance and repression.

### **2.2.2 Media security, full surveillance and repression in West Africa**

The emergence of private media groups in West Africa has generally met with violent repressions. When media professionals dared to question or reveal the criminal activities or the corruption issues of certain members of high-ranking circles, they were terribly threatened, severely punished, jailed or even murdered (Freedom House, 2017). The assassinations of distinguished journalists in West Africa such as Norbert Zongo (1998) in Burkina Faso, Deyda Heydara (2004) in Gambia, Ghislaine Dupont and Claude Verlon (2013) in Mali, etc. (just to name few) illustrate realistically the severity of repression in West Africa. In 1998 for instance, the report of an independent commission on the 'Zongo assassination affair' concluded that:

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<sup>10</sup> Excerpted from an interview with Ibrahim SAKANDE, former General Director of *Sidwaya*, in September, 2015.

Norbert Zongo was assassinated for strictly political reasons, because he practiced committed investigative journalism. He defended a democratic ideal and participated, within the framework of his independent newspaper, in the fight for the respect of human rights and justice against bad governance in public affairs and against impunity.

Some international media associations such as the New York-based Committee to Protect Journalists estimated that around 200 journalists have been killed in Africa over the past 20 years. Most of them have been victims of wars. In addition, repressive laws have severely hampered the rights of journalists in the African continent. Except South Africa where the post-apartheid transition has been accompanied by a complete overhaul of media law, the media pluralism in Africa has prompted only very minor legal and political reforms. A study estimated in 2005 that the legislative and political straitjacket imposed on the media in most countries of the continent was so restrictive that “the need for a critical examination and major transformations of the legislative and political framework in which the media operate the continent cannot be overstated” (Ogola, 2015)<sup>11</sup>. In consequence, violent attacks and restrictive laws slowed media growth and reduced its effectiveness. Meanwhile, the professional shortcomings and the financial precariousness of the press contributed to diminish its scope.

By contrast, the African Union and regional bodies like the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), as well as the 11 members of the Regional Conference on the Great Lakes have all adopted protocols and declarations in favour of press freedom and freedom of opinion. And while most governments in member countries still do not respect these protocols, civil society groups are mobilizing organizations such as the Office of the Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Expression and Access to Public Information (OSRFEAPI), and the African Commission on Human Rights (ACHR) are still struggling to promote awareness of media rights. Other associations, such as the Media Foundation for West Africa (MFWA), denounce violations of journalists’ rights to the new ECOWAS Regional Court of Community Justice (Freedom House, 2017).

More than any other factor, economic considerations threaten the survival of media pluralism in West Africa. With the exception of independent media groups such as

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<sup>11</sup> Ogola George (2015); African journalism: A journey of failures and triumphs. *African Journalism Studies*, 36:1, 93-102. Available Online at: <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/23743670.2015.1008175>.

‘Notre Voie’ and ‘Soir Info’ in Ivory Coast, ‘L’Observateur Paalga’ and ‘Le pays’ in Burkina Faso, ‘Info-Matin’ and ‘Le Républicain’ in Mali, the ‘Multimedia Group’ in Ghana, most private independent news organizations are small and fragile enterprises, often threatened with downsizing and even bankruptcy. With the growing economic dependence of private media groups, their independence is increasingly threatened. Hence, dominant companies and corrupted bosses are trying to impose their hegemony on the private media organizations. Hitherto, the advent of new media and Citizen Journalism began to play a starring role in West African media landscape.

### **2.2.3 New media and Citizen Journalism in West African media ecosystem**

Despite the extraordinary proliferation of media companies in Africa, Professor Guy Berger of the Rhodes University School of Journalism and Media Studies in South Africa estimated in 2007 that “Africans were the least well served populations in terms of dissemination of information”<sup>12</sup>. For him, African states have few journalists per capita if we compare the continent to other regions of the world. With one journalist per 1,300 inhabitants, South Africa is at the top of the ranking. In Ghana, there is one journalist for every 11,000 people, and one for every 18,000 people in Cameroon. Zimbabwe, with one journalist for 34,000, is ahead of Ethiopia which has one journalist for 99,000 people. Over the decades, the shortage worsens.

However, new media and, more broadly, digital journalism have contributed to a “radical personalisation of news-gathering” (Goggin, 2006, p. 147). As a potential newsgathering device, mobile phones contributed considerably to a wide dissemination of information through the populace in West African context specifically. Today, it is almost incredible to see even an adolescent without a smartphone or iPad. Thus, these tools are obviously the best devices for manifold utilizations such as following the news and sharing digital contents on social media platforms (Ouedraogo, 2020). In recent technological researchers, psychologists have considered the excessive use of mobile phones as an addictive pathology. Called nomophobia, it is a kind of addiction which makes it difficult for digital

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<sup>12</sup> Guy Berger (2007). *Theorizing the Media: Democracy Relationship in Southern Africa*. Available online at : <https://doi.org/10.1177/17480485020640010201>.

natives to get rid of their mobile devices (Giovanni; Bragazzi, 2014: PP 155-160)<sup>13</sup>. Thus, the use of new media devices such as smartphones and iPads by new generation of digital contents prosumers has revealed “how ubiquitous these new technological devices have become”<sup>14</sup>. This means that digital media and social networks turn out to be essential means for the dissemination of information today. The French academic BALLE Francis (1998) appreciates it with the following terms:

The success (...) was immediate and, with it [the mobile phone] throughout the decades of its expansion, many improvements appeared: the rationalization of the design of communication and networks empowerment. And finally technological changes related to the introduction of electronics profoundly change the sector of telephony and news<sup>15</sup>.

Therefore, digital Journalism reveals to be one of the surest methods of popularizing information in West African context; a guarantee of anchoring democracy in the public sphere. As Manuel Castells (2010) put it, “mobile telephony has moved from being the technology for a privileged few, to be essentially a mainstream technology”.

West African countries are on the move and seek to take their place in the technological, political and social revolution represented by the emergence of new media in this digital age; despite the difficulties and the cost of access to the Internet connexion, and despite the political reluctance of repressive authorities who take a dim view on independent news companies. In his academic book entitled ‘*We, The Media*’<sup>16</sup>, Dan Gillmor (2004) describes how, in the context of an industrialized country like the United States, technology enabled participatory and democratized media, a ‘trustworthy information ecosystem’.

In the West African context, press freedom and democratization remain a utopia in several countries. Talking about the issue of citizen journalism, Guy Berger (2019) claimed that “we want our journalists to become citizens, and not only, but also our

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<sup>13</sup> Bragazzi, NL, Giovanni, DP (2014): A proposal for including nomophobia in the new DSM-V. Psychol Res Behav Manage.

<sup>14</sup> Davie N, Hilber T.; Nomophobia: is smartphone addiction a genuine risk for mobile learning? Presentation at: 13th International Conference Mobile Learning. South Westphalia University of Applied Sciences, 2017. <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED579211.pdf>

<sup>15</sup> BALLE Francis (1998). *Medias & Society*; 15th Edition. Lextenso; PP.122.

<sup>16</sup> Dan Gillmor (2004). *We, the Media: Grassroots Journalism by the People, for the People*. Available Online at : [http://library.uniteddiversity.coop/Media\\_and\\_Free\\_Culture/We\\_the\\_Media.pdf](http://library.uniteddiversity.coop/Media_and_Free_Culture/We_the_Media.pdf)

citizens to become journalists as it is generally understood.”<sup>17</sup> The message from Guy Berger (2019), master of ceremonies of Highway Africa<sup>18</sup>, was clear:

Too many African countries treat their people as subjects, not as citizens. Too many African countries are still subject to dictatorships. Too many African countries are still living in the dark age of official reporting. Africans, like others, have a right to media that support and enable the affirmation of citizenship, which allows them to be both journalists and citizens. Journalists are citizens; they are two sides of the same coin (Berger, 2019).

Despite the difficult conditions, West Africa is indeed on the eve of an explosion of new media, the premises of which can be perceived everywhere, with the appearance of bloggers; such as Théophile Kouamouo, a blogger in Ivory Coast and Bassératou Kindo, a feminist blogger in Burkina Faso. As everywhere else, the advent of the Internet and social media platforms have shaken up the West African media landscape and the independent media news companies. However, the digital media has grown slowly, in a regional context where, in June 2019, just 6.2% of the population had access to the Internet connexion (J. Clement, 2020)<sup>19</sup>. The computer park remains limited and the electrical network is often non-existent or deficient. Hence, the new forms of citizen journalism implemented in Ivory Coast and in Burkina Faso respectively in 2013 and 2014 have become ineluctable means of democratization of information in this era of digital media predominance.

### **2.3 Problematic and research questions**

Communication plays a major role in a context of crisis; and more specifically, in the fight against terrorism. In such a context, the struggle is not only military, it is also and above all communicational. Unfortunately, crisis communication in Sub-Saharan Africa is still desperately seeking to be well-organized. Governments are putting themselves in a posture of routine communication vis-à-vis terrorist attacks. Talking about communication and terrorism, this statement from Anthony Jay Robbins

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<sup>17</sup> Guy Berger is the head of the faculty of journalism at Rhodes University and "guru" of Highway Africa.

<sup>18</sup> Highway Africa is a multiyear collaborative research and teaching project that explores the past, present, and future of the trans-African highway system.

<sup>19</sup> J. Clement (September, 2020). *Statista - Africa: number of internet users in selected countries 2019*. Online accessibility: <https://www.statista.com/statistics/505883/number-of-internet-users-in-african-countries/>

(1994) illustrates this point so well: “If you do what you have always done, you will get what you have always got.”<sup>20</sup>

Any communication about terrorism is de facto crisis communication. Terrorist attacks are increasing everywhere in the world. Hostage-takings follow one another in the Sub-Saharan strip. Nigeria for example is always facing local terrorism that challenges the established socio-economic order and deadly interfaith crises. In view of these demonstrations by the terrorist groups of AL-QAEDA<sup>21</sup> and its allies in Africa, it is normal to worry about a plausible worsening of the situation. In Sub-Saharan Africa, since 2013, there have been a fairly significant number of attacks, kidnappings, terrorist intimidations and threats. In fact, it is possible to say that a terrorist act is in fine an act of communication because for the terrorists, it is the message that matters, not the victim.

More importantly, we are living in a digital era characterized by digital news and social media platforms. There is no way-out but to sleep and wake up with the information emanating from smartphones, iPads, computers, and televisions. Thus, using these digital media tools or, at most, navigating through social media platforms has become a habit, a daily routine, a new discipline, and even an instinct for “digital prosumers” (Ritzer & Jurgenson, 2009)<sup>22</sup>. There is nothing relevant (in terms of information) but images and videos devoid of depth, originality and coherence. Human mind, like a black box, wittingly or unwittingly, consciously or unconsciously is perpetually consuming these images, these digital counterfeit contents, this social mediated information.

This state of fact is due to the unprecedented progress of the communication and information technologies. In this twenty-first century, everything is essentially based on the utilization of these new technologies by new generation of digital natives. That is to say: without these new technologies nothing can be relevantly possible for

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<sup>20</sup> Excerpted from - Tony Robbins (1994) - Giant Steps: Small Changes to Make a Big Difference. Presso Punti di Ritiro.

<sup>21</sup> Founded in 1988, *Al-Qaeda* (the base in Arabic) is a network of Islamic fundamentalist groups associated with the September, 11, 2001, terrorist attacks on the World Trade Center in the USA. The main ideology of Al-Qaeda is to eradicate all foreign influences, especially Western domination, in Muslim countries.

<sup>22</sup>See George Ritzer and Nathan Jurgenson (2009). The Age of Digital ‘Prosumer’. Online Access: <https://doi.org/10.1177/1469540509354673>

the new generation of active “digital prosumers”. These new technologies along with the explosion of digital platforms have generated new ways of spreading information, openhanded citizens’ unprecedented freedom of expression. A freedom of expression that is in accordance with the Charter of Munich (1971) which endorses the right to press freedom, freedom of opinion and to public information.

Actually, freedom of expression is one of the fundamental principles of democracy (UDHR, 1948). This freedom is supremely underlined by the freedom granted to the media ecosystem, including traditional media, digital media, and social media networks. Press freedom has been consolidated by the multiplicity of new media platforms; and particularly with the advent of digitalization process which gave birth to social media: Facebook, Instagram, WhatsApp, YouTube, Telegram, Tweeter, TikTok, etc. Thus, traditional media’s reputation tends to be reduced in this context of social media predominance, which reduces both the cost and the time of media news accessibility. Even though the use of seductive traditional media such as radio and TV has been prioritized for long time, today social networks enable an extraordinary democratization of information; giving to the term ‘democracy’ all its acclaim. Nowadays, it is not exaggerating to claim that social media platforms constitute the best privileged means of communication for billions of users everywhere in the world. In this regard, it is indispensable for new generations of media professionals, journalists, communicators and media practitioners in general, to revolutionize the sector with new innovations in order to keep building a specific audience identity, and also to keep adapting the products (if we consider information as a commodity) to the new behaviours of media news prosumers.

Furthermore, the appearance of social networks in the field of informational diffusion within two decades has offered new possibilities and advantages. One of these innovative possibilities is the instantaneity in terms of informational dissemination through digital media platforms such as WhatsApp groups, YouTube channels, TikTok, Twitter, Facebook pages, etc. Nonetheless, this new method of propagation of information adopted by media professionals raises crucial questions in West Africa: Is that a real democratization of information for the benefit of the digital contents prosumers? How to cover terrorist attacks in Sub-Saharan Africa while respecting the ethical and deontological rules of journalism? In a context of crisis communication like the media coverage of terrorism, what motivates

traditional media professionals to resort to social media? What are the favourable and unfavourable factors for better crisis communication about terrorism in West African context? In other words, do media workers have the necessary hindsight to inform the populations about terrorist attacks without condoning terrorism? These different questions will certainly constitute the principle framework of my study and will necessarily find answers at the end of this research.

## **2.4 Research purposes**

Regarding what I have mentioned in the introductory part, the main purposes of this research tend to analyse, amongst others, the positioning of the West African media in the coverage of terrorist attacks taking place in Sub-Saharan Africa. Hence, the main purposes of this study aim to:

- Investigate and establish a nexus between crisis communication, media framing and the advent of social media prevalence in West Africa;
- Check whether the processing of information respects the ethical and professional rules of journalists;
- Identify the relations between media and terrorism in Sub-Saharan Africa;
- Comprehend the digital prosumers' behaviours towards counterfeit information related to terrorism in West Africa.

## **2.5 Scientific interest of the research**

I have decided to work on this topic because terrorism is a new phenomenon in West Africa, especially in Mali and Burkina Faso, with its strong repercussions on the lives of populations. The interest of this study also lies in the fact that traditional media do not yet have a deep understanding of the issue related to the coverage of these kinds of crises. In fact, the difficulties in processing information during certain terrorist attacks in West Africa reveal the challenges of framing such news. Academically, this study concerns a new phenomenon which influences the behaviour of media professionals and the ways of the media framing as well as the West African media agenda setting. This situation motivated me to undertake academic research on this topic.

The crisis communication implemented by West African governments and the media's handling of information in the context of terrorism are often singled out. It is



common to observe that following a terrorist attack, two types of communication prevail: (a) governmental communication which should reassure the populations and attest to the control of the situation and (b) communication experts (or pseudo-experts) interviewed by the media professionals to make their comments and analysis of the situation. However, according to the scholar Ben-Ammar (2018), this is not an effective way of communicating about terrorism. He articulates it as the following:

The legitimacy and credibility of “official speech” closely depend on the degree of awareness of this reality as well as the responsiveness of the government through effective and well-planned communication. Communication should be thought of as an integral part of any mechanism for combating terrorism (Ammar, 2018).

Academically speaking, this is a relatively young and brand new field of study that is conducted in Sub-Saharan Africa, especially in French speaking countries, as the first cases of terrorist attacks only date back to 2013 in Mali, 2015 in Burkina Faso, and 2016 in Ivory Coast (Côte d’Ivoire). Even at the international level, it was in the aftermath of the attacks of September 11, 2001 that scholars, researchers and academics began to take an interest in the peculiarities of a crisis described as a terrorist act and the challenges that this kind of crisis poses in terms of communication. It is therefore a rather particular work which will be of modest contribution to research in Media, Information and Communication studies in West Africa and beyond.

## **2.6 Research limitations and difficulties**

Difficulties are inherent in all scientific researches. The major difficulties that I faced throughout the current study have been essentially related to the availability of research materials. Firstly, for the literature review, general hardcover books on terrorism are not available in our libraries nearby. In addition, those available online are quite expensive given the fact that I do not have enough financial research fund to afford them. I, therefore, worked mostly with scientific articles and free access e-books available on e-libraries for free downloads and also with a very limited quantity of hardback documents.

Another remarkable difficulty is that I kept updating information based on the last evolutions of terrorism in West Africa as well as the agenda setting of West African media groups. In fact, the concept of crisis communication is evolving over times

and it is necessary to take every single development into account in my investigations.

Another limitation is related to the availability of some media managers, sociologists and experts in terrorism for online interviews. Hence, I ended up by conducting phone calls and email interviews with some of them, given the fact that I have a limited time to conduct this research. All these difficulties, far from demotivating me, have further galvanized me to continue investigating more for my research. Finally, the last thing, and not the least, is the fact that I have faced some technical problems with my computers; and this did not make things easy for me during my investigation.

## **2.7 Conceptual definitions**

A concept is not only a help to perceive, but a way of conceiving. It organizes facts by retaining the distinctive, significant characters of the phenomena (Grawitch, 2003). In doing so, it forms a first sorting out amid the flood of notions that assail the researcher. Hence, for a better understanding of this research topic, it is necessary to define the key concepts in the following chapters.

### **2.7.1 Crisis communication**

According to the communication specialist Thierry Libaert (2018), it was at the beginning of the 1980s that professionals started using the notion of crisis communication in scientific researches. The professionalization of communication expertise, the internationalization of media communication, the perception of reputational risks in corporate communication, etc. all of these facts bring about an evolution in crisis management; and accordingly, communication is recognized as a major part of the success of crisis management. Yet, according to the researcher Jean-Pierre Piotet (2008), crisis communication is first and foremost “common-sense communication” in a context of strong emotionality. It is a transparent communication or at least a “negotiated transparency”, since the dissemination of certain information may be deliberately hidden by external forces and influences.

Concretely, a crisis corresponds to the final phase of a series of dysfunctions that threatens the reputation and stability of an organization (Libaert, 2018). It is characterized by the intrusion of new stakeholders who demand accountability.

Etymologically labelled as an irrational terminology; the word ‘crisis’ is theoretically defined as a disruption in the usual functioning of a society, a state, or an organization. This situation incontestably generates an entire informational misunderstanding in the public opinion, bringing about a horizontal propagation of fake news (Ouedraogo, 2020). Thus, such circumstances entail that the principal authorities, the ruling classes for example, clarify the issue by addressing promptly trustworthy news to the audience. A handful of well-developed communicational reflexes can help managing and preventing certain risks specific to every kind of crisis. In these types of circumstances, accurate information and good communication can turn out to be indispensable means for finding solutions to the various crises.

Most often, a crisis can result in generating uncertainty and enabling de facto the circulation of rumours in society. Consequently, a crisis can be labelled as a factor of destabilization because it shakes up the normal order in a state or an organization; jeopardizing its national and international reputation and creating a need for accurate and trustworthy information. As a matter of fact, in a context of crisis, experts in communication and media practitioners must implement adequate communicational and informational approaches in order to manage efficiently every type of issue. This will obviously help creating awareness in the public sphere by informing accurately and fairly the targeted audience.

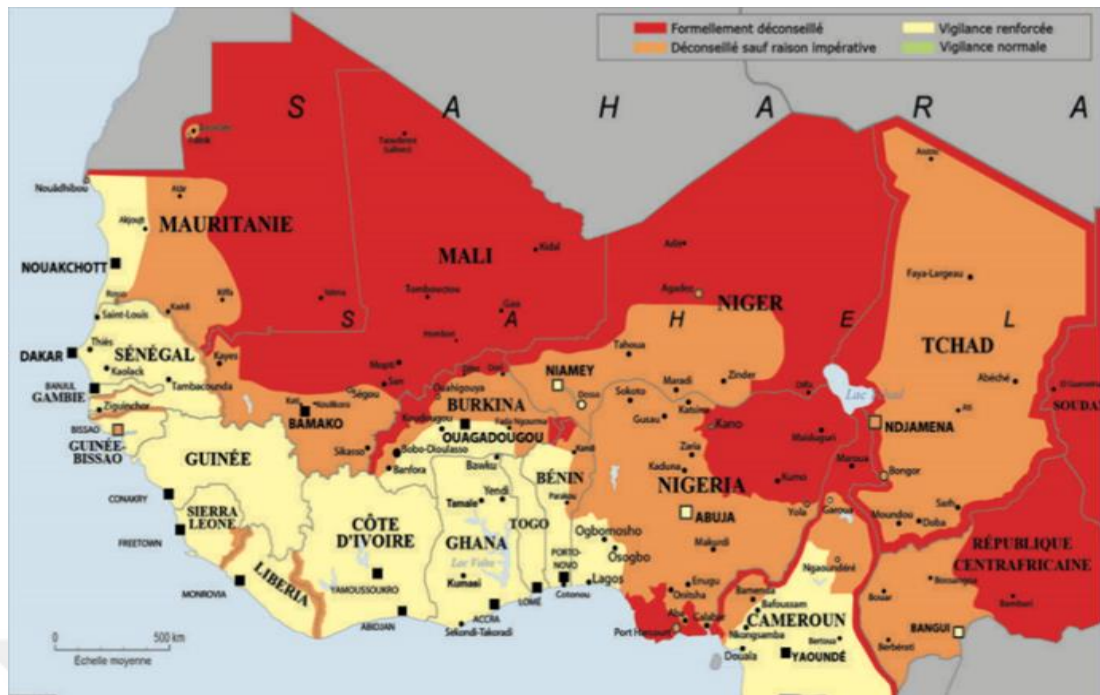
Put it differently, the central purpose of crisis communication is to help adjusting the disrupted situation and make it recognized by the concerned public. This goes without saying that good communication will necessarily help deciphering the intentions of protagonists and antagonists involved in the crisis. It is all about evaluating, acting and anticipating the impact of crisis communication by informing the targeted public with trustworthy messages at the right moment. As a consequent, the current research will examine different facades of informational and communicational approaches undertaken in West Africa; not only to prevent propaganda in a context of crisis characterized by terrorist attacks, but also and overall to avoid the misapprehensions related to their managements.

