

Audience Perception of Mass media Reports on Terrorism and Attacks in Nigeria

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Abstract

The increasing terror attacks in Nigeria has secured several pages and air spaces of the media on daily basis, this is in a bid to update Nigerians on security situation of the country. This study was carried out to ascertain audience perception of mass media reports on terrorism and attacks in Nigeria. The study was anchored on Cognitive Dissonance Theory. Survey Research method and in-depth interview were adopted for data collection. The population of study was infinite, while the sample size of 180 was obtained. The results were analyzed using frequency tables with percent. It was found that greater number of the respondents were exposed to media news on terrorism and attacks to a very large extent. Also, larger number of the respondents had the knowledge of media reports on terrorism and attacks to a very large extent. Part of the findings of this study is that media reports on terror attacks heighten the fear of the public. Therefore, these recommendations were made: There is a need for the governments to mount surveillance equipment at all nooks and crannies of the country to capture every movement of people including criminalities. Journalists should step up and carry investigative reports of terrorism activities among the military personnel, politicians and the perpetrators. Terrorism suspects should be openly tried at the court, and if found guilty, treated with the prescription of the Nigerian constitution. And there should be no dialogue and no secret release of suspects. The security bodies should be equipped with sophisticated arms to withstand any battle against the terror groups.

Keywords: Audience, Perception, Mass Media, Reports, Terrorism and Attacks.

Introduction

Nigeria has experienced an unprecedented increase in security challenges in the recent times. This has caused threat to civilians and Nigerian security to be the major problem facing Nigerian government, and has made a huge part of the budget of the federation to be allocated to national security. The mass media have made it a regular news, trying to make people be careful to avoid being abducted or attacked especially in the rural communities.

In attempt to quench terrorism and attacks, the Federal Government of Nigeria has passed the Anti-Terrorism Act in 2011, and installed Computer-based Closed Circuit Television cameras (CCTV) across major cities of the country to enhance surveillance and investigation of crimes, heightening security activities across the federation, with the aim of deterring or averting chances of attacks, reforming the national security through the availability of modern security gadgets and development of broadcast security tips in mass media (Azazi, 2011). Despite all the efforts, the rate of security challenges across the nation continues to increase on daily bases. Moreover, Nigeria has been always ranked very low while rating the Global Peace Index (GPI, 2012). This signifies a dangerous sign of insecurity within the nation (Achumba, Ighomereho & Akpor-Robaro, 2013).

In the words of Adagba, Ugwu and Eme (2012), every effort of the government towards curbing attacks has not yield enough result, as the media continue to report many cases of terrorism and attacks from different communities across the country, with huge evidences of killings and destruction of properties. Considering the rampant reports of cases

of attacks without the capacity to secure lives and property by the Nigerian security operatives, people are so worried and everybody in the country today has the feeling of disappointment about the security situation in the country. There is no doubt, as the news of terrorism and attacks keep appearing on the media, the problem of insecurity in Nigeria appears insurmountable, making a number of people to believe that the Federal Government has failed to apply the appropriate measures in confronting security challenges but dealing with the situation decisively. Others believe that security situation in Nigeria has political inclination meant to protect the interests of some political lords, who are disgruntled with the political manifestations in the country.

The concept of terrorism and attack could be understood properly by addressing the concept of security first. According to Akin (2008), security is the situation that is obtained when there is a proper establishment of capacity for protection of lives, property and information against enemy persons, forces or actions. This is the situation by which people can go their normal activities on daily bases, and there will be no threat to their lives or properties. It encompasses all the measures put in place to safeguard and shield the citizens and all the properties of people, groups and the country against violence, sabotage or destructive occurrence. The United Nations General Assembly gave a remarkable definition of terrorism as “criminal acts intended or calculated to provoke a state of terror in the general public, a group of persons or particular persons for political purposes”. The body further said that whichever considerations of political, philosophical, ideological, racial, ethnic, religious or other nature that may be invoked to justify them, it is an unlawful use of force or violence against persons or property to intimidate or coerce a government, the civilian population, or any segment thereof, in furtherance of political or social objectives (Ngige, Badekale & Hamman Joda, 2016).