### 2.7.2 Terrorist attack

Terrorism is in essence a situation of crisis created by an organization or an individual to generate a climate of insecurity, to blackmail a government, a company, a country, or a system. From the Latin verb '*terrere*' which means 'to frighten'; the word terrorism corresponds to a "great fear". It can be a result of the systematic use of terror as a policy by a group or an individual to nurture the fear into the population. Consequently, a terrorist is a person or a group who uses terror and violence to impose their ideology (political, religious), beliefs or authority on other individuals or organizations. To paraphrase Walter Laqueur (1977), "terrorism is propaganda by action".

Within the international community, a clear definition of terrorism has been the subject of many debates. The General Secretary of the United Nations, António Guterres, indicated on July 12<sup>th</sup>, 2005, that it must be necessary to simply agree that the murder of unarmed civilians, no matter the defended cause, is by definition 'terrorism'. Some researchers prefer the following definition of terrorism: any action aimed at causing death or serious injury to civilians or non-combatants constitutes a terrorist act.

Put it this way, in Sub-Saharan Africa, terrorist attacks are generally killings, bombings, gun fires, and deprivation of liberty imposed by unidentified armed individuals (most often) on civilian populations, national armed forces and security officers (military, police, etc.), institutional officials, public and private infrastructures, symbols and emblems of the State. West Africa has experienced in recent years a proliferation of various terrorist groups, which take advantage of the fragility of states in the region to spread and terrorize populations. The Libyan and Malian crises have accentuated the emergence of several of these groups in the West African region. In the map (*figure 2.1*) below, the red colour indicates the very high risk West African zones, not recommended to foreign tourists. These zones include chiefly Mali, Mauritania, Nigeria and Niger; and partially Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Chad and Central Africa. The map below gives more visual details about the high risk zones (see *figure 2.1*).

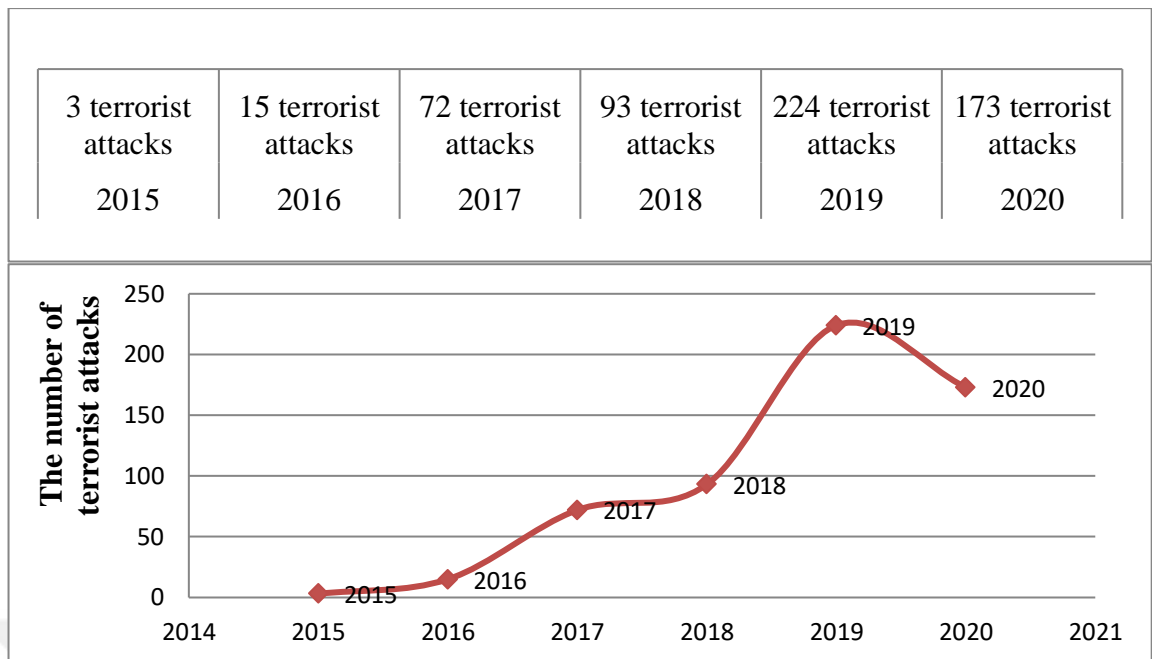


**Figure 2.1 Mapping terrorism in the Sahel**

According to some data collected from the Citizen Coalition for the Sahel, the year 2020 was the deadliest year for civilians in Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger, with more than 2,440 dead. There are 1096 attacks and 2443 civilians killed in these three Sub-Saharan countries; or 91 attacks and 203 deaths per month on average<sup>23</sup>. In Mali, 174 terrorist attacks were recorded in 2020. According to the Observatory for Democracy and Human Rights (ODDH), in Burkina Faso, “between April 2015 and May 2020, terrorist groups carried out at least 580 attacks targeting mainly the army, police stations, militias with which the state cooperates, schools, and town halls. The worst terrorist attack in Burkina Faso occurred in June 2021 with 160 dead. Many other incidents have been reported in the media and on social networks, which suggests that the total number of terrorist attacks committed during this period is likely much higher”<sup>24</sup>. The graph (figure 2.2) below gives more visual details about the increase of terrorist attacks in the Sahel.

<sup>23</sup> Excerpt from the document entitled “*Sahel: What must change*”. Online Access link: <https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/Sahel%20Ce%2Bqui%2Bdoit%2Bchanger%2B-%2BRapport%2BCoalition%2Bcitoyenne.pdf>

<sup>24</sup> ODDH produced a document in May 2020 entitled: “*Burkina Faso. Risk of a new Rwanda?*” Online access link: [https://lefaso.net/IMG/pdf/burkina\\_faso\\_risque\\_d\\_un\\_nouveau\\_rwanda.pdf](https://lefaso.net/IMG/pdf/burkina_faso_risque_d_un_nouveau_rwanda.pdf)



**Figure 2.1 The significant increase of terrorist attacks in the Sahel**

### 2.7.3 Media coverage

Media coverage can be defined as the processing of information devoted to a specific subject, event, or issue through various media platforms (newspaper, online media, TV reports, interviews, or Radio broadcasting), and its dissemination to the public (various audiences). Media coverage can help developing emotional acquaintances with the audience.

In this digital era of digital media prevalence, the concept ‘media coverage’ is used to refer to all social media feeds, blog articles, YouTube videos or any type of digital contents that frame a specific issue, brand, product, or services. Therefore, in order to fully understand the concept of media coverage, it is necessary to decipher the notion of media framing.

### 2.7.4 Media Framing

Framing has huge impacts on how the audience comprehends, understands or thinks about societal issues. Thus, media coverages have always been framed throughout different angles of treatment or perspectives; leading the audience to interpret the information according to the news construction. In fact, mediated information comprises three distinct categories: objective reality (real image), subjective reality (desired image) and constructed reality (images perceived through media) (Kaid et

al., 1991). That is why mass-media is considered as distributors of ideology (Gitlin, 1980). Basically, this means that the so-called ideologies are constructed, manufactured or disseminated mainly via framings, or specific angles of treatment (the story focus).

The concept 'framing' was initially coined by the British anthropologist Gregory Bateson in 1955 to describe how media select some aspects of apparent reality and mark them as more prominent in a specific communicative style. Framing can be highlighted as the ways of considering whether a glass is 'half full' or 'half empty'; depending on which aspect of the spectrum newsmakers decide to put forwards (Entman, 1993). Thus, framing is the way of "elevating information in salience" (ibid., pp. 53). There are two different types of framings in media coverage: episodic coverage and thematic coverage. More specifically, episodic coverage tracks a specific event in a straight line; whereas thematic coverage usually befalls later, several times after the event happened (Kimberly, 2008: pp.169-192). In this research, my analysis combines both episodic framings and thematic media framings of terrorism in Mali and Burkina Faso, along with contents analysis of two main digital media (*LeFaso.net* and *Maliweb.net*) from these two West African countries.

Furthermore, a handful of modern scholars like Valkenburg (2000), Scheufele (1999), and Gamson (1993), define media framing as a process whereby professionals of communication, intentionally or unintentionally, act to manufacture a point of view that underlines facts concerning a given situation; allowing people to interpret it in a particular manner. As a reminder, the current research emphasizes how media frames the issue of terrorism in West Africa, especially in a context of social media proliferation and the use of traditional media symbolism. Yet, framing can be considered as a form of agenda-setting, a process of communication which consists in directing the public's attention to a specific issue (Kurt, 1940). In doing so, the framing concept in this study is related to the indexing theory (Hallin & Mancini, 1986; Naim & Bennett, 1990).

Contextually, this research aims at investigating how the use of media symbolism and social media platforms affected the apprehension of terrorism news framing in Mali and Burkina Faso. In this context, a symbol can be well-defined as distinctive sign, an explicit mark, or a specific word that labels or designates a constructed idea.

Thus, symbols impulse media audience to understand an issue in a particular way by going beyond the mere known facts and making their own interpretations. In 1974, the American sociologist Erving Goffman deeply discussed this concept and termed it as “schemata of interpretation” (1974, p.24). According to him, “schemata of interpretation” allow people to distinguish, perceive, identify and interpret events, manufacturing de facto specific meanings.

Moreover, since framing is defined as a way of structuring or presenting an issue, the consideration of the audience is the core question. In fact, it involves explanations and descriptions of an issue in a specific context; retaining the attention and most importantly the support of the audience. This means that the way the issue is framed always reflects the behaviours, attitudes and engagements of the targeted audience. Arguing alongside, handful of scholars claimed that the quintessence of framing process is to provide a compact and tangible platform for examining how discourses are orchestrated in media ecosystem (Kimberly, 2008). Hence, the deliberate purpose of framing is to redirect people’s concerns towards particular political subjects.

In visual communication, framing consists of presenting visually symbolic elements especially in relation to the subject through a strategic arrangement in such a way to give a specific connotation (ibid, 2008). Entman (2003; pp. 417) claims that “the words and images that make up the frame can be distinguished from the rest of the news by their capacity of stimulating positively or negatively, objectively or subjectively, different sides in a political conflict”. Thus, it consists in keeping the audience’s focus on the framed topic. That is why Entman conceptualized it as ‘dominant frames’; that is to say, the frames which dictate the outlines of the discussions. For him, certain frames turn out to become more dominant than others via three distinct variables: the motivations, the power and strategy, and the cultural congruence (ibid, pp.421).

As a result, the framing theory explores the manipulation of audiences by media through the way of presenting them only one side of the news. The audiences have therefore to be more vigilant and exercise their critical thinking abilities in order to deal with such mediated information. Likewise, during terrorist attacks, what the media present us is just pieces of “frames”, emphasizing certain aspects of the reality. Thus, this theory will be very important for my research because it allows



comprehending the choices of the media experts in the treatment of information related to terrorism in West African context.

### 2.7.5 Jihadism and Islamism

Etymologically the terms ‘Jihadism’ and ‘Islamism’ are formed respectively by the roots *Jihād* (effort or struggle in Arabic language), *Islām* (meaning literally submission to God) and the suffix ‘ism’ which semantically means ideology. This means roughly (and mistakenly) an ideology based on the Islamic religion. Hence, the notion ‘Jihadism’ is widely used (often inaccurately) by Western media, and often Western politics, to depict those who commit violence. As a matter of fact, after the Vienna terrorist attack which occurred in November 2020, the Austrian chancellor Sebastian Kurz made the following speech to depict the situation:

It has now been confirmed that yesterday’s attack was clearly an *Islamist terrorist attack*. It was an attack out of hatred - out of hatred for our basic values, for our way of life, for our democracy, in which all people are equal in rights and dignity. (...) Our enemy - Islamist extremism - not only wants to cause death and suffering, it also wants to divide our society. (...) We must all be aware that this is not a conflict between Christians and Muslims or between Austrians and migrants. No, this is a fight between many people who believe in peace and those few who want war. It is a fight between civilization and barbarism. And we will fight this fight with all our determination.<sup>25</sup>

Even though the Austrian Chancellor Kurz deliberately mentioned that “‘this is not a conflict between Christians and Muslims’”, his remarks still reflect a wrong perception of *Islam* widely held in Europe, especially when it happens few days after the vehement clashes between the French President Emmanuel Macron and some leaders in Islamic countries.<sup>26</sup> All these things remind us that the fight against both Islamophobia and Terrorism in the West still has a long way to go.

However, in Arabic, the term *Jihād* could designate internal efforts or struggles practiced by an individual or a group against improper temptations. For example, the Muslims’ daily ritual prayers and the fasting during the month of Ramadan can be considered as individual *Jihād*. These efforts and struggles aim, in the Islamic understanding, to build a better Muslim community or to fight against unbelievers

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<sup>25</sup> Carlo Arrighi (2020). Stating Otherness Through Socio-Cultural Biases - Sociology Study, Sept.-Oct. 2020, Vol. 10, No. 5, 207-215 doi: 10.17265/2159-5526/2020.05.003 - University of Padua, Padua, Italy. Access Available Online: <http://www.davidpublisher.org/Public/uploads/Contribute/5fd827793a692.pdf>

<sup>26</sup> The assassination of the French high school teacher, Samuel Paty<sup>21</sup>, on October 16, 2020, has further fueled tension between Muslims and Liberals, or more crucially, between East and West, in general. This crime occurred three weeks after a new attack on the satirical magazine Charlie Hebdo.

(Hegghammer, 2010). This means that the fundamental role of Islamism is to reorganize the Muslim community in accordance with the Islamic law, or the Sharia. As the Muslim scholar Muzammil H. Siddiqi (2012) put it:

Jihad is all about doing your best to better your acts. In the Holy Qur'an, the word Jihad is used 33 times in various forms. It is often associated with other Quranic concepts such as faith, repentance, righteous actions, and emigration (...) Therefore, Jihad is about protecting the faith of the individual and his rights. However, it is not always a war although it can sometimes take this form. Islam is the religion of peace, but this does not mean that it accepts oppression. Islam teaches that we should do all we can to eliminate tensions and conflicts. Islam promotes peaceful means to bring about change and reforms. In reality, Islam insists that one should strive to eradicate evil by peaceful means without resorting to force as much as possible.

This argumentation of Muzammil Siddiqi (2012) was reinforced by a research conducted by the Engineer Tom Anderson who developed analytical Software called "Odin Text" in 2016 to find "the most violent" Holy book amongst the Old and New Testaments as well as the English version of the Quran. It reveals that the Quran uses less violent concepts than the two other Holy books (the Old and New Testament). The researcher explained that:

The research project had been motivated by the constant public discussions, contradictions and debates about whether or not the issue of terrorism linked to "Islamic fundamentalism" reflects - to some degree - fundamentally and characteristically the violence about Islam as compared to other major religions<sup>27</sup>.

In the academia, Western researchers started using the term *Jihadism* since the 1990s and more abusively since September, 11, 2001 attacks to portray violent terrorist acts. Notwithstanding, for normal Jihadists, violent struggles and enough efforts are necessary to eliminate societal problems and restore God's rule (Sharia). That is the only way to defend Muslim society (Umma) against unbelievers. Therefore, in Muslim societies, *Jihād* turns out to be both an individual and a collective duty that must be accomplished by every believer. That is why the word '*jihadism*' is not frequently used by Muslim thinkers and Middle Eastern scholars because it is wrongly associated with the Islamic notion of 'illegitimate violence'.

#### **2.7.6 Media ethics and deontology**

The word 'ethics' takes its origin from the Greek root '*ethicos*' (meaning moral), and '*ethos*' which means values, customs or traditions. Hence, in the common understanding, ethics refer to a personal rule based on moral and individual values.

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<sup>27</sup>Tom Anderson (2016). Odin Text. Article available Online at: <http://www.independent.co.uk/arts-entertainment/books/violence-more-common-in-bible-than-quran-text-analysis-reveals-a6863381.html>

As a matter of fact, ethics are personal and include all the rules and arrangements made by an individual in order to perform a job, to exercise a profession. Most often, the term is used in media domain to bring out the decency of the profession; and in any other profession it is used to qualify the sector as noble. Ethics (generally in plural) are therefore a reflection on the values that guide and motivate our actions. This reflection is concerned with our relationships with others and can be carried out at two levels. At the most general level, ethical reflection concerns conceptions of good, justice and fairness in human activities.

In media communication, the ethics of journalism is defined by two reference texts; one of which was approved by the journalists' unions of the six member states of the EEC<sup>28</sup>, in addition to those of Switzerland and Austria and the Declaration of duties and of the rights of journalists in 1971, known as the Munich Charter. In its preamble, the Munich Charter (1971) states that:

The right to information, to free speech and to criticism is one of the most fundamental freedoms of every human being. The whole complex of duties and rights of journalists derives from this right of the public to know facts and opinions. The responsibility of journalists vis-a-vis the public has precedence over any other responsibility, in particular towards their employers and the public power. The mission to inform necessarily includes the limits journalists spontaneously impose on themselves. This is the subject of the present declaration of duties. Yet, these duties can be effectively respected in the exercise of the journalist profession only if the concrete conditions of professional independence and dignity are implemented.

On the other side of the spectrum, the term 'deontology' derives from the Greek '*deon*' (meaning duty) or '*deontos*' (which means suitable) and '*logos*' which means knowledge or study. It refers to all the duties and obligations imposed on members of a professional order or association. Like a rule of law, deontological rules apply identically to all members of the group, in all situations of practice. An authority is responsible for enforcing them and imposing sanctions in the case of derogation. In West Africa, and in almost all countries, the profession of journalism is governed by deontological codes and ethical rules guaranteed by professional media associations. Deontology is quite precise as to what the professionals should do or should avoid to do in common practice situations.

In modern moral philosophy, the terminology 'deontology' is classified amongst the normative theories which discuss what is morally required, allowed or

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<sup>28</sup> European Economic Community (EEC) is formed by six key members which are France, West Germany, Italy and the three Benelux countries: Belgium, the Netherlands and Luxembourg.

prohibited. The term was coined for the first time by the British philosopher Jeremy Bentham - the father of utilitarianism - in 1816 to illustrate his conception of morality. Yet, at the very beginning, Bentham (1816) used it as a synonym of what he called 'censorial ethics'; those ethics which are based on individual judgement. However, in the contemporary conceptualization and specifically in this research, journalistic ethics should be characterized by duties understood as moral obligations, but not as legal constraints. In short, in its general definition, deontology is a theory of duties which advocates the fact of knowing what is right and proper to do.

As a result, journalism is a central profession for the prosperity of democratic nations. However, the profession is organized around the ethical and deontological rules which are above all moral requirements to guarantee the credibility of the mediated information. The scholar André Linard (1998) reminds us about the distinction and complementarity between ethics and deontology in journalism:

Ethics and deontology are not synonyms. Ethics appeal to values, to everyone's awareness of what is noble or infamous, good or bad, to do or not to do. Deontology, on the other side of the coin, is made up of rules that the profession imposes on itself. The compliance to the deontological statements is generally well-organized by internal rules of the profession which penalize any transgression<sup>29</sup>.

Amongst the ethical and deontological rules, there are therefore several, but the most frequently ones are the followings: the veracity of the information, the impartiality, the critical distance, the absence of collusion, and the protection of sources of information. I will elucidate these terminologies in the second part of this research, the literature review.

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<sup>29</sup> André LINARD, in collaboration with Bertrand SCIRPO, (May, 1998). Law, Deontology and Ethics of Media. GRET Diffusion, Paris, France.

## CHAPTER III

### THE LITERATURE REVIEW

In this part of my study, I will examine different delimitations of my research topic, drawing inspiration from the similar studies already carried out. It is an overview of some authors who have already worked on parallel subjects before. As a matter of fact, it will be question of recalling synthetically the essential parts of previous researches and discussing, interpreting, and analysing them regarding the current research topic's context. From these deductions, I will be able to go further in this research by deepening and enriching it following my research questions previously stated. Hence, the literature review will focus on the impact of media on terrorism, the controversial role of media in crisis context, and eventually, the social responsibility of journalists.

#### 3.1 The nexus between terrorism and crisis communication

Based on the case of the shooting in the Parliament of Ottawa on October 22, 2014, Serge Banyongen wrote a book entitled “‘Terrorism and crisis communication: the case of Ottawa’”<sup>30</sup> in which he assesses the place of communication in the understanding and the management of a terrorist act. His study dissects the preparation and dissemination of strategic messages by officials and politicians through various media, and then deduces operational concepts and theories. Better than a simple case study, Banyongen (2016) confronts different contexts of crises, the communication that results from them and the empirical realities of a terrorist act. Eventually, his work constitutes a fundamental contribution to academic debates across many societies, namely the dialectic between freedom and security in a context where terrorism as a form of asymmetric violence remains a permanent threat. Likewise, to contextualize it with my study, terrorist violence in Sub-Saharan Africa has increased and diversified in the last five years despite the determination of

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<sup>30</sup> See Banyongen Serge (2016). *Terrorism and crisis communication: the case of Ottawa*, Editions ‘Knowledge and Information’, 306 pages.

successive governments to tackle it. Yet, media communication occupies a central place in the response provided by the public authorities.