The British Broadcasting Corporation BBC News in the article with title “Guide to Nigeria’s Trouble Spots” which was published on its’ website on the 9th of March 2012, gave a lucid description of trouble spots in Nigeria using the map of Nigeria (world-Africa htmBBC.htm). The map projects with clear explanations, the insecurity in South-South, North East, South East and North Central geopolitical zones. The article appears like an indication to the whole world that the aforementioned zones are always not secured (Chinenye & Emelda, 2013).

The media are known to be the powerful channel of information dissemination about terrorism and attacks. Thus, they contribute greatly towards terrorists’ expressions. Therefore, it is pertinent to ascertain the consequences of media dissemination of information on terror or attack and the atrocities meted to the victims by the insurgent groups. This is because the media dissemination of terror or attack information in line with activities of the insurgent groups can contribute in the realisation of their maximum potential actions, intentions and mission to cause fundamental administrative change as the media is too powerful and capable of catalysing or hindering the accomplishment of a certain action, idea or programme. (Aiyesimoju, 2015).

Statement of Problem

In Nigeria, terrorism has sadly become one of the unfortunate features of our society today. Often times, the media report much cases of attacks in different communities of the country, with evidences of killing of a number of persons and displacement of many. Eze (2014) contends that more than two million people have been killed in terror attacks in the recent decade throughout the world, and more than Five Hundred Thousand people have been made orphans, disabled or critically injured. The Government of Nigeria has identified the perpetrators of attacks with different names on mass media, such as: Boko Haram, Bandits,

IPOB, Fulani Herdsmen, Gunmen and so forth. The cruel attacks in Nigeria with sophistication, audacity and dexterity have taken Nigerian security operatives by surprise. People are killed, displaced, kidnapped, maimed and many facilities destroyed or plundered. To ascertain the audience perception of media report of these attacks on daily basis formed the kernel of this study.

Objectives of the Study

The objectives of this study were to:

1. find out audience level of exposure to media reports on terrorism and attacks in Nigeria.
2. ascertain audience level of knowledge of media reports on terrorism and attacks in Nigeria.
3. determine audience view about media reports on terrorism and attacks in Nigeria.

Research Questions

In line with the research objectives, the following research questions were formulated to guide the study.

1. What was the audience level of exposure to media reports on terrorism and attacks in Nigeria?
2. What was the audience level of knowledge of media reports on terrorism and attacks in Nigeria?
3. What was the audience view about media reports on terrorism and attacks in Nigeria?

Literature Review

There have been many cases of terror and attack in Nigeria, and the mass media have played their part by projecting it to the society and the international communities. With these constant media reports on attacks, Nigeria recently became 19 “most at risk” nations from the terrorist attack ranking in the wide world. In line with the survey floated online in August 2011, by a United Kingdom based Global Analyst, Maplecroft, with these records of terror, the country has become part of the nations seen at the “extreme risk” from terror attacks. Nigeria’s present status on the global media is attributed to an uprising militia sect (Bakare, 2011).

In the words of Adamu and Ibrahim (2014), in reporting events of insurgence, accuracy and adequacy of reportage is highly needed. Thus, mass media have the responsibility to give the public members an advantage information, both in reporting the attack and also give details account of such event. Adequacy in this concept stands as the length of coverage to that particular issue. Insurgencies, attacks, terrorism and many other kinds of crises are so devastating problems that always attract media coverage both locally and internationally. Bola (2010) revealed that, conflicts in Nigeria have always gotten extensive media coverage. In corroboration with this point, Timiebi (2010) depicts that the crisis in Niger-Delta was extensively reported on the Nigerian media, especially the electronic media. In his own contributions, Remi (2010) avers that media have always given widespread reports of crisis in Jos, Plateau State.

Aside the adequacy and accuracy of terror and attack news, timeliness constitutes one of the fundamental criteria for news worthiness. For any hard news to make a significant impact, the writer must consider timeliness as an integral demand, it remains a major factor with many others that are always considered for the worthiness of any news.