Similarly, Fenardji (2015) asserts that terrorism is not just a bombing machine; it is a whole complex system that relies on a strategic weapon of great importance which is communication. Nevertheless, counterterrorism attempts to understand the importance of the 'terrorist discourse'. Thus, to exist, terrorist groups have to show themselves by using the new means of communication. That is the very basis of the thought of Al-Qaida in the Islamic Maghreb (AQMI) or Daesh. These groups are condemned to communicate in order to exist. Therefore, this communication process is accomplished via the strategical use of media symbolism.

### **3.2 Media symbolism and terrorism**

Every communication strategy is accompanied by strongly infused symbolism. This can be found in terrorist actions as well as in the choice of dates for operations, or even in the process of naming terrorist groups. For example, the Charlie Hebdo attack in France was highly symbolic. This attack which hit the heart of Paris was one of the most designated targets by terrorist organizations. It was highly symbolic because the fact that the magazine distributed the cartoons of the Prophet Muhammad shocked the Arab world in 2005. As a matter of fact, this justifies somehow their actions even though the Islamic religion does not promote violence.

The French geopolitical expert on terrorism issues, Mathieu Guidère (2015), discussed the importance of symbolism in his book entitled "Al-Qaida conquering the Maghreb". He explains that as long as we do not take into account the totality of the information transmitted by the terrorists, we will have little or no understanding of their mentalities of actions, and we will not be able to prevent future actions. Regarding the names of some terrorists groups, or even some operations' names, Guidère (2015) claimed that it is not possible to win a battle or a war without naming it. Even the simple fact of associating the name of God "Allah Akbar" during terrorist operations corresponds to a savvy use of symbolism.

Thus, the choice of words responds first of all to a military communication objective, but which also has a definite psychological impact in the civilian world (ibid, 2015). Like in marketing communication, in order to sell a product or service, battle names

must have a 'seller-name'. For example, the first operation of the Salafist Group in Mauritania was codenamed '*Badr*', in reference to the first victorious battle of the Sunnis, during the time of Prophet Muhammad in 624. Therefore, the names of battles do really matter, and so do the names of terrorist groups. For some specialists, these names are concrete clues through which it is possible to access terrorists' intentions and strategic data related to certain attacks.

In addition, terrorist organizations use the social and political reality in the aim of criticizing the established order, and most often the state. As an illustration, in the 1990s in Algeria, the Islamic Armed Group (GIA) primarily targeted all symbolic representations of the state. New terrorist groups like AQIM<sup>31</sup>, or even *Daesh* (داعش), are continuing to practice the same process of violent protests. From this perspective, the state is symbolically seen as '*Kafir*' (كافر) – meaning impious in Arabic – and constitutes therefore an obstacle to the creation of an Islamic state. With the internationalization of terrorism, this terrorist conception is now accompanied by a witty criticism of the West, and most significantly, it is misunderstood by some scholars in the Western academia.

Moreover, terrorist groups often use factual data to justify their actions by denouncing the Western mores, the Islamophobia attitudes and interventionism. In fact, the American invasion of Iraq in 2003 would have finished sealing this image of a violent West. According to Mathieu Guidère, however, “anti-Semitism and anti-Americanism are two strong axes of Al-Qaida propaganda” and indeed, through numerous press releases, AQIM takes up this discourse full of symbolism in order to galvanize its troops and future members (2015). As a result, terrorists know how to turn people's frustration to their advantage over foreign powers which seem to intervene more to preserve their economic interests than to bring true peace. This state of fact is perceptible in French-Speaking West African countries like Mali, Ivory Coast, Burkina Faso and Niger where many foreign companies, especially French ones, come to extract mineral resources.

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<sup>31</sup> Jean-Pierre Filiu (2009). Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM): Algerian Challenge or Global Threat? Carnegie PAPERS; Middle East Program - Number 104 - October 2009. Available online: [https://carnegieendowment.org/files/al-qaeda\\_islamic\\_maghreb.pdf](https://carnegieendowment.org/files/al-qaeda_islamic_maghreb.pdf)

Eventually, the use of media symbolism in crisis context takes another dimension when it happens in an era dominated by social media proliferation. This is what I will discuss in the following lines.

### 3.3 The Social Mediated Crisis Communication

The theory of Social Mediated Crisis Communication (SMCC)<sup>32</sup> was recently developed by Lucinda, Austin and al. in 2017. This communicational model plays a significant role in a context where crisis communication is implemented today. The SMCC theory implies that in a context of crisis, the social media audience encompasses three major components:

- *The Influentials*<sup>33</sup>: Those people who create an important chunk of information related specific crisis contexts on social media platforms: YouTubers, bloggers, digital activists and other social media accounts managers.
- *The Followers*: These are the individuals or group of people who are following, sharing, commenting, and liking the information disseminated by the first group (the influentials).
- *The Inactive Members*: These are the group of people who decides to stay inactive. They neither share nor comment information on social media platforms. Although the 'inactive members' have their social media accounts, the vast majority amongst them are characterized by the old generation of people born before the age of social media.

The crucial thing about the SMCC model is both *Influentials* and *Followers*' direct and indirect propagation of messages through social media platforms. Given the fact that almost every traditional media has today at least one social media account; the *Inactive Members* get access to the news via these social mediated pages. As a result, the SMCC theory turns out to be useful for new generation of digital communication experts in situations of emergency to best spread their messages. This communicational model provides more clarifications about the behaviours and

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<sup>32</sup> Lucinda L. Austin, Yan Jin et al. (2017): Social Media and Crisis Communication; 1st Edition, Published June 20, 2017 by Routledge - 482 Pages.

<sup>33</sup> According to the SMMC model the concept of "*Influentials*" refers to the definition of "*influencers*" on social media. The Cambridge dictionary defines the latter as "a person or group that has the ability to influence the behaviour or opinions of others". In fine, it is someone who affects or changes the way that other people behave.



features of audiences that can be helpful in terms of sharpening up appropriate communication strategies according to the contexts. In emergency situations in which there is a relatively limited timeframe for the audiences to develop critical thinking mechanisms – because the crises affect the individuals’ psycho-emotional attitudes – it is essential to know how to effectively manage the social mediated information.

Concretely, the SMCC model has been introduced to explore the online crisis management process because during a context of crisis people spend more time on social networks: YouTube, Twitter, Instagram, Facebook, TikTok, etc. (Ouedraogo, 2020)<sup>34</sup>. In West African countries like Mali, Ivory Coast, and Burkina Faso, social networks are heavily used by governments and official institutions. This allows the communicators to reach the maximum of fragmented audience within a very short time. Besides this state of fact, the traditional media’s agenda setting process is also crucial when it comes to framing terrorism-related news.

### **3.4 The Agenda setting theory**

The Agenda setting theory can be defined as the process through which the mass media select, and frame the (qualified) importance of certain various issues and events, and impose it to the public. For the theorists Maxwell McCombs and Donald Shaw (1972), the media impose an agenda on the audiences; and consequently, the public consumes what the media impose on them. The most important effect of mass media communication would then be its ability to edict and mentally organize the public’s opinion about mediated news; telling them what and how they should think about media contents.

Indeed, the agenda setting theory has been conceptualized for the first time in 1972 by the American scholars McCombs and Shaw who tried to empirically verify the role of the media by analysing the US presidential elections of 1968, 1972 and 1976. As a result, they postulate that the influence of the media affects the order in which reports are presented or framed. This, somewhat; reconfigures the public’s mind and

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<sup>34</sup> Ouedraogo, N., (2020). Social Media Literacy in Crisis Context: Fake News Consumption during COVID-19 Lockdown. Social Sciences Research Network (SSRN Electronic Journal) - Available Online at: <https://ssrn.com/abstract=3601466> or <http://dx.doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.3601466>.

constitutes a sort of public opinion in both private and public spheres. In doing so, the media influence can be located on three different levels namely:

- *The journalists' questions:* The questions of the journalists are directed in such a specific way to get particular information from the interviewers. During a terrorist attack for example, the journalists will absolutely try to get the viewpoint of some experts through interviews. Thus, media professionals redirect the experts with typical questions so that they end up by commenting the subject under a specific angle. This will obviously influence how the audiences think about the issue in question.

- *The storytelling:* As its sounds, the story-telling is the fact of (re)telling a story or narrating a story. In the domain of media studies, however, the storytelling focuses on the protagonists (or antagonists) of an event by questioning, interpreting, commenting it in the way they want the audience to think about the issue. In 2017, Lugmayr and al.<sup>35</sup> subdivided the storytelling method in four different components: the narrative, the perspective, the interactivity and the medium. The figure 3.3 below gives more details about this process.



**Figure 3.2 The four different components of storytelling method (Lugmayr and al., 2017)**

<sup>35</sup>Artur Lugmayr<sup>1</sup> & Erkki Sutinen<sup>2</sup> & Jarkko Suhonen<sup>3</sup> & Carolina Islas Sedano<sup>3</sup> & Helmut Hlavacs<sup>4</sup> & Calkin Suero Montero<sup>3</sup> (July, 2017). Serious storytelling – a first definition and review. Multimed Tools Appl - DOI 10.1007/s11042-016-3865-5.

*-The editorial line:* This represents the set of choices and decisions on the processing of information by a medium: TV, radio, print newspaper or digital medium. Each medium has in principle an editorial line. In the traditional media, it is generally guaranteed by Chief Editors, in collaboration with the media managers who decide on what aspect the information should be emphasized. The editorial line, therefore, traces the conduct to be taken for any journalist working for the media institution. This gives to the medium a specific colouring which makes it different compared to the other media. The editorial line also allows the media to be positioned on the left or right side, respectively labelled as opposition, central or governmental media. Decided by an editorial committee, the editorial line makes it possible to choose the informational subjects to be dealt with, to be prioritized. It gives a guideline to all the contents and induces a specific angle for processing information.

The Agenda setting theory can be used in political and marketing communication (advertising, announcements, electoral campaigns, business, public relations, etc. just to name few). In advertising, for example, the media end up imposing a brand, a product, and new consumption habits to the audience. It is the choice of media that ultimately prevails over different audiences with various habits, cultures and customs. As such, the media give paramount importance to information so that this information will impress the public and appear to be vital and useful. Hence, the Agenda setting theory describes the ability of the media to tell us what the important issues are and how to interpret them by exerting a huge influence on the audiences. As a matter of fact, the researchers Maxwell McCombs and Donald Shaw (1972) concluded that the media exerts a significant influence on what voters or the public see as the main issue during an electoral campaign.

The finality is all about how the audience attaches particular importance to a news story and perceives the context in which a problem is framed. Ultimately, if the media fail to tell the audiences how to think, they still succeed in imposing on them what to discuss about. This theory is of great importance for this research because it allows showing the starring role that media give to terrorist facts. After a terrorist attack for instance, it is as if all other subjects disappear, leaving only reports and other comments on terrorist facts. Therefore, terrorism eventually imposed itself on

the media agenda and public discussions. Ultimately, the social responsibility of Journalists should play a primordial role in this process.

### **3.5 The Social responsibility of Journalists**

Journalism is a profession governed by inviolable principles. These principles include objectivity, impartiality, accuracy, ethics and professional demeanours. In West Africa and all around the world, it is a profession that is closely supervised on the one hand by regulatory bodies disposed with ethical codes and, on the other hand, by peers through deontological rules. Indeed, if these fundamentals of journalism are not respected, the media workers - who should be models of honesty and trustworthiness - will accomplish a work that is truncated and harmful for their audiences (Kovach; Rosentiel, 2004)<sup>36</sup>. Also, seen from a different perspective, Cherilyn Ireton and al. (2018) stated that:

The primary task of the journalists is to serve the audiences' right to truthful and authentic information through an honest attachment to objective reality, by consciously placing the facts in their context, by deploying all the creative power of the reporter, so that the public receives appropriate material allowing them to form a precise and coherent picture of the world, where the origin, nature and essence of events, processes and situations, would be understood as objectively as possible.<sup>37</sup>

However, according to Martin-Lagardette (2006), “if the information is truncated or biased, a whole chain of judgments, behaviours and attitudes will be distorted. As a result, readers (audience in general, including radio listeners and TV viewers) will suffer unwittingly”<sup>38</sup>. Therefore, it becomes important to figure out the necessary means to enable journalists to morally perform their tasks with ability and professionalism. Furthermore, in their work about the ‘Principles of Journalism’, Kovach and Rosentiel (2004) discuss these fundamentals with two key elements formulated as the following: What Journalists Should Know and What the Public Should Demand. Thus, the researchers redefined the primary role of journalism and

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<sup>36</sup> Bill Kovach and Tom Rosentiel (2004). *Principes du journalisme : ce que les journalistes doivent savoir, ce que le public doit exiger*, Nouveaux Horizons, ARS, Paris, p34.

<sup>37</sup> Alexios Mantzarlis, Alice Matthews, Cherilyn Ireton, Claire Wardle, Fergus Bell, Hossein Derakhshan, Julie Posetti, Magda Abu-Fadil, Tom Trewinnard (2018). *Journalism, ‘Fake News’ & Disinformation. Handbook for Journalism Education and Training*; Paris 07 SP, France. Online access:  
[https://en.unesco.org/sites/default/files/journalism\\_fake\\_news\\_disinformation\\_print\\_friendly\\_0\\_0.pdf](https://en.unesco.org/sites/default/files/journalism_fake_news_disinformation_print_friendly_0_0.pdf)

<sup>38</sup> Jean-Luc Martin-LAGARDETTE (2006). *L'information responsable: un défi démocratique*, PUF, Paris, France.

the essential principles that drive this profession. For them, indeed, “the first obligation of journalism is to tell the truth”. Beyond this principle, fact-checking, economic and political independence, fairness and the duty of conscience are other sub-principles that are crucial to media professionals. Put it differently, another author, Daniel Cornu (2009), articulates the issue in this way:

The first duty of the journalists is to respect the truth whatever the consequences for themselves, and this, because of the right that the public has to know the truth (...) A journalist must struggle to ensure that the information he/she is disseminating is correct and intact, to avoid expressing biased comments, conjectures, as well as falsification by distortion.<sup>39</sup>

In consequence, the ethical commitments to the universal values of humanism oblige the journalists to refrain from any form of propagation of violence, wars, aggression, or to all other forms of hatred and discrimination; especially racism, xenophobia, apartheid, etc. This also incites media news workers to resist to any type of corruption or oppression of tyrannical and totalitarian regimes. Moreover, in dealing with journalistic information, the media focus exclusively on the facts. This is perceptible through the process of framings as well as the angles of treatment. This is most often linked to the editorial line of each media and the recurrence of the event and its impact on the audiences; since some events create an agenda effect by monopolizing the media columns.

Eventually, all these principles of impartiality, neutrality, objectivity and independence can be conceptualized as the social responsibility of the media. This means that journalists have a social mission within the society in which they live. They work for the manifestation of the truth in the field of information, sensitization and social communication by delivering accurate facts to the public. Concretely, in the case of media covering of the terrorist attacks, journalists are somehow divided in a social dilemma. They are split between telling the truth (the facts) on the one hand; and on the other hand, criticizing the actions of the government and the weakness of the security services. Indeed, siding with the government makes the journalists guilty of colluding with the political power according to the public's understanding because “the facts are sacred, but the comments are free” (Rogers, 2011). How to tell it? Can the journalist tell everything? Should journalists be silent in some circumstances or should they describe the whole lived reality without qualms? That is the social

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<sup>39</sup> Daniel CORNU (2009). *Journalism and Truth: Information Ethics in the Challenge of Media Change*, Ed. Labor et Fides, Genève, p80.

dilemma to which media professionals are confronted when it comes to discussing the social responsibility of the journalists.

Eventually, it is also to consider the public opinions when it comes to analysing the media framing of terrorism. This goes without saying that the Spiral of Silence theory should be specified because it is in line with the outcomes of this research.

### **3.6 The Spiral of Silence theory**

The current study is in line with the “Spiral of silence” theory developed by the German researcher Elisabeth Noelle-Neumann in the mid-1960s to describe the “collective opinion formation and societal decision making regarding issues that are controversial or morally loaded” such as political issues or in a context of crisis like terrorism. Whence, the fact that people express their opinions on controversial public issues is mainly affected by their unconscious perception of those opinions as being either popular or unpopular.

## CHAPTER IV

### THE RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

#### 4.1 Outlines

The central purpose of this research is threefold. Firstly, it aims to investigate and establish a nexus between crisis communication, media framing and the advent of social media prevalence. Secondly, this study attempts to check whether the processing of information respects the ethical and professional rules of journalism in West Africa. The third purpose of the research concerns the comprehension of the digital prosumers' behaviours towards counterfeit information related to terrorism in Sub-Saharan African context.

Therefore, this will enable me to demonstrate that social media platforms – which represent *cool media*<sup>40</sup> regarding Marshall McLuhan's categorization (1994) – have offered a new strategy to democratize information, by providing an easy way of disseminating news to the new generation of media professionals. Indeed, the investigations will show that this process of disseminating information about terrorism through social networks is an opportunity offered to the public in order to facilitate their access to information. Also, I will discuss whether the media coverage of terrorist attacks in West African context respects the ethic and deontological principles of journalism or not. Similarly, it will be question of investigating whether the West African media serve as channels for terrorist messages' propaganda. All the same, it will be worth analysing the use of social media platforms by “digital prosumers” following terrorist attacks.

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<sup>40</sup> In 1994, Marshall McLuhan divided the types of media into two main categories in one of his masterpieces entitled *Understanding Media* (1994). A) The first category is the *hot media* such as print newspapers, cinema and radio which require less sensory involvements of the audiences because for these types of media the public does not participate actively but very passively. B) The second category concerns the *cool media* such as TV, Telephone and now Social Media platforms which highly require very a very active participation of the audiences. See *Marshall McLuhan; Understanding media: The extensions of man - MIT Press (1994)*.

Therefore, it is essential to outline the research method, the research purpose, its strategy and procedure. As a matter of fact, the sociologist Jean Stoetzel (1980) describes the methodology as “a knowledge occasioning by a reflection on the research practice”. Subsequently, it is a way of progressing towards an objective (Quivy, 1995). Consequently, in this chapter, I will focus my work on the constitutive elements of the research methodology such as the research strategy, the research universe (the field of study: the geographical universe and the population of study), the type of analysis, the data collection techniques, etc.

#### **4.2 - The research strategy**

Since this chapter of my study on media and terrorism deals with the research methodology, I will, hereafter, specify different articulations which are the followings: the research universe, the type of analysis, the research approach, the data collection and samples selection techniques, the research process, and the type of data analysis. Although the issues related to media and terrorism is not a new phenomenon, this investigation turns out to be an innovative study because it is conducted in the specific context of West Africa and also during an era of digital and social media prevalence. In fact, every investigative research bears a specific interest insofar as it concerns a specific geographical area and is conducted in a definite context; because in communication the context dictates the messages.

#### **4.3 The research universe**

The current study about the media framing of terrorism concerns the particular population of West Africa; especially those living in French-speaking countries. In fact, this study puts emphasis on the specific population of Mali and Burkina Faso. Yet, to constitute the study samples, I made a rational choice. The rational sampling method is a method of selecting a sample by which the representativeness of the sample is ensured by a reasoned approach. Therefore, the research universe can be delineated as it followings:

- *Global targeted population:* West African population, especially those who consume digital news and use excessively social media platforms;
- *Specific targeted population:* The French-speaking African citizens of Burkina Faso and Mali affected passively and actively by the news related to terrorism via both traditional and digital media, including social media. Concretely, this concerns media



managers, web-activists, bloggers, media regulatory representatives, the educated people (university students, contractors, civil servants, etc.). The reason why I consider them as specific target can be justified by the fact that these groups of people use to follow actively the news published on social media platforms. Also, the particular targets such as media managers, media regulatory bodies and journalists are somehow experts in terms of discussing the framing of terrorism by West African media.

#### **4.4 The type of analysis**

The current study about West African media coverage of terrorist attacks in the age of social media follows a Sequential Mixed Method with essentially a qualitative approach. In fact, every research strategy has its specific method. Therefore, in the aim of reaching the objectives of this study, I have adopted a qualitative analysis type, since it is a matter of investigating the interconnection between crisis communication, media framing and the advent of social media prevalence in West African context. Indeed, in order to understand this topic in a phenomenological angle of view, it is necessary to analyse it through a Sequential Mixed Method. This type of analysis will permit to provide in-depth information about how people assess the way news related to terrorism is framed by journalists and the attitudes of social media prosumers. Therefore, the investigation is based on interviews, opinions, experiences, focus groups discussions, and survey data analysis, etc. Actually, the qualitative research approach associated to the Sequential Mixed Method is generally used for phenomenology, ethnography, grounded theory, case studies, and narrative research (Creswell, 2009). This method furnishes rigorous information about human attitudes.

As a result, in order to better analyse the issues of media ethics and deontology in West Africa, the relations between media and terrorism as well as the digital prosumers' behaviours towards counterfeit information related to terrorism in Sub-Saharan Africa; I have firstly elaborated a survey that I have submitted to the targeted population (the citizens from Mali and Burkina Faso). Also, in order to get the opinions, expertise and comments of West African citizens about the impact news related to terrorism, the individual interviews and the survey's open-ended questions helped me to dig out my research topic. Thereby, the collected qualitative

data allowed me to interpret social media users' behaviours, decisions, thoughts, and actions in Sub-Saharan Africa about counterfeit news in relation with terrorism.

Yet, to understand my research topic in a phenomenological viewpoint, it is also essential to undertake some contents analyses on two most popular digital media located in Mali and Burkina Faso: namely *Maliweb.net* and *LeFaso.net*. This entails the use of specific tools and adequate data collection techniques.

#### **4.5 Data collection techniques and specific tools**

During the investigations of this study, I used specific research tools and implemented adequate data collection techniques which are the followings:

- *The Online open-ended questions survey*: This type of survey consists of free-forms survey questions which aim to permit the respondents to give various answers in open text format, or by selecting optional answers. In doing so, the respondents have the ability to write down their answers based on their own knowledge, their experiences, their personal feelings, their own opinions, comments, interpretations and personal understandings. This makes it closer to the interview.

Also, I have done some individual interviews with "*resource persons*". Technically, a *resource person* is an expert in a specific field who is able to contribute with their expertise or knowledge to give sharp information in a given topic of study. As a matter of fact, for the individual interviews with "resource persons", I elaborated an interview guide which exclusively encompasses *open-ended questions*. These interviews have been conducted remotely via Zoom, Skype, Phone calls (on WhatsApp especially), and occasionally Emails.

Concerning the elaboration of the interviews' questionnaire, I focused especially on "contingency questions" (focusing on the respondents directly concerned by the phenomenon) as well as "semi-open questions" (open-to-comments questions with multiple options of answers), and avoiding de facto "*closed-ended*" or "*dead-end questions*" which do not allow the respondents to make enough comments on the discussed subject. Therefore, the use of open-ended questions, contingency questions and semi-open questions allowed the respondents to freely share their opinions with more information; and in the meantime to gauge the precision of their thoughts about

the topic. Hereafter, the research tools that I used to collect qualitative data from the population of the study are the followings:

- *The research survey:* It was exclusively submitted online to the respondents between February, 15<sup>th</sup> and May 25<sup>th</sup>, 2021. As a result, this open-ended questions survey provided essentially qualitative data related to media framing of terrorism in West Africa, as well as the impact of social media on crisis communication. However, during the preliminary stages of my investigations, it was necessary to test the questionnaire by administering it among few respondent in order to avoid the risk of misunderstanding or misinterpretation. This questionnaire testing helped to check the validity of the questionnaire (form, question formulations, translations, etc.). Also, the aim of the questionnaire testing was to not compromise the quality of the data that will be collected, and minimize the potential risks of bias.

- *The interview guide:* It was a tool that I used during the individual remote interviews with the crisis communication experts, media managers and media regulatory bodies' representatives. This helped gathering essential data from the "resource persons" by involving direct interactions in the forms of "Q/R" (question-Answers).

- *The Adobe Audition Software:* It is a tool that allowed me to record the embedded voices during the individual interviews with "resource persons" after getting their permissions beforehand. Thus, Adobe Audition was extremely useful because it helped collecting important data during my remote interviews. Thereby, during the qualitative data analysis and interpretations, I could transcribe the conversations (the comments and opinions) of my interviewees.

- *The SPSS Software:* It helped analysing varied chunks of complex data in relation with the phenomenon of media and terrorism during the data analysis process. The SPSS software also allowed me to categorize, determine and classify some technical variables.

As a reminder, my investigations also encompass media contents analysis since the study puts emphasis on the contest of narratives. Indeed, while investigating the nexus between crisis communication, media framing and the advent of social media prevalence in West Africa, it is necessary to analyse terrorism-related news framing

in both Burkina Faso and Mali's most popular digital media. These two news media are namely *Lefoso.net* and *Maliweb.net*. In doing so, the *LexisNexis* online search engine have been used in order to find all news articles related to terrorism and using the keywords "*Jihadism, Al-Qaida, Daesh, Boko-Haram and Mujao, etc.*" respectively in *Lefaso.net* and *Maliweb.net* from January 2020 to January 2021.

Concretely, I will navigate through one year of digital news dealing with terrorism produced by *LeFaso.net* and *Maliweb.net*. Thence, the analytical aspect of these contents pursues two mains objectives. Firstly, it aims to comprehend the use of both episodic and thematic framings<sup>41</sup> by the abovementioned digital news media between January, 2020 and January, 2021. Thus, exploring theses twelve months of digital news framings, my research concentrates exclusively on the coverages of terrorism in Mali and Burkina Faso.

I chose *Maliweb.net* and *Lefaso.net* because these are both the most famous and the first online news media respectively in Mali and Burkina Faso. Created in 2002, *Maliweb.net* is the first digital News media in Mali. Similarly, *LeFaso.net* was created in October 2003 in Burkina Faso and it is still the most popular digital media in the country with its slogan "*News from Burkina Faso on the Internet*". In October 2019, the *LeFaso.net* inaugurated a studio to produce videos to develop its WebTV platform. Both *Maliweb.net* and *LeFaso.net* have around 30 employees including approximately 20 journalists in each media. They also have a network of correspondents in different African countries, in some European countries, and also in the United States of America. As every professional news media, they follow the ethical and deontological charter of journalism. In the web portal of *Maliweb.net* for example, the following message is displayed:

As an online distributor of local and international press articles, *MALIWEB MEDIA SERVICES GROUP* - through its website *maliweb.net* - undertakes in particular to do its utmost effort to verify the veracity of information, to comply with the rules of journalistic ethics and deontology; not to infringe the rights and dignity of persons as well as to inform Internet users of the editorial or advertising nature of the contents. We are also committed to doing our utmost to ensure the reliability of information and services provided by third parties.

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<sup>41</sup> There are two different types of framings in media coverage: episodic coverage and thematic coverage. More specifically, episodic coverage tracks a specific event in a straight line; whereas thematic coverage usually befalls later, several times after the event happened (Kimberly, 2008; pp.169-192).

Contextually, *LeFaso.net* and *Maliweb.net* were specifically selected in order to see whether both media respectively depicted the issues of terrorism in accordance with the ethical and deontological principles of journalism. Also, it was necessary to search and understand whether these two West African media serve as channels for terrorist messages' propaganda or not. Alongside with Robert Entman's "cascading model" (2003)<sup>42</sup>, the abovementioned digital news media contribute to a construction of informational networks and to a creation of an informational environment in line with their editorial lines. This implies that the process of labelling in the media's narratives goes hand in hand with the questions of media ethics and deontology.

#### **4.6 The sample selection**

As it is not always possible to interview each member of the research population due to geographic and time constraints, it is still possible to learn more about the targeted population, in particular by analysing a selected sample. To do this, it is essential to choose the right method of constructing such a sample. In this study, the sampling concerns the examination of a part of the targeted population; from which a specific sample can be made. This is particularly the case of the French-speaking West African populations questioned at the beginning my investigations, before approaching Burkinabe and Malian citizens with my online survey.

To constitute my study sample, I proceeded by a rational choice as I have already mentioned above. Actually, the rational sampling method is a technique which consists in selecting a sample from which the representativeness is ensured by a reasoned approach. This method is an alternative to the probabilistic research method. As a matter of fact, I made a rational choice because the targeted population is already known. Thus, in the current study, the sample is representative because each selected sample member has special relationships with the phenomenon of media and terrorism which is under investigation. Also, regarding the context of the research, they have satisfactory knowledge and relevant experiences in the topic

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<sup>42</sup> In Media and communication domain, the concept of "Cascade" refers to the top-down manner movement that takes information regarding a particular topic. Pioneered in 2003 by the theorist Robert Entnam, this model entails the training of the public by their experts, the more knowledgeable peers. The Author discussed this model in an article entitled: "*Cascading Activation: Contesting the White House's Frame After 9/11*", *Political Communication*, 20:4, 415 – 432; Entman, Robert M. (2003). Accessible Online via: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/10584600390244176>.

under discussion. Finally, this sample provided empirical information that allowed me to dig out my research topic.

As a result, the sample size of the online survey covers a population of 98 respondents including both Burkinabe and Malians. Thence, it is formed of 98 people of different educational backgrounds and various socio-professional domains such as students, civil servants and contractors from Burkina Faso and Mali. I also approached 4 “resource persons”, namely media managers, media regulatory institutions’ representatives and Media owners both in Burkina Faso and Mali. For a better visibility of the constitution of this sample, I detailed its distribution in the table (*table 4.1*) below.

**Table 4.1 Distribution of the sample target**

Variables	Media managers (Interview)	Media regulatory body (interview)	Malian citizens (survey)	Burkinabe citizens (survey)
Sample size	2	2	36	62

For the contents analysis of media news relating to terrorism, a total of 219 news articles have been examined alongside with the research purposes. To be more specific, I analysed 127 articles from *Maliweb.net* and 92 articles from *LeFaso.net* published between January, 2020 and January, 2021. The manning table (*table 4.2*) below gives more details about the contents analysis data.

**Table 4.2 Stratification of the contents analysis data**

<i>Name of Media</i>	<i>LeFaso.net</i>	<i>Maliweb.net</i>
Number of news articles relating to terrorism published between January, 2020 and January, 2021 in Mali and Burkina Faso.	92	127

#### **4.7 The research approach**

As above-mentioned, this study applies the Sequential Mixed Method and puts emphasis on a qualitative research design. Technically speaking, each research

approach follows a particular process. In consequence, open-ended research surveys and interviews are necessary when it comes to dealing with a qualitative investigation. Hence, the qualitative study – which is essentially explorative – is conducted for grounded theory, ethnographic and phenomenological researches, narrative researches and case studies. As a result, the use of qualitative research design in the current study obeys to the logic of furnishing relevant information and expertise about West African public's attitudes related to terrorist news, as well as shedding light on media workers' professionalism.

Also, my research approach deemed necessary to analyse the topic by scrutinizing the contents of information published through the columns of *Maliweb.net* and *LeFaso.net* by combining both the episodic coverages and thematic coverages. Theoretically speaking, media framing comprises two technical concepts called inclusion and exclusion. These two notions refer to the critical aspects of the event to be framed. In fact, an event (such as a terrorist attack) may be deliberately prioritised over another one, purposefully or unintentionally, to stimulate a particular interpretation of the event in question. To be more concrete, this approach helped me to tackle the questions in line with the respect of ethics and deontological principles of journalism; and in the meantime, to understand whether the West African media serve as channels for terrorist messages' propaganda or not. In fine, this approach has objectively amplified the scientific value and the reliability of my investigations.

## CHAPTER V

### ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION OF INVESTIGATIVE DATA

#### 5.1 Metadata overview

The data analysis and interpretation of this study constitutes the step which allows the qualitative explanation of different facts considered on a rational basis. It is therefore essential to follow a systematic and rigorous approach. Among the tasks accomplished so far, this stage is undoubtedly the one that calls for the most technical knowledge and scientific rigor. Since it is from the results that I will draw my conclusions, it is imperative not only to describe the existing data itself, but also how it was collected, analysed and interpreted. The method of interpretation must also be clarified, since it will ultimately be a question of making conclusions and recommendations to allow a better understanding of crisis communication, but also and above all to have a critical look at the role of journalists in a context of terrorism.

To be concrete, data analysis is the process of examining and interpreting the obtained data in the aim of developing tangible responses to the research questions. The main steps in the analysis process consist in identifying the research strategy and techniques, determining the availability of appropriate data, deciding which methods to use according to the research purpose, and communicating the results of investigations. As a result, data analysis is essential to comprehend the results of investigative researches.

As I constantly aforementioned, during my investigation about the media coverage of terrorist attacks in the age of Social Media prevalence in Sub-Saharan Africa, I have used an online questionnaire which has been sent to the population from Mali and Burkina Faso via two main social media platforms: Facebook and WhatsApp groups. Additionally, I have also examined some media contents of the two most popular online digital news media in the two abovementioned West African countries namely *Maliweb.net* and *LeFaso.net*. In doing so, since this part of my study is dedicated to



the analysis and interpretations of the research data, the qualitative data collected through the survey and the information observed from the content analysis have been very useful because they allowed to reach somehow reliable and accurate scientific data, generalizable to a certain extent.

Thereby, in the following lines, I will linger on the analysis and interpretations of the investigative data. The manning table below (*table 5.3*) gives a broad view about the surveyed and interviewed research populations both in Mali and Burkina Faso.

**Table 5.3 Manning table of the research population, (May, 2021)**

Type of investigation	Socio-professional activities	Ages: 18-35 years old			36- 45 years and over		Total
		Sex:		Other	Male	Female	
		Male	Female				
Online Survey	General public	78	14	01	03	02	98
Interviews	Media regulatory institutions' representatives; Media owners	02	00	00	02	00	04

## 5.2 Interpretation and thematic content analysis

The objective of this part is to give sense to the content analysis data collected on *Maliweb.net* and *LeFaso.net* from January, 2020 to January 2021. In academic terms, thematic analysis is epistemologically a mental construct, carried out by the researcher, to give sense to qualitative data. It is therefore up to the researcher, in his analytical approach, to identify the thematic interpretations constructed from real events, from facts (Blais & Martineau, 2006). Thus, the value of qualitative research is largely based on the researcher's ability to give sense to the qualitative data. It goes without saying that this strategy leads to what Erwing Goffman termed as “schemata of interpretation” which allow researchers to make epistemological interpretations by going beyond the mere subjective facts (1974, p.24).

This supposes that the fact of extracting this thematic meaning and analysing it makes it possible, in a way, to “go beyond” what the raw data obtained during the interviews and questionnaires state a priori (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). Concretely, the interpretation of data from thematic content analysis calls for selective readings of the corpus, through analysis grids. These grids are chosen and constructed during the initial formulation of the research questions, but also supplemented, modified and reoriented - with the incorporation of new information (new empirical data) - during the investigations until the moment of their interpretation.

Thus, the thematic analysis is applied to qualitative analysis approach, involving data reduction processes. Hence, my analysis will in fact appeal to a categorization of key themes called “labelling” or “schematization” by some sociologists such as Erving Goffman (1974). In epistemological researches, it is sometimes question of adding some “sub-themes” to refer to the decomposition of certain themes. In short, it is a question of responding step by step to the central question of my research by the process of thematic categorization. As a result, in this thematic analysis, the “schematization” constitutes the central operation of this method, namely the transposition of a given corpus into a certain number of themes which are representative of the analysed contents, and this, in relation to the research orientation (the defined problematic of the study).

In doing so, as I have already mentioned above, the *Lexis Nexis* search engine was used with *Maliweb.net* and *LeFaso.net* in order to find all news articles using the keywords “*terrorism, Jihadism, Al-Qaida, Daesh, Boko-Haram and Barkhane*”<sup>43</sup> from January 2020 to January 2021. A total of 127 online news articles from *Maliweb.net* and 92 articles from *LeFaso.net* have been examined for a period of 12 months (January 2020 - January 2021). The reason of opting for such a content analysis is threefold: to analyse the thematic framing of terrorism in West African media and also to understand the social dynamics that underpin the crisis communication strategies through media narratives in the region. The third aim is to

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<sup>43</sup> Operation *Barkhane* is a military operation carried out in the Sub-Saharan Africa by the French Army. According to French ministry of defense, *Barkhane's* aim is to fight against armed jihadist groups throughout the Sahel region. It was launched on August 2014, replacing the *Serval* and *Épervier* operations which were operating in that region before *Barkhane's* arrival. It mobilizes several thousand soldiers (officially estimated at roughly 5000 French forces) against a few hundred terrorists.

scrutinize the professionalism of online media professionals in dealing with such controversial topics.

### **5.2.1 Framing of terrorism by “Maliweb.net”**

This part of my research deals with the articles related to terrorism in West Africa published by the Malian digital media *Maliweb.net* between January, 2020 and January, 2021. These articles about terrorist attacks can be categorized into three major frames which are “Barkhane”, “Jihadism” and “FAMA<sup>44</sup>”. Accordingly, the major frames correspond to three essential labelling which are respectively: a) the exaggeration, b) the propagation horror and terror, and c) the pacification of tension. Among a plethora of 317 articles published by the journalists of *Maliweb.net*, 127 articles focus particularly on terrorist operations in Sub-Saharan African countries: Mali, Burkina Faso and Niger as well as the other states members of the Sahelo-Saharan strip<sup>45</sup>. The 190 remaining articles concern international terrorism and publications related to the government’s official announcements and press releases regarding terrorist attacks. My analysis concentrates exclusively on the 127 articles produced by the journalists of *Maliweb.net* about West African terrorism. Thereby, in the following lines, I will linger on the abovementioned labelling to foster my “schemata of interpretation”.

#### **a) The labelling of exaggeration**

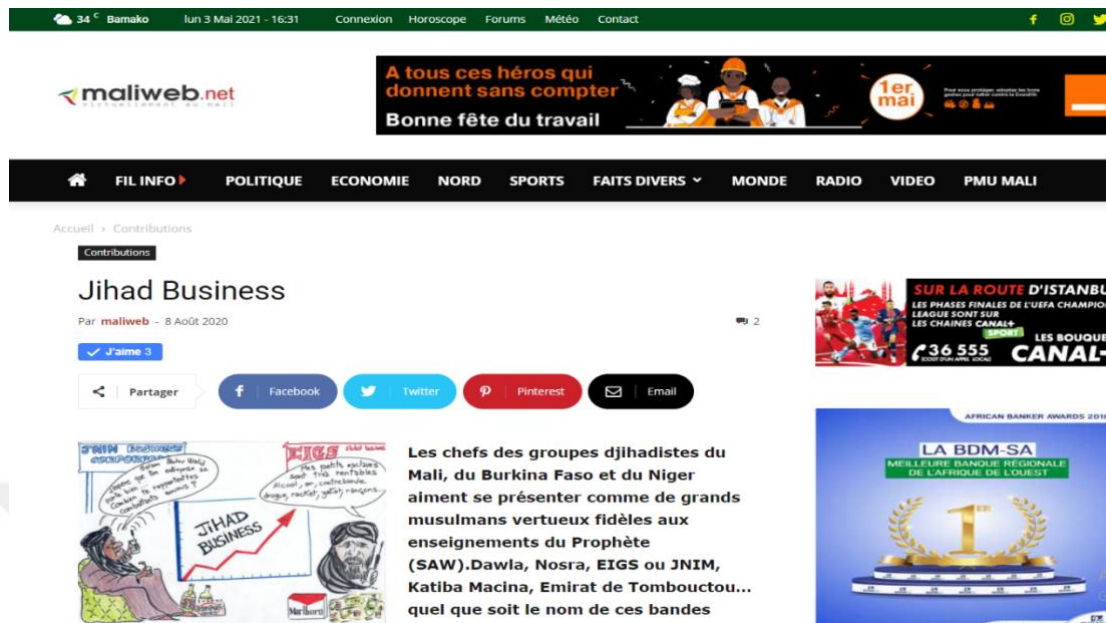
Amongst the 127 articles dealing with terrorism in West Africa, the word “Jihadism” is repeated 478 times. This can be qualified as exaggerative for the fact that the term “Jihad” itself is quite controversial and does not bear the semantic meaning attributed by Islamic theology. As I have already discussed in the section dedicated to the conceptual framework, the term “Jihad” is initially conceptualized by Muslim experts as a form of submission through effort and struggle. As a result, terrorism should not be assimilated with “Jihadism”. To illustrate this state of fact, the

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<sup>44</sup> FAMA meaning in French “*Forces Armées Maliennes*” is the acronym for Malian Armed Forces which consists of the Army, the Mali Air Force and the National Guard.

<sup>45</sup> The main countries of the Sahelo-Saharan strip are notably: Burkina Faso, Mali, Mauritania, Niger, and Chad. The Sahelo-Saharan strip brings together around 5,100 soldiers whose mission is to fight armed terrorist groups and they are supported by the armed forces of partner countries (French Barkhane Specifically and some UN forces) so that they can eradicate the terrorist threat.

Screenshot (picture 5.1) below shows the heading of an article by Maliweb.net entitled: “*Jihad Business*”<sup>46</sup>, published on August, 8, 2020.



**Picture 5.1** Heading of an article by Maliweb.net on August, 08, 2020

Moreover, the abovementioned article includes some controversial expressions and phrases such as: “*The leaders of jihadist groups in Mali, Burkina Faso and Niger like to present themselves as great virtuous Muslims*”. This is somehow a way of condoning terrorist leaders because there is no way of amalgamating terrorists’ leaders and virtuous Muslims. Similarly, in the last paragraph of the same article it is mentioned that “*Jihad is a smokescreen and invocations are an excuse*”. This definition of “Jihad” has nothing to do with the authentic one.

More interestingly, in one of the corpus articles published on October, 13, 2020, the columnist talks about “*the clutches of ruthless and bloodthirsty Jihadists*”<sup>47</sup>; a phrase which sounds like a combination of both hyperbole and oxymoron. In fact, the terms “*clutches, ruthless and bloodthirsty*” constitute a sort of exaggeration while the word “*Jihadists*” appears to be a mere contradiction if we refer to its semantic and authentic meaning. Likewise, the same conceptual maladroitness reappeared in an article published on November, 25, 2020; talking about “*a sympathizer of the Islamic*

<sup>46</sup> Heading of an article published by Maliweb.net on August, 08, 2020 - Online access link: <https://www.maliweb.net/contributions/jihad-business-2889041.html>

<sup>47</sup> Maliweb, October, 13, 2020 – Online access link: <https://www.maliweb.net/non-classe/groupes-dopposants-armes-jihad-et-si-mariam-petronin-avait-raison-2899485.html>

*State*". If the word *sympathizer* in itself is problematical a priori, one must also question the concept of *Islamic State* which is not appropriate because it reinforces the thesis defended by the terrorists. The last paragraph of the same article<sup>48</sup> complicates the narration with another "hyperbolic oxymoron" through the use the expression "*major jihadist extremist attacks*". Obviously, these kinds of conceptual confusions can be labelled as a sort of condoning terrorism, and thence, a way of propagating horror and terror because the information may divide the public opinion about the actual facts. This leads me to discuss the next major labelling of *Maliweb.net* which is the propagation horror and terror.