In Nigeria, many researchers have discovered that the mass media have failed to be timely in the coverage of terrorism. Afolabi (2010) found that the media in Nigeria have not done the needful in timely dissemination of information on insurgences. Okpara (2010) projects that the mass media in Nigeria have not effectively played the surveillance role of the press in the coverage of attacks, and this has led to the unceasing crisis across the country. The findings by Okali (2011) support the above projection as it was found that the Nigerian mass media have not yet done well in the course of discharging the surveillance duty, especially in the cases of Boko Haram.

One of the major challenges facing the practice of journalism in Nigeria these days is how to survive the attacks and terror of the Muslim fundamentalist religious sect, the Boko Haram (Popoola, 2012 in Ngige, Badekale & Hamman Joda, 2016). Terrorists mainly first seek to penetrate and exploit the mass media to achieve their goals, by casting messages of violence and thus attracting massive publicity. The media usually promote terrorists by reporting any of their major frightful events to the large audience (Rather, 2012 in Ngige et al, 2016). In agreement with the assertion, Azeez (2009) avers that, reporting terrorism on the media presents a number of dilemmas and paradoxes to media agents whose primary duty is to update the public accurately, objectively and fairly.

However, there are several unanswered questions about the ways of reporting terrorism and attacks on the media, for which media practitioners are yet to provide faultless and concrete answers. Among those questions are: whether or not the mass media are accomplices to the objectives of the terror groups who always crave for undeserved publicity; whether the mass media are not really amplifying the fear and threat in folks by the usual way they project terrorism and attacks rather than allaying the societal fear; and whether or not the mass media are sincerely objective, accurate and fair with the manner they portray terrorism with their narratives and framing of terror groups (Peresin, 2007 in Ngige et al 2016).

Ademola and Okeke (2011) also express that Nigerian mass media have been so biased with their news on terrorism and attacks in Nigeria. In the same view, Oputa (2011) discovered that objective reporting was not adequately observed with media reportage of the Niger-Delta crisis. Relatively, the result by Lawrence (2011) revealed that media in Nigeria particularly the electronic media are biased in the dissemination of news about Boko Haram sect. Considering the fact that surveillance is a remarkable responsibility of every medium, the media are highly expected to report any impending danger to the public. This particular function of the press places a big demand that the press should cover, critically analyze and expose significant threats in a particular society.

Pertaining to the issue of security problem emanating from the Boko Haram insurgents, the media have the power to effectively disseminate information that can help in resolving the crisis through extensive coverage. The very surveillance duty of the mass media should be critically played as a way of warning people based on future attack. Thus, through extensive reportage of news about the sect, those causing the problem must change their perception, and peace-loving Nigerians will also take the issues of security more serious. (Adamu & Ibrahim 2014),

Generally, journalism like newspaper, magazine and many other types of media practices have successfully made itself so influential to the society. The people believe that the duty is given to the press to make sure that the political targets of Nigeria are well achieved in line with the motto of the nation which is "Unity and faith, peace and progress". There is no doubt that part of the major ethics of mass media and mass communication profession is to adequately promote peace. This does not mean that peace stands as the total absence of conflict, but of a truth, the press has the responsibility of organising our society. More so, some obligations to the public should be adopted as a service and should be diligently discharged by the media. These societal obligations could be successfully attained by setting a very tough professional measure of accuracy, truth, balanced and objectivity in discharging their duties. Folks argued that the media ought to be self controlling under law and generally established body. They argued that the public have the right to receive good standard of coverage from all the mass media but intervention could be allowed to protect the people's goods, as journalists are expected to serve the society.

According to (Maikaba 2006 in Adamu & Ibrahim 2014), there are several strategies by which the media can maintain peace and resolve crisis in our society. Such strategies include: reminding the government on the patterns of peaceful negotiation: During crisis, the media should issue a reminder by suggesting the best way of achieving peace in the country.