## **b) The propagation horror and terror**

Etymologically the terms *horror* and *terror* are associated with the "feeling of fear or dread" and, accordingly, the term terrorism itself derived from *terrorem* (terror). From this definition, it is possible to understand that the fact of arousing terror into the population is a form of terrorism. Hence, media workers should pay more attention to this aspect while using some terrifying words or images while framing terrorism. As an illustration, *Maliweb.net* stated in one of their articles published on February, 28, 2020 that "*terrorists (...) cut throats and hands and inject their evil ideology ...*" In this same article, the journalist depicts terrorism as "*a real ideology with a real hypnotic power*"; qualifying violent extremism as "*a safe cancer which quite easily manages to metastasize vast swathes of territories in the Sahel*". These terminologies do not make things easier for the readers (the audience) because anybody who comes across such depictions of terrorism will be definitely frightened; especially when the audience is in majority the local population who are directly concerned about terrorists' extortions.

Additionally, *Maliweb.net* tends to commit a sort of "hara-kiri"<sup>49</sup> when it published an article entitled: "*Terrorism in the Sahel and beyond: An unconscious complicity*"

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<sup>48</sup> Maliweb: article published on November, 25, 2020 – Online access link: <https://www.maliweb.net/international/lassaillante-suisse-etait-apparue-dans-une-enquete-sur-le-jihadisme-2905794.html>

<sup>49</sup> Hara-kiri is a Japanese ritual suicide which consists in cutting one's own stomach with a sword. It was formerly practiced in Japan by samurai as an honorable alternative to executions. I used this term here to point the fact that *Maliweb*'s journalists are tackling their own maladroitness.

of the media is to be denounced”<sup>50</sup>. This article deals specifically with the role of media professionals in a context of terrorism. The Picture 5.2 (screenshot) below gives more visual details about this article.

## Le terrorisme au Sahel et au-delà : Une complicité inconsciente des médias est à dénoncer

Par Inf@sept - 28 Fév 2020

2

J'aime 5

Partager

Facebook

Twitter

Pinterest

Email



**Le sommet du G5 Sahel tenu mardi dernier a prouvé une fois de plus que la lutte contre le terrorisme est loin d'être gagnée. Il a été unanimement reconnu que les efforts dans l'opérationnalisation de la force conjointe doivent s'intensifier tout en**

**Picture 5.2 Article on Maliweb about the role of media professionals in a context of terrorism**

Likewise, there is an avalanche of portrayals of horror and terror, controversial the ones as the others, as evidenced by the use of the following popular adage in an article: *“When you can do nothing against the thief, you must even help him to take away the goods that he has just stolen from you”* (Maliweb.net - February, 24, 2020). This clumsiness is reinforced by phrases such as *“a fight lost in advance by IBK [Ibrahim Boubacar Keita, the name of Mali former president]”* (November, 26, 2020); or even *“Such is the sad record ...”* (September, 7, 2020); *“the Jihadists seem to have not buried their hatchet”*. This way of giving news fosters horror and, de facto, nurtures terror into the population. That is why the social responsibility of journalists is sometimes to necessarily try to pacify the situation even if it is complex. This leads me to discuss, in the following lines, the notion of “solution journalism” alongside with the pacification labelling in *Maliweb.net*.

<sup>50</sup>Maliweb: article about the role of media professionals in a context of terrorism - Online Access link: <https://www.maliweb.net/insecurite/le-terrorisme-au-sahel-et-au-dela-an-unconscious-complicit-in-the-media-is-to-denounce-2861252.html>

### c) The pacification of tension

“Solutions journalism”<sup>51</sup> is a concept coined by the professor Pauline Amiel in 2017. For the researcher, it is a sort of news reporting approach which concentrates on the responses to social issues as well as the societal phenomena. It consists of presenting tangible solutions to the perceived problems, and seeing how and why these solutions work. Consequently, in a crisis context such as the framing of news about terrorism, media professionals should consider “solutions journalism” as a central part of their social responsibility.

Although the journalists of *Maliweb.net* do not apply “solutions journalism” while reporting terrorist attacks, it is possible however to identify few attempts of “tension pacification” labelling in some of their articles produced between January, 2020 and January, 2021. As a matter of fact, one of the corpus articles (published on February, 28, 2020)<sup>52</sup> attempts to give hope to the population through smooth terms such as “*reassure the populations*”, or talking about the operations of military services they qualify them as “*extremely meticulous and rigorous intelligence work*”. This way of covering the terrorism-related news is highly recommended because it somehow corresponds to a form of “solutions journalism”. The same form of journalistic work reappeared in an article published on November, 10, 2020 entitled “*Barkhane participates in the support of the inhabitants of Farabougou*”. Put it differently, another article written and published on June 15, 2020 headed: “*After Droukdel's death, the end of terrorism*”<sup>53</sup>. The picture 5.3 (screenshot) below is a concrete illustration.

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<sup>51</sup> Pauline Amiel, “Solutions journalism. A solution to the local press crisis?”; Communication. Media Information Practical Theories, vol.34/2, July 6, 2017 (ISSN 1189-3788, DOI 10.4000/communication.7226 - Online Access link: <https://journals.openedition.org/communication/7226>

<sup>52</sup>Maliweb: article published on February, 28, 2020 – Online access link: <https://www.maliweb.net/communique/actualitec-de-la-force-barkhane-du-21-au-27-fevrier-2020-2861407.html>

<sup>53</sup>Maliweb: article published on June, 15, 2020 – Online access link: <https://www.maliweb.net/contributions/apres-la-mort-de-droukdel-en-finir-avec-le-terrorisme-2879891.html>.

Abdelmalek *Droukdel*, the leader of al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (Aqmi), was killed in June 2020 during an operation carried out by French forces in northern Mali. He was killed in Talhandak, along



# Après la mort de Droukdel, en finir avec le terrorisme

Par maliweb - 15 juin 2020

0

J'aime 14



Partager



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De nombreux rapports concordent sur un point : c'est aux frontières du Mali et du Burkina Faso désormais que les terroristes concentrent leurs méfaits. Pour cette raison, le rôle des FDS burkinabè dans la lutte contre les organisations djihadistes qui sévissent dans la région, le JNIM ou l'EIGS principalement, est central aux côtés des FAMA. En effet, en raison de la

**Picture 5.3 Article published on November, 10, 2020 by Maliweb.net**

Five months later, the same echo resounds in a different article published on December, 9, 2020 entitled: *“Impact of Terrorism to Decline in Africa”*. But, before the abovementioned article, Maliweb.net has already published a similar heading on February, 24, 2020: *“The rise of the Defence and Security Forces”*. Hence, this way of media coverage responds to the exigence of the “solutions journalism” approach. This is an approach which calls for the social responsibility of journalists as I mentioned earlier. In the following chapter, I will analyse the depiction of terrorism in the Burkinabe Online media *LeFaso.net*.

## 5.2.2 Framing of terrorism by “LeFaso.net”

This part of my research deals with the articles related to terrorism in West Africa published by the Burkinabe digital media *LeFaso.net* between January, 2020 and January, 2021. A total of 129 published articles related to terrorism have been listed; but only 92 articles written by the journalists of *LeFaso.net* deals precisely with the context of Burkina Faso and West Africa. Therefore, my analysis focuses exclusively on these 92 articles. It is possible to divide these articles dealing with terrorist attacks

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the Algerian border with Mali. Born in the early 1970s near Algiers, *Droukdel* has reigned for around 15 years over many Salafist jihadist groups in North Africa and the Sahel.



in Burkina Faso and West Africa into three main categories: “terrorism”, “Jihadism” and “FDS”<sup>54</sup>. Consequently, the mentioned categories can be split into three various schemata of interpretation. These are namely a) the labelling of “Patriotic journalism”, b) the labelling of neutrality and partiality, and finally c) the labelling of visual symbolism.

#### **a) Patriotic journalism labelling**

Patriotic journalism is a practice of journalism which deviates from the objective or neutral ideal of journalism. It is therefore related to what Ginosar and Cohen (2017) considered in their research<sup>55</sup> as “our news” or “our war” mode of coverage. Basically, patriotic journalism can be labelled with two significant indicators which are namely: emotional depictions and bravery. Thus, among the 92 analysed articles, there are more opinion articles and thematic framings than factual news. These articles consist of emotional statements, opinion columns, interviews, analysis and reports. These articles are characterized by messages of compassion towards the population and the headlines were intentionally articulated to encourage the soldiers.

In other words, the journalists of *LeFaso.net* praise the bravery of the army as well as the elegy of the victims, calling for social cohesion, unity of action around the government to face terrorism. In doing so, on April 16, 2020, the headline of *LeFaso.net* was articulated as it follows: “*What if ridicule could kill the terrorists of Mali and Burkina?*”<sup>56</sup> This heading was illustrated with a picture of two terrorist leaders. The picture 5.4 (screenshot) below gives more details.

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<sup>54</sup> FDS is an acronym in French which stands for: *Forces de Défense et de Sécurité*; meaning Burkina Faso Armed Forces for Security. The FDS include the army, the air forces, the national police and gendarmerie, the national fire brigade, and the central group of armies.

<sup>55</sup> For more information, see Avshalom Ginosar, Inbar Cohen (2017). Patriotic journalism: An appeal to emotion and cognition - May 25, 2017; Research Article. Online Access link: <https://doi.org/10.1177/1750635217710678>

<sup>56</sup> The headline of *LeFaso.net* published on April 16, 2020 – Online access link: <https://lefaso.net/spip.php?article96232>

## Et si le ridicule pouvait tuer les terroristes du Mali et du Burkina... ?

Accueil > Actualités > DOSSIERS > Attaques terroristes • • jeudi 16 avril 2020 à 16h02min

👍 J'aime 0



**Picture 5.4 Heading of LeFaso.net on April, 16, 2020**

Furthermore, on March 10, 2020, in an article entitled *“Insecurity: 70 terrorists incapacitated”*, the journalist argued that *“the forces of evil had the misfortune to come across a team of the gendarmerie on patrol”*. This way of portraying the facts is all about patriotism. A month later (May, 16, 2020), another article titled *“Terrorists neutralized in Sebba: The MPP applauds the bravery of the FDS”*<sup>57</sup> reported the compliments made by the political authorities (MPP) towards the national army (FDS). Five days later, on May 21, 2020, another article praises the work of “the boys”, the soldiers, with such terms: *“Good harvest for the Defence and Security Forces engaged in the fight against terrorism”*. Such depictions are quite frequent in *LeFaso.net* because in different columns it is possible to read sentences such as *“the boys administered a bitter correction to the madmen of God”*. The “boys” here refers to the armed forces and terrorists are qualified as the *“madmen of God”*; also *“70 terrorists received their visas to hell”* is quite a way of overstating the killing of terrorists with a literary mixture of irony, oxymoron and hyperbole.

Thence, as I mentioned above, patriotic journalism in crisis context may consist in praising the bravery of armed forces. In *LeFaso.net*, we have a perfect illustration with sentences such as: the soldiers *“succeed in thwarting the macabre and Machiavellian plans of the enemy”*. Or even, they *“surprise them and inflict heavy*

<sup>57</sup> The headline of *LeFaso.net* published on May 16, 2020 – Online access link <https://lefaso.net/spip.php?article96876>

*defeats on them during a confrontation*”. Also, one of the articles concluded with the following terms: *“This is how hundreds of terrorists have been neutralized across the country by the brave FDS who go out of their way to protect the Burkinabe and defend the country's territorial integrity”*. In this manner, the labelling of patriotic journalism is quite perceptible in the aforementioned depictions.

As a result, it is possible to say that when journalism is combined with patriotism, it is difficult to be neutral and impartial. Therefore, in the following chapter, I will discuss the concepts of neutrality and partiality in *LeFaso.net*.

## **b) Neutrality and partiality**

To be impartial means to limit as much as possible the biases of subjectivity, that is to say, to avoid as much as possible any preference and bias, in particular of an ideological, political, economic, social, racial or cultural nature, in relation with the facts (Cornu, 1994). Put it differently, the Swiss researcher Daniel Cornu argues that:

Impartiality is not simple neutrality, which consists of never deciding. It does not prohibit taking sides. It commands that we judge without bias. In doing so, impartiality allows journalists to relate facts without taking sides, to report the facts, just the facts. In consequence, journalists should avoid both in their professional and personal life, any behaviour, engagement, function or task which could distract them from their duty of independence and integrity<sup>58</sup>.

This supposes that the journalist tracks down his own prejudices, fears, desires, beliefs, etc. in short, his own emotions, during his journalistic activities. It is the distance that a journalist takes from the facts that will determine his credibility and success in the profession. Impartiality is often difficult to respect, as everyone's ego and subjectivity want to express themselves (Freud, 1919). It is this ability to tame this ego that will allow media professionals to fully play their role as journalists, and consider journalism as a profession governed by deontological rules. This is what also differentiates them from the ordinary citizens who would flaunt everything that goes through their minds in front of the world, on social networks. As a result, critical distance is akin to the notion of impartiality. It is the distance that one would place between a researcher and his work, between a journalist and the facts that he relates.

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<sup>58</sup> Daniel Cornu (1994). *Journalisme et vérité: Pour une éthique de l'information* (English : Journalism and Truth). Edition Labor et fides, Geneva, Switzerland, January, 1, 1994.

In *LeFaso.net*, the excessive use of adjectives while practising patriotic journalism can be considered as an absence of neutrality. Concretely, there are several adjectives repeatedly used such as “*unfortunately*”, “*brave FDS*”, “*heavy defeats*”, “*macabre and Machiavellian plans*”, etc. Likewise, the fact of stating that the armed forces “*neutralized several terrorists*”, without specifying an approximate number, is a kind of subjectivity in terms of facts and comments. As wrote Simon Rogers, “comments are free but facts are sacred” (2011). The concept of neutrality, partiality and subjectivity can also be seen through the intentional use of visual symbolism. This labelling will be discussed in the next lines.

### c) **Visual symbolism**

In journalism, visual symbolism can be defined as the set of informational techniques based on images, graphics, diagrams, figures, in short, visual illustrations. The primary purpose of visual symbolism is to convey (visually) specific information to the readers. Depending on the situation, visual symbols can be used to grab the attention of the audience by creating sensational news, seducing the readers, terrifying or motivating them, etc. However, broadly defined, in visual communication journalistic framing encompasses the fact of presenting visual elements exclusively related to the topic through intentional arrangements so that it will bear specific connotations (Kimberly, 2008). Discussing the process of media framing and the use of visual symbolism, the researcher Robert Entman argued that “*the words and images that make up the frame can be distinguished from the rest of the news by their capacity of stimulating positively or negatively (objectively or subjectively) different sides in a political conflict*” (2003; pp. 417). Accordingly, this consists in keeping the readers’ attention on the outlined subject.

In the context of the current study, a visual symbol can be understood as a visual distinctive sign, an explicit observable mark, or a specific image or colour that labels a fabricated opinion, a constructed idea. Therefore, visual symbols tend to urge media audiences to comprehend or interpret a topic in a particular manner, in a strategic way; by going beyond the facts and fostering new interpretations. In consequence, there are many uses of visuals by journalists of *LeFaso.net*. For example, in an article entitled “*Fight against terrorism: More than twenty terrorists*

*neutralized, material recovered*”<sup>59</sup>, published on September 29, 2020, the illustrative picture was full of symbolic meaning of military steadfastness. See the picture 4.5 (screenshot) below.

### Lutte contre le terrorisme : Plus de vingt terroristes neutralisés, du matériel récupéré

Accueil > Actualités > DOSSIERS > Attaques terroristes • LEFASO.NET - Photo d'illustration • mardi, 29 septembre 2020 à 00h24min

J'aime 0



#### ARTICLES DE LA MÊME RUBRIQUE

Mali : Environ 300 militaires de Barkhane mobilisés pour sécuriser un convoi de ravitaillement dans le nord  
5 Réactions

**Picture 5.5 The illustrative image of an article of LeFaso.net published on September 29, 2020**

Once again, one of the articles published the following weeks, on October 26, 2020, played sensationally on the visual symbolism by associating the images of soldiers in battle position to give news about the reopening of classrooms in a war zone. The screenshot (Picture 5.6) below is a concrete illustration.

<sup>59</sup>Article of *LeFaso.net* published on September, 29, 2020 - Online Access link: <https://lefaso.net/spip.php?article99586>

## Sécurité au Burkina : Les forces armées ont permis la réouverture des classes dans des localités du Centre-Nord

Accueil > Actualités > DOSSIERS > Attaques terroristes • LEFASO.NET • lundi, 26 octobre 2020 à 22h15min

J'aime 0



### ARTICLES DE LA MÊME RUBRIQUE

Mali : Environ 300 militaires de la Force Barkhane mobilisés pour sécuriser un convoi de ravitaillement dans le nord  
5 Réactions

Activate Window  
Go to Settings to activate

**Picture 5.6 The illustrative image of an article dealing with the reopening of classrooms**

Therefore, we can see that there is a discrepancy between the article which deals with the reopening of classrooms and the picture which shows the militaries in battle position. Similarly, in May 21, 2020, the visual elements (see picture 5.7 below) are commented with an intertitle articulated as the following: “*Good harvest for the Defence and Security Forces engaged in the fight against terrorism*”<sup>60</sup>.

<sup>60</sup> LeFaso.net - May 21, 2020 - Online access link: <https://lefaso.net/spip.php?article96951>






**Bonne moisson pour les Forces de Défense et de sécurité engagées sur le front de la lutte contre le terrorisme.**

**Picture 5.7 The illustrative image of an article published on May 21, 2020**

There are also several visual elements which show the theatre of operations, the devices put in place by military forces (both Barkhane and FDS) to counter the enemy. For instance, the picture 5.8 below is a concrete illustration. In doing so, media professionals offer strong emotional news to their readers.

**Terrorisme : la force Barkhane met la pression sur les groupes armés terroristes dans le Liptako**

Accueil > Actualités > DOSSIERS > Attaques terroristes • LEFASO.NET • samedi, 19 septembre 2020 à 00h28min [J'aime 0](#)



LEFASO TV  
Francis Ducreux, régisseur

ARTICLES DE LA MÊME RUBRIQUE

Mali : Environ 300 m  
Barkhane mobilisés  
convoy de ravitaillem  
5 Réactions

**Picture 5.8 The illustrative image of an article published on September 19, 2020**

To sum up, the various schemata of interpretation helped understanding the conflictual relations between media and terrorism in Sub-Saharan Africa, especially in Mali and Burkina Faso. Consequently, it is possible to affirm that difficulties of several kinds hamper journalistic works in the context of terrorism in West Africa. In fact, the deciphering of the major frames and the corresponding essential labelling – the exaggeration, the propagation horror and terror, and the pacification of tension – leads me to demonstrate that the West African media serve, to some extent, as channels for terrorist messages’ propaganda. Also, through the analysis of patriotic journalism labelling, the labelling of neutrality and partiality, as well as the labelling of visual symbolism, I can argue that the processing of information in West African digital media did not respect the ethical and deontological principles of journalism. In order to check whether the processing of information via both traditional media and social media platforms respects the ethical and professional rules of journalists, it is better go through an analysis and interpretation of my online surveyed data.

### **5.3 Analysis and interpretation of interviews and surveyed data**

In this section of my research, the data collected from the interviews and the online questionnaire will be interpreted and analysed following the criteria of rigor and “scientificity” that apply in each of them. This supposes the use of techniques appropriate to each of the qualitative and quantitative methods, which is the sequential mixed method (Creswell, 2009). Nonetheless, the quality of the entire process is based on the qualitative method considerations. This means that both the interviews and the online survey (with open-ended questions) provided essentially qualitative data.

#### **5.3.1 Interviews data**

Regarding the interviews’ data, which have been collected essentially from the media regulatory institutions’ representatives, it is worth mentioning that I approached two West African media bodies in line with my research corpus: the Superior Council of Communication (CSC) in Burkina Faso and the High Authority of Communication (HAC) in Mali. In doing so, the questions were semi-structured, which means that all the questions were not asked to the interviewees in a chronological order as it is structured on the interview guide attached in the appendix. In concreto, some questions have been rephrased, skipped, or asked in a different order; depending on



the answers provided by the interlocutors. Also, depending on how the discussions evolved or progressed, some probing questions (not mentioned in the interview guide) have been used accordingly. The consents of all the interlocutors have been got before starting to record the interviews. They were also informed that the conversations would be stored, transcribed, treated and used only for academic purpose.

As a result, in this part of the investigations both the Superior Council of Communication's representatives and the High Authority of Communication's representatives avowed that there were no deliberate interpositions relating to the processing of information on terrorist attacks between January 2020 and January 2021. However, in Burkina Faso, there were two exceptional cases falling within the general coverage of terrorist issue, or more specifically, of inter-community conflicts. More interestingly, some media published sensational news on their social media pages, especially on Facebook, that the regulatory bodies considered violating the ethical principles. Hence, traditional media's social media accounts have offered new strategies to democratize information in West Africa, by providing an easy way of disseminating news related to terrorist attacks. Yet, this process of disseminating information through social networks is an opportunity offered to the public, the digital citizens, in order to facilitate their access to information about terrorism. The analysis of the surveyed data collected from 98 respondents from Mali and Burkina Faso will give more details about the digital prosumers' behaviours towards counterfeits information related to terrorism in West African context.

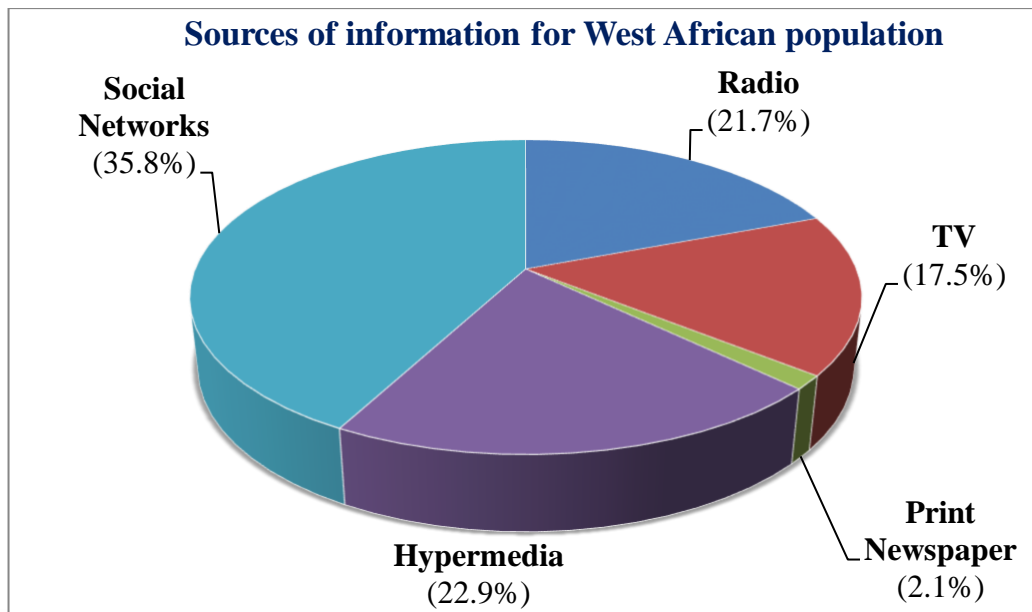
### **5.3.2 Survey data analysis**

During my investigations about the fake news related to terrorism in West African context, I have used an online questionnaire, with open-ended questions, which has been sent to the research population in Mali and Burkina Faso via WhatsApp groups and Facebook essentially. Given the fact the questionnaire is composed in its vast majority of open-ended questions, the data obtained are essentially qualitative. Thus, this part of my work consists of analysis and interpretations of these surveyed data.

In fact, the online survey was conducted in order to comprehend the "social media natives", the "digital prosumers", or even the "digital citizens" behaviours towards counterfeits information related to terrorism in West African context. Also, it aimed

to investigate and establish a nexus between crisis communication, media framing and the advent of social media prevalence in Sub-Saharan Africa. Concretely, the online survey took approximately three months (from February, 15<sup>th</sup> to May 25<sup>th</sup>, 2021) to be filled in by respondents from Mali and Burkina Faso. During this period of time, 98 respondents from the abovementioned countries have filled it in. Indeed, given the fact that it is primordially a qualitative research, the number of respondents does not matter. According to some sociologists such as Stoetzel (1980), Creswell (2009), Balima and Duchenne (2005), at least a number of 50 respondents is sufficient enough for qualitative researches; especially when the survey is constituted of open-ended questions.

Hence, this part of my analysis concentrates on the data gathered from 98 West African populations; from different education backgrounds, and diverse domains of activities. This provided, *ceteris paribus*, pertinent research data for scientific extrapolation because the population is highly representative of the phenomenon under study. Thereby, the implied analyses and interpretations attempt to understand first and foremost the impact of social media platforms on the framing of terrorism in Sub-Saharan Africa. Therefore, when asked to know through which channels did the public learn about the first terrorist attack in Mali and/or in Burkina Faso, social networks are mentioned in first position. As it is illustratively mentioned in the graphic below (*figure 5.4*), social media platforms constitute the main sources of information for West African citizens between January 2020 and January 2021.



**Figure 5.4 Social media platforms constitute the main sources of information of West African population to get news related to terrorist attacks, (May, 2021)**

As it is perceptible in the pie-chart above, beside the social media platforms (35.8%), the hypermedia<sup>61</sup> platforms represent the second major sources of information for West African populations with 22.9% of respondents. And only 17.5% of digital citizens learnt about the first terrorist attack through television channels. Basically, it means that the vast majority (58.7%) has been informed about the first terrorist attack through the internet sources. This can be justified by the fact that the advent of the Internet which gave birth to hypermedia generates a sort of fragmentation of audiences. Hence, each type of media (social, traditional or digital) holds a small part of audience. Notwithstanding, the rise of Internet with its corollary platforms of social media and hypermedia tends to oust the popularity of print newspaper in West Africa with only 2.1% of the audience.

With social networks and hypermedia platforms, West African citizens participate more in the life of their society. Indeed, on Facebook, WhatsApp, Instagram, Twitter, TikTok and other social media platforms, digital citizens disseminate information on the atrocities of terrorism, and give their opinions on information related to the security of the populations and public affairs. Thus, West African Internet users voice their opinions and suggestions for possible solutions, but also react to the

<sup>61</sup> Hypermedia brings together the new media born thanks to media convergence (online media, web radio, web TV, YouTube Channels, etc.) which includes sound, video, plain texts, graphics, and hyperlinks; reinforced by the birth of social media and other multimedia contents.

actions of those in power. Accordingly, they often manage to influence certain high-level decisions. In Burkina Faso and Mali for example, after the recurrent terrorist attacks which have grown in proportions in the recent years, Internet users have always drawn the attention of the population to the need of peace and social cohesion. As a result, these different reactions on the web push the West African decision-makers to take appropriate decisions for the security of their territories.

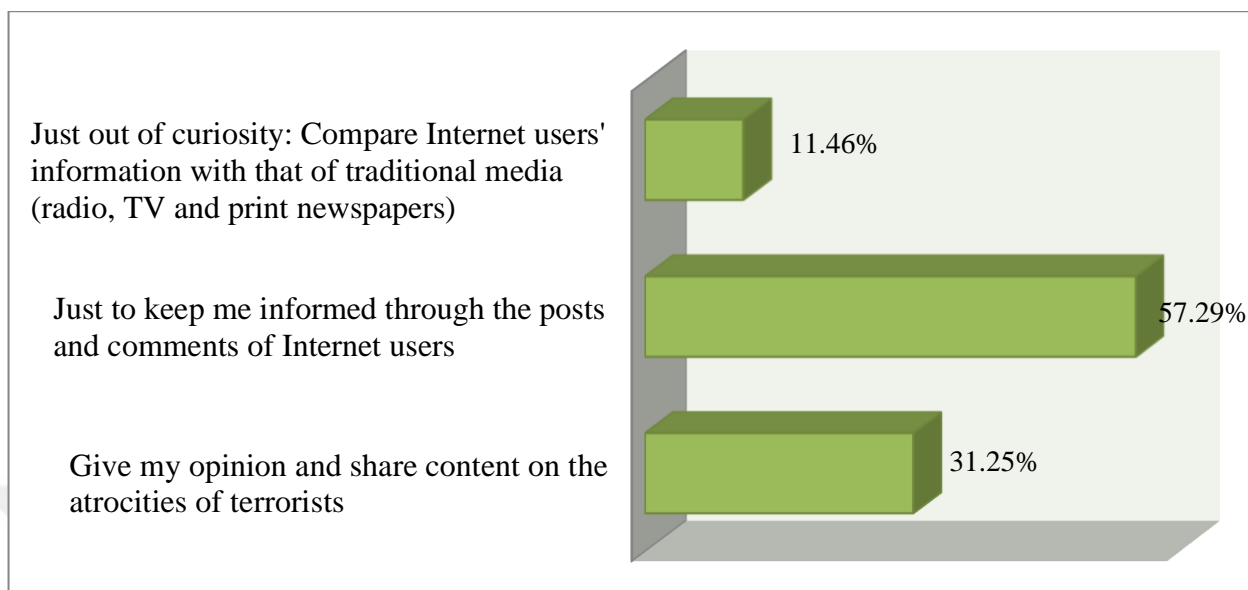
Moreover, it is possible to say that West African new media (hypermedia and social networks) have participated in an awakening of citizens on the security management, especially in Mali and Burkina Faso. In these two West African countries specifically, terrorism is well argued and condemned by Internet users both on their social network accounts and on the discussions fora offered by the online media (blogs- official websites, social media pages, Web-radio, Web-TV, etc.). This participation in the debate about terrorism is decisive both for governmental actions and for raising the awareness of populations in order to face the danger posed by terrorism. In fine, West African digital citizens offer good projections for the development of States. Certainly, with their participation increased tenfold thanks to social media and hypermedia, the governors have a pressure which obliges them to observe a minimum of seriousness to fight effectively against the scourge of terrorism. But what motive West African population to overuse social media in a context of terrorism? This is what I will discuss in the next following paragraphs.

#### **5.3.2.1 The necessity of using social media after terrorists attacks**

In the following lines, my analysis concentrated on what preoccupied West African people, especially in French speaking countries like Mali and Burkina Faso, to resort to social media when it comes to getting information about terrorism. The question asked in the online survey was formulated as the following: *What do you do on social media after a terrorist attack?* And to this question, the respondents have three open-for-comments options which are respectively:

- 1) Give my opinion and share contents on the atrocities of terrorists;*
- 2) Just to keep me informed through the posts and comments of Internet users;*
- 3) Just out of curiosity: to compare Internet users' information with that of traditional media (radio, TV and print newspapers) (see appendix for more details*

about the survey questions). Thereby, West African people's motivations for social media use after terrorist attacks can be visually read in the graph (*figure 5.5*) below.

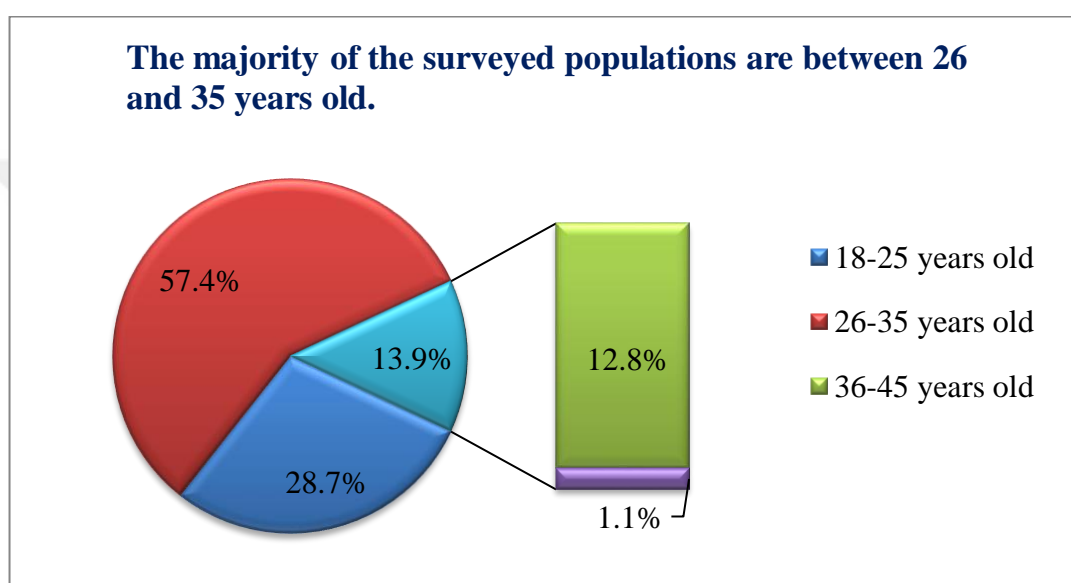


**Figure 5.5 The Motivations for social media after terrorist attacks in West Africa, (May,2021)**

As we can see in the graph (*figure 5.5*) above, the vast majority of West African digital citizens (57.29%) use social media platforms just to get information about terrorist attacks. This implies that they do not pay attention to the veracity of information circulation on social media. According to the Social Mediated Crisis Communication (SMCC) model developed by Lucinda Austin and al. in 2017, this corresponds to the “*inactive members*”. As a matter of fact, just 11.46% of them use to compare Internet users' posts and comments with the information published by West African traditional media. These are the “*followers*” when it comes to the SMCC categorization. And accordingly, those who use to share posts and comments on social media platforms represent 31.25% of the surveyed population. This last category can be considered as the “*influentials*”.

Similarly, the excessive use of the internet sources, especially social networks, to get access to the news about terrorism can be justified by the fact that the majority of the surveyed West African populations are relatively young. Therefore, most of them belong to the last generation of digital natives which turns out to be called “digital

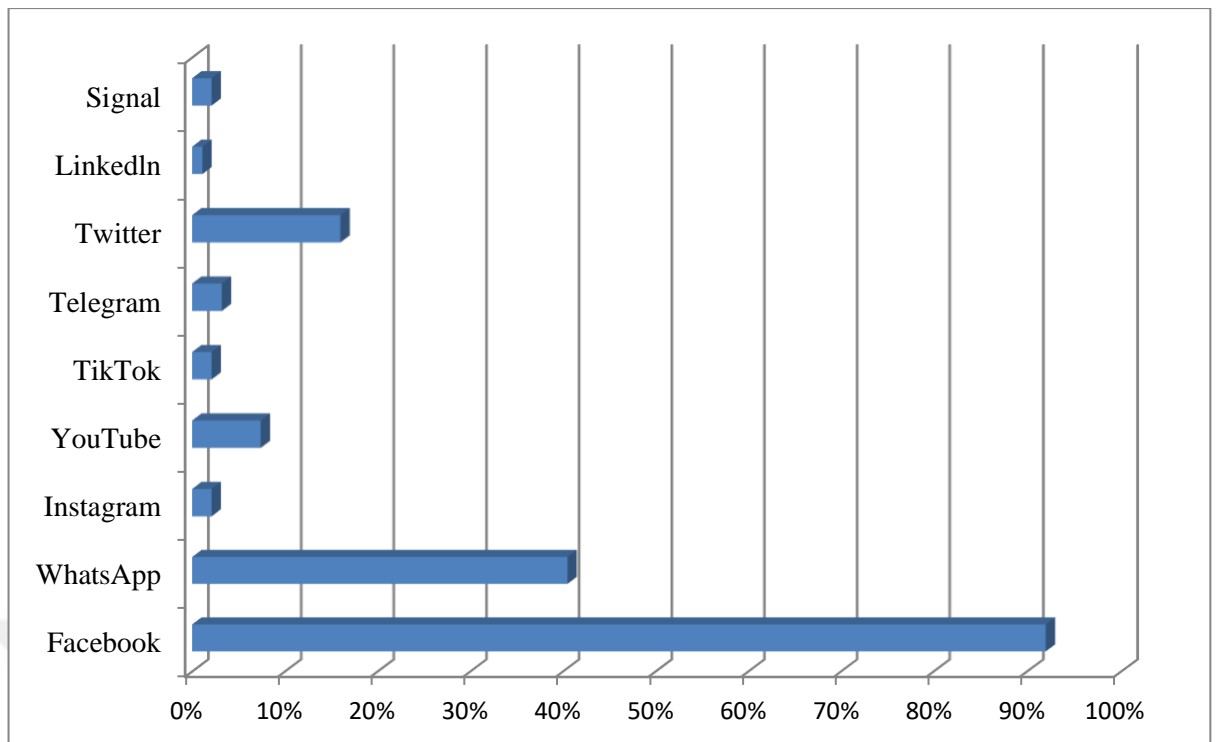
prosumers”<sup>62</sup> or even digital citizens because their lives are fundamentally linked to the use of the services provided by the new technologies of information and communication. More concretely, 57.4% of my corpus is constituted of young West Africans, whose ages vary between 26 and 35 years old; while 28.7% of them are between 18 and 25 years old; 12.8% between 35 and 45 years old; and only 1.1% beyond 45 years old. And most importantly, most of them are students (52.1%), civil servants (30.2%) or contractors (17.7%) with high educational backgrounds. See the graph (*figure 5.6*) below for more details.



**Figure 5.6** Ages groups of surveyed West African digital citizens (May, 2021)

Additionally, in Mali and Burkina Faso, the majority of the surveyed population encounter most often information about terrorism on Facebook and WhatsApp groups. Besides, Twitter is the third platforms on which the surveyed digital citizens encounter the most terrorism-related news. The following question has been asked: *On which social media platform do you see the most terrorism-related publications?* (See appendix for more details about the options of answers). The graph (*figure 5.7*) below gives descriptive information about this issue.

<sup>62</sup>For more details about the concept of “digital prosumers”, see Ritzer & Jurgenson (2009). The Age of the digital “prosumer”. *J.Cons. Cult.* PP.163-196.



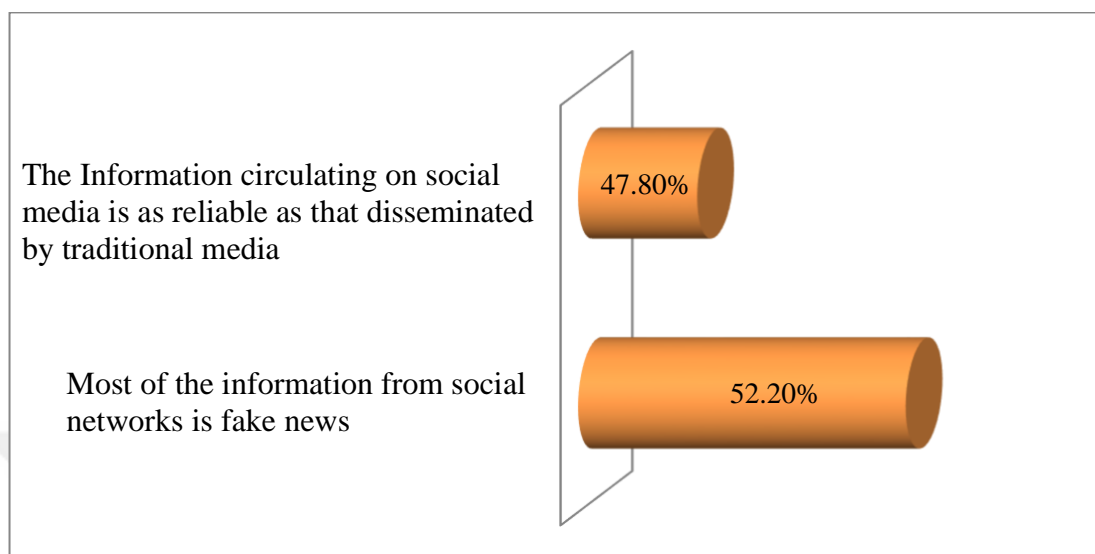
**Figure 5.7 Facebook is the prime social media platform for terrorist news' propagation in West Africa (May, 2021)**

Thus, the excessive use of the Internet sources for information is fraught with many drawbacks. In terms of information relating to terrorism especially, there are several unreliable sources of propaganda. Many web sites and social networks are specialized in disseminating all types of fake news: misinformation, disinformation, satire news and rumours (Ouedraogo, 2020). It is therefore important to inculcate West African digital citizens – particularly in Social Media Literacy (SML) – to be able to recognize reliable sources and fake news related to terrorism.

### **5.3.2.2 Assessment of information on terrorism circulating in social networks**

According to many of the West African surveyed populations, the contents of social networks help them to have more information on terrorist exactions. To do this, they prefer getting information via social networks than through traditional media (TV channels, radio stations, print newspapers). Although social networks sometimes propagate terrorism in the African Sahel, some populations claim that social networks are reliable sources for information on terrorism. Concretely, 52.2% of them admit that the information relating to terrorism is controversial; and subsequently, most of the news about terrorism circulating on social media is likely to be misleading. Conversely, 47.8% of the surveyed populations find it difficult to

recognize that most of the information coming from social networks can be propaganda, rumours, parodies or disinformation. The graph (*figure 5.8*) below put it visually decipherable.

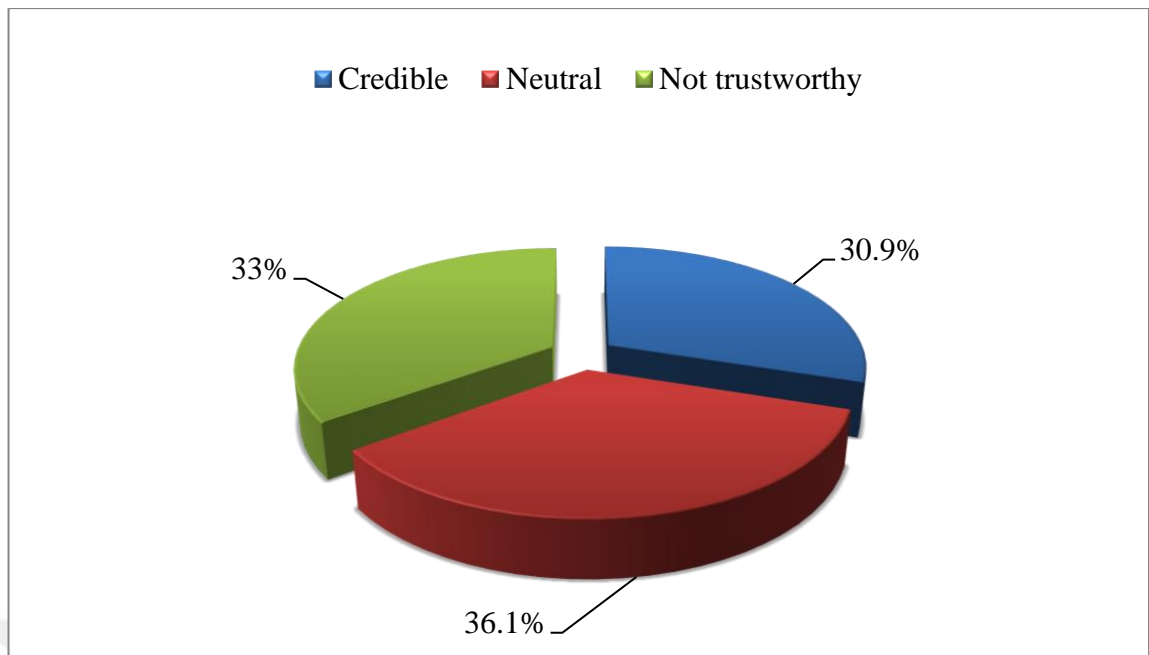


**Figure 5.8 Appreciation of social mediated terrorism-related news (May, 2021)**

In addition, the massive flow of social networks' contents, along with their global aspects, does not allow adequate control and contents regulation; except those that are linked to traditional media groups. In fact, West African media regulatory institutions do not have the legal competence to regulate the information on the social media platforms. This gives free rein to the spread of all kinds of fake news on sensitive topics such as terrorism. The excessive use of social media can furthermore lead to addiction and prevent some people from developing critical minds by verifying information with that of traditional media.

Furthermore, when it comes to the veracity of "social mediated terrorism-related news", 67.1% of the West African surveyed population think that the information is either trustworthy or neutral. The following question has been asked: *How do you assess the information related to terrorism posted on social networks?* The pie-chart (*figure 5.9*) below illustrates it descriptively.

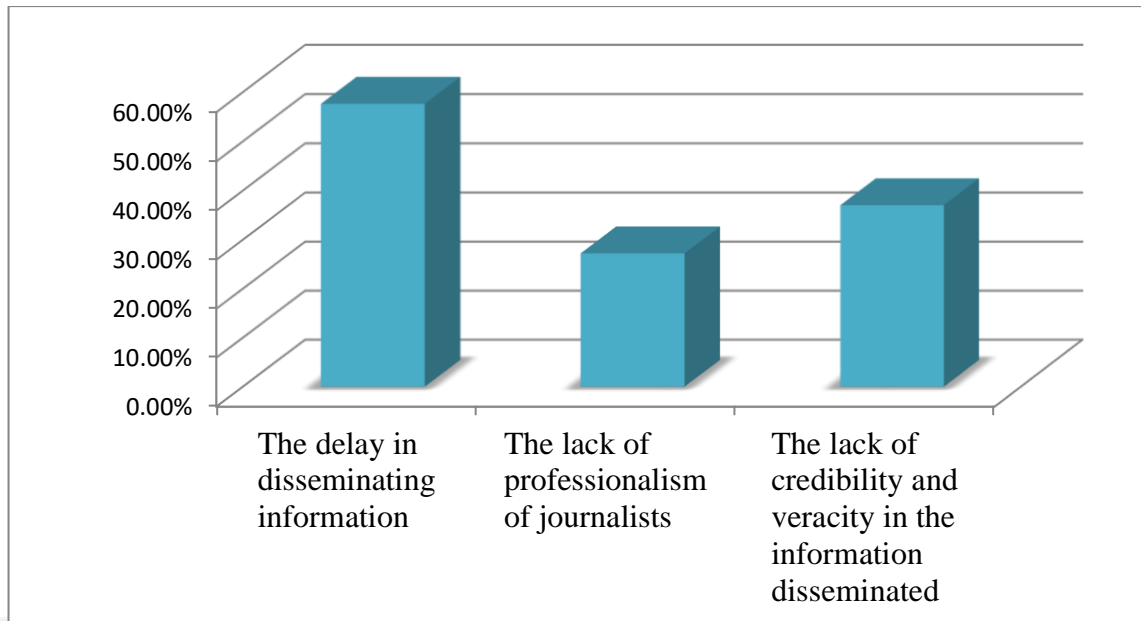




**Figure 5.9 Opinions about the veracity of terrorism-related information on Social media (May, 2021)**

As we can see on the figure 5.9 above, only 33% of the surveyed population state that terrorism-related information flowing on Social media platforms is not trustworthy. For 36.1% of them, the social mediated information on terrorism is neutral; while 30.9% consider this information to be credible. As a result, it is not exaggerating to say that the vast majority of West African digital citizens may not possess social media literacy (SML).

Moreover, the overuse of social media instead of traditional media by West African population to get access to news about terrorism can be justified by the fact that traditional media are somehow reproached for a) the delay in disseminating information, b) the lack of professionalism of journalists, and c) the lack of credibility and veracity in the information disseminated. In my investigative survey, the question asked to the population is articulated as the following: *What don't you like about terrorism and media coverage in West Africa? In other words, what exactly do you blame the Malian and/or Burkinabe media for?* (See the questionnaire in the appendix for more details). Hence, in their responses, they delay in the dissemination of information by traditional media is the main factor that discourage West African digital citizens. The graph below (*figure 5.10*) is a concrete illustration of this state of fact.



**Figure 5.10 The main reproaches made towards West African traditional media (May, 2021)**

As it can be seen from the graph above, 57.6% of the surveyed West African people prefer using social media to get access to information related to terrorism because traditional media use to disseminate it late. Also, 37% amongst them think that the news related to terrorism disseminated by West African traditional media lack of credibility and veracity. The latter prefers referring to international traditional media such as RFI [French International Radio station] and France24 [French popular TV broadcasting channel] to get their daily news. In the meantime, 27.2% of them point out the lack of professionalism of West African journalists.

Likewise, when it comes to the appreciation of West African journalists' professionalism, only 35.1% keep of positive image of media professionals, while 33% of them have a negative image of journalists. Nonetheless, 31.9% prefer being neutral. The question was articulated as the following: *Do you have a good appreciation of the professionalism of Malian and/or Burkinabe journalists in covering terrorist attacks?* The majority of the respondents denounce some contradictions observed from traditional media which make them lose the credibility of the information. Also, they state that when the sources of information are not explicitly mentioned by the journalists, the information is likely to be fabricated.

Interestingly, some surveyed people assert that traditional media often propagandize terrorism by devoting lots of time and space to discuss of the terrorists' exactions. Similarly, some of them believe that the terrorism-related news is often disseminated with exaggeration. To the question: *What is the last case of unprofessionalism that you have observed (?)*; the surveyed populations' opinions vary. Amongst others, the most pertinent comments made by the surveyed West African populations are the following:

Traditional media also propagate fake news. On May 08, 2021 for example, the Facebook page of Radio Omega FM announced about twenty deaths in a terrorist attack, when it was not. Realizing their mistake, they have just deleted the post; they did not say anything more, not even to apologize for their fake news.

Sometimes our traditional media wait for the publication of RFI [French International Radio station] or France24 [French popular TV channel] to repeat almost mechanically the same news, although the facts happened here in our country.

Actually, the security issue is very sensitive. There are some types of information that our media must give partially, not completely, because they might put the lives of some people in danger or even aggravate terrorism in the area.

The international media provide terrorism-related information with great gravity. They do not recognize the effort being made by the West African army. They always focus on the effort of the foreign forces. Some are credible and others are not. Professionalism is not everyone's cup of tea. It is all about informational intoxication. The credibility of the information is first recognized via its source: the independent media, the leftist (those of the opposition) and the rightist media (governmental media). However, the official communication of the governments in West Africa is also slow.

Furthermore, in order to better understand the functioning of West African media landscape vis-à-vis the framing of terrorism, it is worth approaching the media regulatory bodies. In the following chapter, I will discuss some information obtained from the media regulatory institutions in Mali and Burkina Faso.

## CHAPTER VI

### DISCUSSIONS, PERSPECTIVES AND SUGGESTIONS

#### 6.1 From the media regulatory institutions' standpoint

During this research I approached two West African media regulatory institutions which are namely: the Superior Council of Communication (CSC) in Burkina Faso and the High Authority of Communication (HAC) in Mali. As for the main media regulatory bodies in these two West African countries, their principal missions are the following:

- To ensure the application of laws and regulations relating to public communication in Burkina Faso and Mali;
- To contribute to the respect of professional ethics by private and public radio and television broadcasting companies, as well as public and private print newspapers, periodicals or digital media focusing on the national issues;
- To issue operating licenses for radio stations and television broadcasting channels or any other media company (print or digital). This point concerns exclusively the context of Burkina Faso and does not include Malian media landscape. In fact, according to the law in Mali, to edit a print newspaper or a digital media, the owner does not need any authorization; just the declaration of existence prevails<sup>63</sup>.
- To contribute to compliance with standards relating to broadcasting and reception of equipment for radio stations and television channels;

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<sup>63</sup> According to the article 7 of the law (Law N ° 00-46 / AN-RM of July 7, 2000) relating to the press regime in Mali: *"Before the publication of any newspaper or periodical media, a declaration of existence should be done at the prosecutor's office. The declaration of publication contains specifically: the title of the newspaper or periodical and its mode of publication; the name and address of the Publishing Director; the indication of the printing house's location (its address); the expected average of circulation"*. However, radios stations and televisions channels need to get a deliberate authorization before start operating.

- To promote freedom of expression and the right to information in accordance with the law;
- To guarantee the right of access of media to the available sources of information;
- To receive copies of declarations of existence especially from print media, advertising companies and online media;
- To define, in collaboration with the Ministry in charge of communication, the conditions of granting and the methods of distribution of public aid to the private press;
- And to ensure compliance with the mission and specifications of advertising companies.

Regarding the regulation and sanction of contents posted on social networks, the judicial texts of both the HAC (in Mali) and the CSC (in Burkina Faso) are not clear. For example, the CSC managers stated that the “question about the regulation of social media contents call for technical debate because the law is a little bit ambiguous”. Therefore, there is neither deliberate restriction about the regulation of social media contents, nor any express obligation except by extrapolation. Thus, the CSC and the HAC regulate the social networks of the existing traditional media (newspapers, radio, television and Online media) by considering them as relay media. But these extrapolations do not concern private discussion forums and individual social media accounts. Moreover, “it would be very tedious for the regulator to ensure the reorganization of social networks, given their plethoric number and their cross-border nature”, stated Abdoulaye Dao, representative of the CSC. In fine, the fundamental missions of the HAC are similar to those of the Superior Council of Communication (CSC) in Burkina Faso.

#### **6.1.1 The High Authority of Communication (Mali)**

In Mali, the “*Haute Autorité de la Communication (HAC)*” – which means literally the High Authority of Communication – was created by decree in 2014<sup>64</sup>, replacing

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<sup>64</sup> HAC: Created by Ordinance n° 2014-006 / P-RM (Official Journal of the Republic of Mali of January 31, 2014); ratified by law n° 2015-018 of June 4, 2015 amending and ratifying the order of January 21, 2014 (Official Journal of the Republic of Mali of June 19, 2015).

two other regulatory institutions of media contents called CSC and CNEAME<sup>65</sup> which started operating in 1992. The role and missions of the HAC (the High Authority of Communication) is chiefly to regulate the communication sector in the fields of audio-visual communication, the print press, advertising by means of the audio-visuals, as well as the online media.<sup>66</sup> To this end, the HAC is the only institution which has the ability to give accreditations (authorizations) for the creation of private broadcasting radio stations, television channels, Print newspapers and digital media. As a regulatory body, it also plays a role of media watchdog, consultation, research, control and sanctions.

Nevertheless, according to the president of the HAC, Fodié Touré, the institution has an educational, monitoring and anticipatory role. It must contribute to raising the professional standards of the traditional media by training and providing adequate technological means. Hence, there were no direct sanctions regarding the regulation of publications on traditional media by the HAC between January, 2020 and January, 2021. Indeed, no legislation obliges Malian Digital media and blogs to make a prior declaration. In principle, all Malian websites are totally free. In fact, the online media and Blogs constitute a new form of media in Mali and, therefore, they are not subject of any legislation or regulation. To this end, they are not subject to prior declaration or authorization from the public authorities (African Media Barometer, 2010)<sup>67</sup>. This entails de facto that online media contents cannot be subject of any censorship, sanction or regulation by the High Authority of Communication (HAC).

More interestingly, given the complexity of the tensions in Mali, even media professionals free themselves from relating news about terrorism for fear of cruelty on the behalf of terrorists groups. As a matter of fact, “several radio stations closed for fear of reprisals; some animators, victims of death threats, left their localities”<sup>68</sup>. Yet, in accordance with the Declaration of the Citizens’ Rights and the African

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<sup>65</sup> CNEAME is a French acronym which refers to the National Committee for Equal Access to State Media in Mali.

<sup>66</sup> Article 5 of the Ordinance of 21/01/2014.

<sup>67</sup> African Media Barometer, Mali (2010); Page 23. Online Access link: <http://library.fes.de/pdf-files/bueros/africa-media/08153.pdf>

<sup>68</sup> Abdourahamane Ousmane (October, 2019). Formulation of an approach for the regulation of community media in the Liptako-Gourma space Burkina Faso/Mali/Niger; page 24 – Online Access link: [https://www.mediasupport.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/02/Etude\\_IMS\\_R%C3%A9gulation\\_for-web.pdf](https://www.mediasupport.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/02/Etude_IMS_R%C3%A9gulation_for-web.pdf)

Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights, the Malian constitution guarantees freedom of expression, including freedom of the media<sup>69</sup>.

### 6.1.2 The Superior Council of Communication (Burkina Faso)

In Burkina Faso, the “*Conseil Supérieur de la Communication (CSC)*” – the Superior Communication Council – was created by decree in 1995<sup>70</sup>. However, the CSC did really begin to function in 1997. It is an independent administrative authority responsible for promoting press freedom through professional practices for transparency in society and for governance. As of April 26, 2021, the CSC has nine members headed by Mathias Tankoano. Their job is to support journalists in their political function by playing the role of arbiter in the public space, in the pluralism of debates that characterize democracy in Burkina Faso under the slogan: “*The regulation of communication to promote democracy*”. The CSC also advocates equal access to public service media, especially in certain periods of political life, during elections for example. Its regulatory instrument is the “Information and Communication Code”.

There to, regarding the media framing of terrorist attacks between January, 2020 and January, 2021, there were no deliberate sanctions by the CSC towards media in 2020. But according to the head of the institution, there are two similar cases falling within the general framework of “terrorist hydra”<sup>71</sup> with its corollary of inter-community conflicts.

Indeed, the first case concerns the publication – on February 10, 2020, of the daily “*L’express du Faso*” – of an article entitled: “*Inter-community conflict in Kombori/Kossi: at least thirty dead and material damage recorded*”. According to the media controlling director of the CSC, Abdoulaye DAO, the text is confusing and

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<sup>69</sup> The Constitution of Mali states in its article 4 that: “*Everyone has the right to freedom of thought, conscience, religion, worship, opinion, expression and creation with respect for the law*”. Likewise, the Article 7 of the Declaration of the Citizens’ Rights and the African Charter on Human and Peoples’ Rights stipulates that: “*The freedom of the press is recognized and guaranteed. It is exercised under the conditions set by law. Equal access for all to public media is ensured by an independent body whose status is established by organic law*”.

<sup>70</sup> CSC: Created by Decree No. 95-304 / PRES / PM / MCC of April 1, 1995 in application of Article 143 of the Information Code.

<sup>71</sup> In the Greek mythology, “*hydra*” is a creature with several heads; and when one of heads is cut, two different heads reappears. In this context, it is both imagery and hyperbole used to qualify the complexity of fighting against terrorism in the Sahel.

indicates to the front page a conflict between Fulani and Dogon but in the body, the newspaper deals with a conflict between Dozo and Malian. In the meantime, other newspapers have preferred being cautious and reported that these attacks have been perpetrated by “*unidentified armed individuals*” (an expression referring a priori to terrorists). Therefore, the CSC heard the director of the newspaper in question (*L'express du Faso*) and the latter promised more vigilance in the future. Nonetheless, he received a “letter of observation” which is a smooth form of warning from the CSC.

The second case is about a private radio station called “*Radio Omega*” which aired poorly cross-referenced information pointing to the “*Koglwéogo*” (the self-defence civil militia groups) as the perpetrators of terrorist attacks on the Fulani population of Barga in the Northern region of Burkina Faso and two other surrounding villages. This information was broadcast on March 9, 2020 at 12:15 and posted on the Facebook page of *Radio Omega* the following day. Faced with the “recklessness” of the radio in making such allegations and the social context plagued by social conflicts, the CSC challenged the managing directors of the radio through a hearing followed by an “observation letter” inviting the employees to be more professional in handling information related to conflicts in general and to terrorism more specifically.

Regarding the regulation of social media contents, the last cases in fact concerns the Facebook pages of “*Radio Liberté*” and “*Radio Omega*” FM (see the abovementioned case of Radio Omega). Notwithstanding, in terms of regulation of contents on social networks, the CSC has not yet adopted specific texts to regulate the posts. The media controlling director of the CSC, Abdoulaye DAO, puts it this way:

As far as I know, there is not even a law regarding the regulation of Social media contents. Except the Penal Code which was revised in 2019 to introduce restrictions on media coverage of counter-terrorism operations and this also concerns web activists and other facilitators of discussion forums on social networks; in accordance with the amendments of our Penal Code (Dao, 2021)<sup>72</sup>.

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<sup>72</sup> Abdoulaye Dao is a media regulatory representative at the Superior Council of Communication (CSC) in Burkina Faso. Excerpted from my interview conducted in February 2021.



## 6.2 The nexus between terrorism, media and propaganda

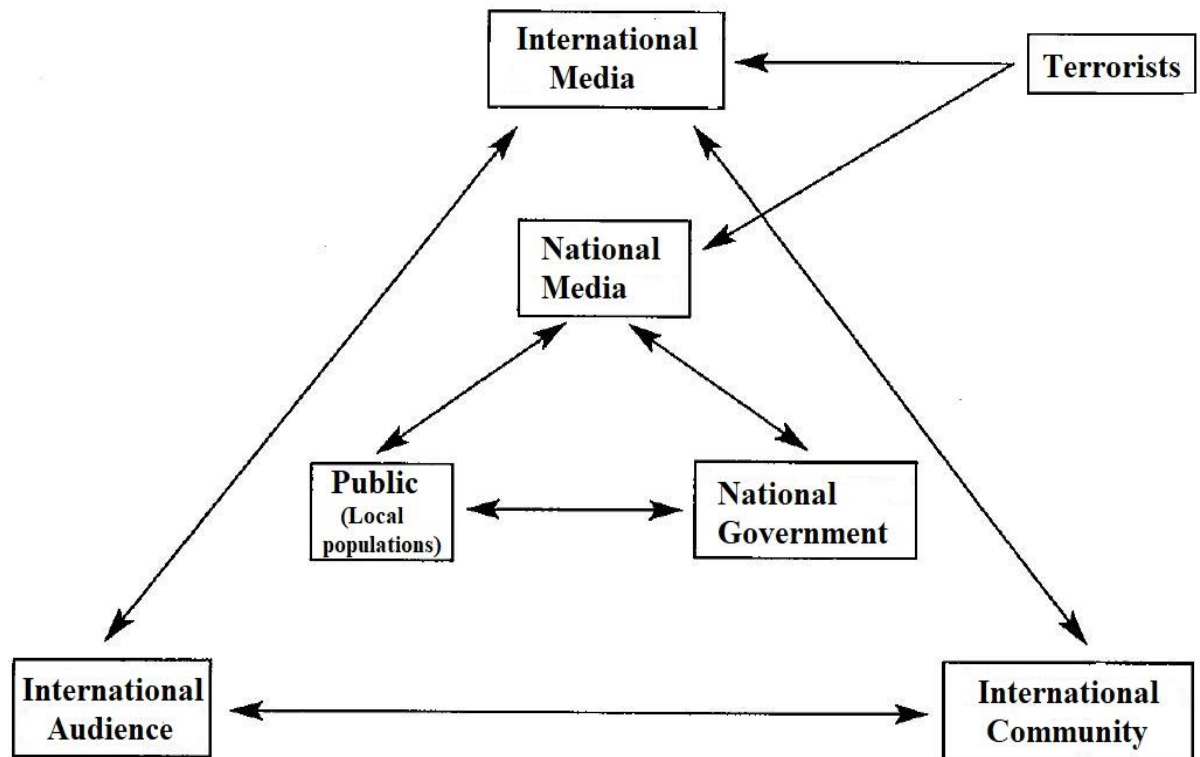
From its Latin root “*propagare*”, which means literally “to spread or to propagate”, the word “propaganda” is a concept designating a set of persuasion techniques implemented in order to propagate with all available means an idea, an opinion, an ideology or a doctrine and to stimulate the adoption of specific behaviours within a targeted audience. These techniques are exercised on populations in order to influence them, even to indoctrinate them, as did Adolf Hitler with the “Nazi Party” in 1933, suavely orchestrated by his “propaganda ministry” Joseph Goebbels<sup>73</sup>.

Sergei Tchakhotin (1992), quoted by Francis Balle (2011) in *Media and Societies*, provides the keys to understanding how political power, in democracy as in dictatorship, can guide and orient public opinion. He enumerates, in details, many sources of political propaganda: intimidation by symbols, slogans, music, huge gatherings and symbolic gestures, etc. Seen from this perspective, political propaganda can be understood as a “collective communication technique aimed at sharing opinions against opposing propaganda (real or virtual) in order to acquire power” (Tchakhotin, 1992). This, therefore, takes place through the combination of various techniques: media or human resources mobilized because of their supposed effectiveness in responding to a specific intentionality. It is also a question of effective communication. Discussing the concept of media propaganda and terrorist strategies, Brigitte Nacos (2005, P.15) elaborated the media-terrorism triangle (see figure 6.11)<sup>74</sup> below.

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<sup>73</sup> See William Allen (1930). *The Nazi Seizure of Power*. Chicago Quadrance Books. According to Hitler and his propaganda ministry, “*The aim of propaganda is not to regulate the rights of the various parties; but to underline exclusively that of the party which we represent. Neither does it have to objectively seek the truth, but to pursue only what is favorable to us*”. The book chapter is available online at the following link : <http://www.public.asu.edu/~acichope/Allen,%20The%20Nazi%20Seizure%20of%20Power%20Chap%203%20and%2011.pdf>

<sup>74</sup>Nacos Brigitte L., (2005). *Media and terrorism: the Central role of the media in terrorism and counter-terrorism*, P.15; *Ed. Nouveaux horizons, Paris*.



**Figure 6.11 Triangle depicting the role of the media in terrorism (Nacos, 2005, P.15)**

To explain terrorist propaganda through the mass media, Brigitte Nacos (2005) refers to the triangle of political communication (*figure 6.11*) above. She defines the combination between propaganda and political communication in the following terms:

Political communication is, therefore, the means by which people express both their unity and their differences. Through communication, we express our demands, assert our interests, rally to our cause those who adhere to our ideas and castigate those who do not share our vision of the world.

Hence, this communication is collective, insofar as the propaganda is directed to communities (or to individuals as members of those communities). Propaganda (if it works) strengthens an ideology and earns it supporters or partisans; it weakens the opposite forces.

In doing so, one of the vertices of the communication triangle is the media. Due to their strategic position, they amplify or minimize information about terrorism or terrorist acts. What terrorists expect is, in fact, when confronted with political violence, the media will leak any information to describe and propagate these events.

As it can be seen in the *figure 6.11* above, when terrorists strike, they are guaranteed to benefit from the attention of the media, and therefore that of the populations and rulers of the targeted countries. Given the globalization of communication systems, with the proliferation of hypermedia and social media specifically, the perpetrators of terrorist acts also find an echo in the international media and at the same time benefit from the attention of the international communities, as it was the case during the major terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001 in the USA. Today, with the advent of hypermedia generated by the convergence of media, then role of media in covering terrorism-related news is crucial.

### **6.3 The convergence of Media and the issue of terrorism-related news**

Media convergence or technological convergence refers to the amalgamation of previously separated technologies and media platforms through digitization and computer networking. The Internet has also enabled the development of new forms of journalism inspired by classic media practices. These are online magazines, web radios and web televisions, mobile journalism or mobile films, etc. Thereafter, even traditional media become accessible on digital platforms via their Facebook pages, official websites, Twitter accounts, YouTube channels, etc. Consequently, with media convergence, terrorism-related news reaches more people, more audiences. Likewise, media products' consumers can access multiple media contents for free.

In addition, media convergence widens, accelerates and facilitates the distribution of media contents. Thereby, digitized media contents become accessible from a multitude of devices. This facilitates a large production and distribution of contents. Undeniably, this made "media prosumers" very active because, in addition to being able to react spontaneously to the contents, they have the possibility of creating and distributing their own contents online; contributing to the construction or the fabrication of both informative and entertaining digital contents. This, in a context of crisis marked by terrorism, may contribute to the propagation of unfavourable news.

Roughly, the primary purpose of terrorism is to inspire terror. The terrorist approach thus responds to a concern for "dramatization". Terrorist attacks have above all a psychological objective. Therefore, "terrorist propaganda" involves the manipulation of minds by using in particular strong images, myths, and words that convey the senses and values. And terrorists are experts in doing so. They hijack television for

propaganda purposes. However, it is clear that terrorists, and more broadly, certain religious extremist groups, are now using this to serve their ends. In fact, the aim of the terrorists is to send messages of mobilization to those to whom they belong and to demoralize the adversary – amplifying psychosis – shocking the public with acts of violence in order to dissuade anyone who does not espouse their ideology; and gain public opinion.

Subsequently, in an asymmetric war, information and communication occupy a central place. For terrorists, gaining public opinion is fundamental. It provides them with political, moral and even logistical support, which is generally vital. In fact, thanks to a benevolent opinion, terrorists can blend in with the population and, as a consequence, be able to easily carry out a number of reprehensible acts. That is where the mass media, the hypermedia in today's context, come in as the propagators of the desired effect. Once this psychological manipulation has been deployed, the game is practically won by the terrorists.

#### **6.4 Discussion and suggestions**

West African media, especially social media platforms, have somehow served as channels for terrorist propaganda. Indeed, after each terrorist attack, several horrible images and videos circulate on social networks; but West African media regulatory institutions face some difficulties in regulating these types of information. This is the case, for example, with the burning of national flags or the dissemination of messages of threat by terrorists' groups, which is shared constantly on WhatsApp groups and Facebook pages by West African digital citizens.

As for the traditional media, the episodic framing devoted to the various attacks instead of thematic framing, in the form of "solution journalism"<sup>75</sup>, constitutes one of the informational limits in certain West African countries. However, in general, West African traditional media treatment of terrorist attacks has, despite some abovementioned difficulties, respected the fundamental principles of journalism. Yet, considering both the survey data and the content analysis it appears that the processing of terrorism-related news is problematic due some aforementioned

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<sup>75</sup> "Solutions journalism" is a form of journalism which aims at providing solutions via compelling and rigorous coverage of social issues. Conceptualized by Bornstein et al. (2013), this type of journalism investigates and explains, in a critical manner, how to work toward solutions. Therefore, it is an approach which concentrates both on the responses to social issues and the problems themselves.

obstacles. Another finding emerging from our research is the self-censorship that some traditional media impose on themselves to fight against the issue of fake news. As a result, the West African media landscape is almost entirely neutral in the treatment of information linked to terrorism. This might probably justify the absence of major complaints or sanctions from the media regulatory institutions, especially in Mali and Burkina Faso, linked to the coverage of terrorist attacks.

Furthermore, the coverage of terrorism by West African traditional media in this context of social media prevalence is a challenge for media professionals. In order to handle this delicate task, the professionalism and the social responsibility of journalists are highly required. Otherwise their actions may jeopardize the survival of West African democracy. In this regard, ethical and deontological principles are essential for processing information related to terrorism. This can help analysing the facts, contextualizing them, validating them and giving them meaning. In doing so, West African media professionals must set a clear editorial line in dealing with these types of crisis events. This includes the following fundamental principles to be taken into account when covering terrorist attacks:

- Collect and disseminate terrorism-related information so as not to panic the local citizens;
- Avoid putting the lives of citizens in danger while framing terrorists' extortions;
- Avoid divulging secrets related news which can thwart military operations on battlegrounds.

Also, West African traditional media must train their journalists and promote the specialization of journalists in crisis and security issues. This comprises the initiation of continuing training policy for journalists on the basics rules of the profession, taking into account the socio-political evolution of the countries, encouraging and motivating those who distinguish themselves by the quality of their journalistic works related to terrorism.

In addition, due to the current context of digital media predominance – marked by the issue of fake news, rumour and disinformation – it is appropriate to cross-check and verify terrorism-related information before dissemination. In doing so, West African news professionals must refrain from any participation in the scoop race.

Otherwise they might sow confusion and fuel the feeling of fear amid the local populations. This goes without saying that West African journalists must solicit the contribution and collaboration of local populations, security services, officials and politics to provide them with accurate and credible information to deepen their thematic analyses.

Another key-thing to be taken into consideration is the issue of labelling. As a matter of fact, West African journalists must pay attention to the use of some terms and concepts such as “jihadist attack” for instance, when dealing with terrorism-related news. Similarly, the use of terms like “sophisticated attack” runs the risk of embellishing the killers and portraying them as heroes. In fact, this kind of lexical labelling is in line with one of the objectives of terrorists, which is to project an image of both power and the possession of Islamic ideology. Thereby, this somehow magnifies the importance of the threat, exaggerates the strategic power of terrorist groups or praises their tactical skills; and subsequently, media become inevitably the oxygen provider of terrorism (Nacos, 2005; P.47)<sup>76</sup>. In any case, media professionals must not portray the perpetrators of terrorist attacks in an aspect that could be perceived as positive.

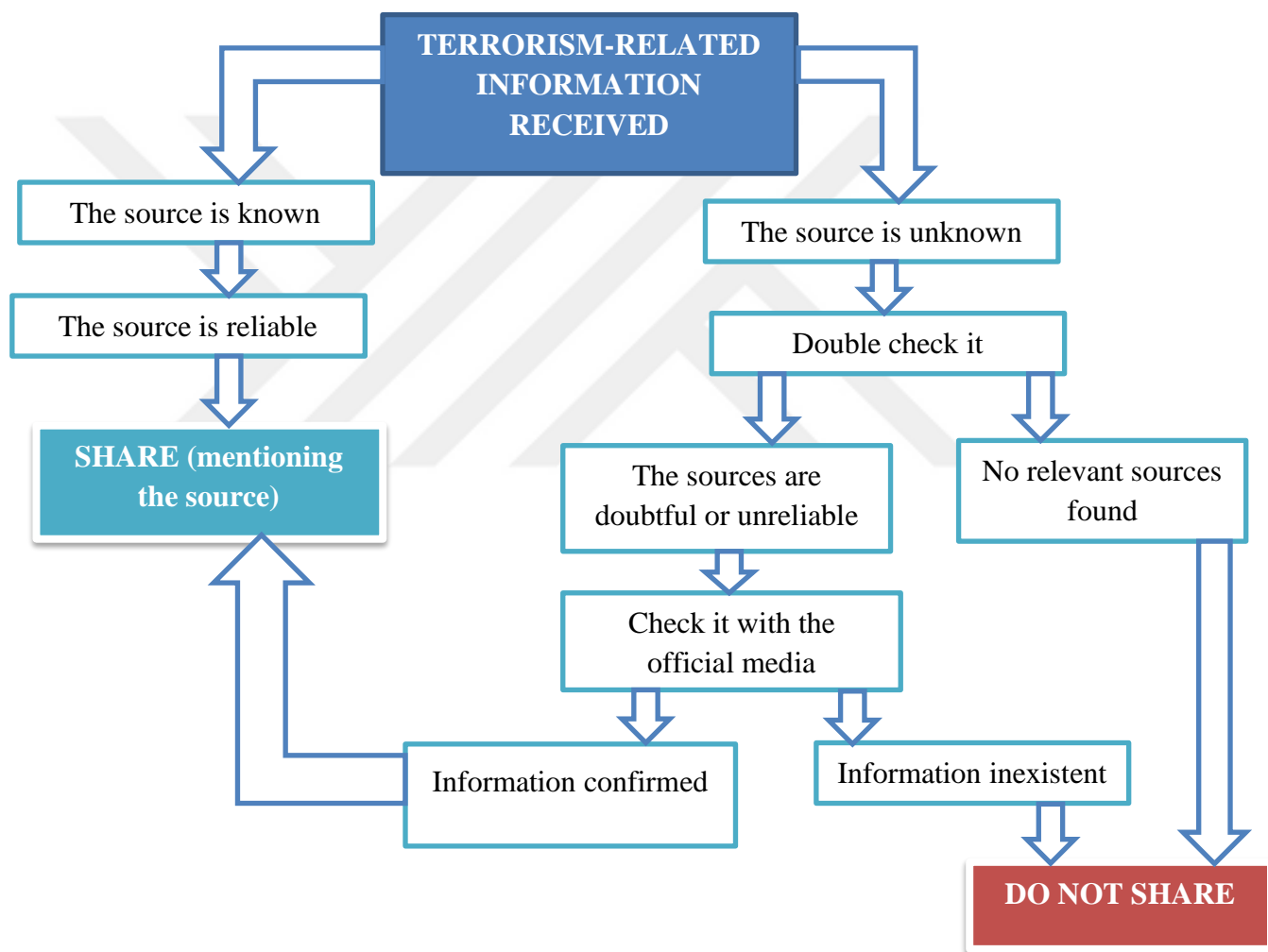
Moreover, West African traditional media should go beyond the dissemination of press releases related to terrorist attacks to produce more thematic framing of the issue with profound analysis about the real causes of the propagation of terror with an approach based on “solution journalism” mechanisms. Concretely, only the informational value of press releases should be selected as excerpts by journalists who will eventually strip it from all propaganda, explain the context and supplement the information with the reactions of the targeted local populations and the authorities; focusing specifically on the solutions and the precautions to be taken in order to avoid similar extortions in the future.

Additionally, the use of visual symbolism is crucial in the framing of terrorism; therefore, West African journalists must avoid disseminating images of horror and terror or images that could undermine the dignity of victims, the hostages or their relatives.

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<sup>76</sup> According to Bigitte Nacos (2005), “for terrorists, advertising is a vital element; it is their oxygen”; in *Media and terrorism: the central role of the media in terrorism and counterterrorism*, (Page 47) – Quoted by Hagada Judith Gaelle (2018).

Nonetheless, in terms of processing information related to terrorism, journalistic works become more complicated when digital citizens, witnesses of the attacks, are able to shoot the horror scenes with their mobile devices and disseminate them on social networks without any knowledge of citizen journalism ability. This entails, de facto, the proliferation of fake news on social media platforms. This scenario places digital citizens into a serious ethical dilemma: to ignore such information flows with the risk of being not up-to-date with the news, or to relay them with the high risk of giving false information. Hence, the right thing to do is to consider the following graph (figure 6.12) below.



**Figure 6.12 The attitude to adopt by digital citizens to avoid propagating fake news (June, 2021)**

Actually, sharing terrorism-related news can have an emotional impact on the general public who is concerned about terrorists' extortions. Worse still, it can lead to post-traumatic stress disorder that can cause the targeted populations to develop

feelings of horror, fear and hopelessness. In this way, by strengthening the verification processes, the “digital prosumers” will contribute fighting against the proliferation of fake news on social media platforms.

All in all, West African media regulatory institutions must work to ensure the protection of reporters at the scenes of terrorist attacks. Indeed, in West African countries, very few media have so far put in place adequate requirements to protect their journalists. Sometimes journalists are deported to the theatres of attacks without any security measures; and even they do not possess at least security vests most of the time. Yet, both security forces and journalists should work collaboratively so that media would not be guilty of disseminating information that could compromise the investigative work of the police.



## CHAPTER VII

### CONCLUSION

“The real battleground of terrorism is in the newspaper columns and on television screens”<sup>77</sup>, wrote the Canadian academic Pierre Mannoni in 2003. This highlights the crucial role of media in terrorism context. The September 11 attacks have profoundly changed the relationship between media and terrorism. Thus, news about terrorists’ crimes floods the traditional media (radio stations, television channels and newspaper columns) and, more importantly today, the social media platforms.

The Sub-Saharan Africa is one of the most affected areas in the world by terrorism, which causes economic, political and social impacts on the local populations. Almost every day, social networks report new terrorist attacks in West Africa, particularly in the borders of Mali and Burkina Faso. As underlined Tavernier and Garcin-Marrou (2001, PP. 147-149):

In a context of terrorism, media must make a “rationalized discourse” about the violence which profoundly undermines the basic principles of any democratic society (...) The journalistic framing of terrorist events strappingly depends on the involvement of the media discourse related to the terrorist threat (...) Hence, between the emotional and the rational, the media discourse differs significantly; depending on whether the antagonists are defamed at the international level or not<sup>78</sup>.

However, in this 21<sup>st</sup> century, communication is really the battlefield for terrorists; and accordingly, the Islamic State terrorist group also had its own news agency called Amaq, founded in August 2014. This entails the excessive use of hypermedia by extremist groups to propagate their messages.

Consequently, with the occurrence of terrorist extortions in Sub-Saharan Africa, West African journalists are now faced with raw information whose treatment

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<sup>77</sup> Mannoni, P. & Bonardi, C., (2003). Terrorism and Mass Media; *Topique* N°83, pages 55-72 – Online Access Link: <https://www.cairn.info/revue-topique-2003-2-page-55.htm>.

<sup>78</sup> Tavernier, A., & Garcin-Marrou, I, (2001). Terrorism, Medias and Democracy. *Études de communication*, no 24. *Presses Universitaires de Lyon coll. Passerelles*, PP 147-149.

requires greater professionalism and a high sense of social responsibility. It is difficult today to talk about terrorism, especially about its proliferation, without the contribution of both traditional and new media. Sometimes still, West African media become veritable relays of terrorists' news. After each bloody attack, media help terrorist groups claiming their extortion; and therefore, they win a moral victory by terrorizing the populations via the media.

As a result, the fight against terrorism should not be used as an excuse for states to restrict press freedom. For their part, media professionals should avoid playing the terrorists' game with a frantic race towards information and publishing sensational images. Hence, West African media, which have a central mission of informing their citizens about the major events that occur in the region, are therefore confronted with a difficult dilemma: to inform the populations about terrorist attacks without terrorizing them.

At the beginning of this work, my main objective was to investigate and establish a nexus between crisis communication, media framing and the advent of social media prevalence in West Africa. At the end of the study, in the light of the various insights provided through the interviews with the media owners, the representatives of the media regulation institutes, the content analysis of 219 articles published on *Maliwe.net* and *LeFaso.net*, as well as the data collected via the open-ended questions survey, proved that the over-media coverage of terrorist attacks and the mode of informational processing constitute a form of involuntary propagation of terrorism in sub-Saharan Africa. Indeed, the method of processing information linked to terrorism creates psychosis amongst West African populations. As the researcher Kriegel Blandine (2003) explains, "When a person is exposed to television violence, the immediate physiological effects are of the same nature as if that person is exposed to a situation of actual violence"<sup>79</sup>.

In fine, after the theoretical framework, the deep examination of West African media landscape, the extensive documentation, in addition to the scientific investigations, and the literature review on media and terrorism, I could discover the challenges of

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<sup>79</sup> KRIEGEL, B., (2003). Violence on television: report of the evaluation mission, analysis and proposals relating to violent representations on television, Paris, PUF, P.173.

terrorism for the Sub-Saharan Africa region, especially in French-speaking countries like Mali and Burkina Faso.

Finally, to avoid being complicit of terrorist propaganda, West African media professionals must take more precautions in framing terrorism, so as not to contribute to fueling panic movements or to accentuating the anxiety-provoking nature that occurs in such crisis contexts. Thus, media professionals must exercise particular vigilance in dealing with matters relating to terrorist acts. Ultimately, since media are used as weapons in battlefields, it is possible to affirm that crisis communication is a sort of double edged sword which cuts both ways. Therefore, information literacy for crisis management is vital to fight against terrorism propaganda in West Africa and beyond.



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# APPENDIX

## APPENDIX A: INTERVIEW GUIDE

### **A) Interview Guide for HAC (Mali) and CSC (Burkina Faso)**

- 1) How do you assess the media information related to terrorism in Mali / Burkina Faso?
- 2) What do you think of the professionalism of Malian/Burkinabe journalists in terms of framing terrorist attacks?
- 3) What do not you appreciate about terrorism and media coverage? In other words, what exactly do you blame the Malian/Burkinabe media professionals for?
- 4) What is the last case of unprofessionalism that you have noticed?
- 5) Do you control and/or sanction false information (fake news) related to terrorism published on social networks?
- 6) Do you find the vast majority of social mediated information reliable?
- 7) On which social media platforms do you encounter the most fake news publications related to terrorism?
- 8) How many press organizations (Radio, TV, written and online press) did the HAC/CSC call out for publications related to terrorism?
- 9) If so, what exactly are they accused of?
- 10) Does the HAC/CSC have the legal skills to regulate and/or sanction publications on social networks?
- 11) If so, what is the last case in question? If not, why?
- 12) What do the HAC/CSC's jurisdictions state about the regulation of posts on social media platforms?

## APPENDIX B: RESEARCH QUESTIONNAIRE

### Online survey about Media and terrorism in Sub-Saharan Africa

Student in the field of Media and Communication, I am currently carrying out a study on media coverage of terrorist attacks in Mali and Burkina Faso. Therefore, I would like to request your collaboration by responding to questionnaire below. Also, if you have further information falling within the framework of media and terrorism; please share them with me to facilitate my research.

Thanks for the availability!

#### 1. Identification

Sex: Male ☐ Female ☐ Other (Prefer not to say) ☐

Age: 18-25 ☐ 26-35 ☐ 36-45 ☐ 45+ ☐

2. Citizenship: Mali ☐ Burkina Faso ☐

#### 3. Socio-professional situation:

☐ Student

☐ Civil Servant

☐ Contractor

☐ Other (specify)

4. How do you assess the media information related to terrorism in Mali / Burkina Faso? .....

5. Through which media have you learnt about the first terrorist attack in Mali/Burkina Faso?

Radio ☐

TV ☐

Social media (specify) ☐

6. What types of social networks do you use?

- Facebook ☐
- WhatsApp ☐
- Instagram ☐
- YouTube ☐
- Twitter ☐
- TikTok ☐
- Autre (specify) ☐

7. How do you assess the information related to terrorism posted on social networks?

☐ Credible

☐ Not trustworthy

☐ Neutral

Justify

your

answer

.....

8. How do you detect false information related to terrorism?

.....

9. Do you have a good appreciation of the professionalism of Malian or Burkinabe journalists in covering terrorist attacks?

Yes ☐

No ☐

☐ Prefer not to say anything

Justify your answer.....

10. What do you do on social media after a terrorist attack?

☐ Give my opinion and share content on the atrocities of terrorists

☐ Just to get information through the posts and comments of Internet users

☐ Just out of curiosity: Compare Internet users' information with that of traditional media (radio, TV and Print newspapers).

11. On which social media platforms do you see the most terrorism-related publications?

☐ Facebook

☐ WhatsApp

- ☐ Instagram
- ☐ YouTube
- ☐ Twitter
- ☐ TikTok
- ☐ Other (specify)

12. What don't you like about terrorism and media coverage in West Africa? In other words, what exactly do you blame the Malian or Burkinabe media for?

- ☐ The delay in disseminating information
- ☐ The lack of professionalism of journalists
- ☐ The lack of credibility and veracity in the information disseminated

13. What is the last case of unprofessionalism that you have seen?

.....

14. Degree of appreciation of information on terrorism circulating in social networks

	<b>I Strongly agree</b>	<b>I agree</b>	<b>I'm not sure</b>	<b>I disagree</b>	<b>I strongly disagree</b>
I get most of the news about terrorism on social media					
Social networks are reliable sources for information on terrorism					
Most of the news about terrorism circulating on social media is fabricated					
I use to post, comment and share contents about terrorism on social media platforms					
Information about terrorism is controversial					
Social networks spread terrorism propaganda in the Sahel					
I prefer getting information via social networks than through traditional media (TV-radio-newspapers)					
Social media contents help me learn more about terrorist extortions					
Most of the information about terrorism from social media is either propaganda, rumours, parodies or disinformation.					

Thank you for your time!

# CURRICULUM VITAE

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