The mass media can play the part of arbitrator and negotiator, attempting to strike a balance between the conflicting ideas and arrive at a certain agreement. Objective reporting: The press can achieve a maximum resolution of conflict through objective coverage. Meanwhile, the people opposing each other in a dispute can heed to suggestions proposed on the mass media. Suggesting a new alternative: When there is a deadlock agreement, it is the responsibility of the media to provide a new alternative stating the best way to resolve the problem. Bestowing respect on the mediators: the respect media practitioners usually accord to negotiators at local, national and international or global levels is an important factor in the success or failure of any conflict resolution. Consensus-generation: The press can ensure conflict resolution through generating consensus from which the conflicting parties might accept settlement from the problem. Influencing the leadership of the government, the groups and the general public: This is a strategic way through which the press can contribute in solving the problem of terrorism and attack. This implies influencing the views and opinion of the government and other prominent persons, restoration of peace can be attained rapidly.

Furthermore, the press and Nigerian military operatives must not work in disarray in giving out information about terror and attacks to avoid giving confusing information to the public. This kind of scenario was experienced in Nigeria as the military through its' spokesperson Christopher Kolade told the press that over seventy percent of the abducted Chibok girls had been recovered. It was eventually discovered that the information was not true. Consequently, the members of the public were so angry about the fake information (Adamu & Ibrahim, 2014). The mass media should operate collaboratively with the military and other security bodies in handling and synthesizing accurate information about military operatives during crisis.

Theoretical Framework

This study was anchored on Cognitive Dissonance Theory. Cognitive dissonance happens when someone is struggling with two or more contradictory beliefs, ideas, or values, or involved in the event that goes against one of these ideas, and pass through psychological stress. Cognitive Dissonance Theory was introduced by Leon Festinger in (1957). When two actions or ideas are not psychologically consistent with each other, people always do their best to harmonise them until they become consistent. The unrest is usually caused by the person's belief clashing with new evidence (facts) perceived, wherein the person must try to resolve the contradiction and restore comfort. This is obtained in the reportage of terror and attacks in different communities of Nigeria.

In the Theory of Cognitive Dissonance, Leon Festinger maintains that human beings strive for internal psychological consistency to function mentally in the real world. A person who has internal inconsistency is likely to become psychologically uncomfortable, and he is pressured to reduce the stress. The person tries to make changes to justify the stressful behaviour, either by adding new parts to the cognition causing the psychological dissonance or by avoiding circumstances and contradictory information likely to increase the magnitude of the cognitive dissonance. This theory is appropriate for this study because the audience are bound to think that the media reports on terrorism and attacks are likely to escalate the fear of the people or that the reports on terror attacks will help in exposing the perpetrators thereby bringing solution to the problem.

Research Methodology

This study adopted survey method of research and in-depth interview for data collection. 180 Copies of questionnaire were administered on audience of terror and attack news in Abakaliki, Owerri and Aba. 60 respondents were purposively selected from each of the cities. 174 copies of the questionnaire were returned, from which the data for this study were elicited. Interview sessions were held with 12 purposively selected terror and attack audience.

Data Presentation and Analysis

Table 1: Respondents' Level of Exposure to Media News on Terrorism and Attacks.

Variable	Frequency	Percent
Very large extent	69	39.7%
Large extent	42	24.4%
Average extent	21	12.1%
Very low extent	20	11.5%
Low extent	18	10.3%
No extent	4	2.3%
Total	174	100

Source field survey

Table One above shows that 69 (39.7%) respondents which is the majority were exposed to media news on terrorism and attacks to a very large extent, seconded by 42 (24.4%) respondents who were exposed to terror and attack news to a large extent, followed by 21 (12.1%) respondents who were exposed to news on terror attacks at average extent, 20 (11.5%) respondents maintained that they were exposed to terror and attack news at a very low extent, 18 (10.3%) respondents and only 4 (2.3%) respondents were not exposed to any news on terrorism and attack. This is a clear indication that the respondents were highly exposed to media news on terrorism and attack.

Table 2: Respondents Level of Knowledge about Media News on Terrorism and Attacks.

Variable	Frequency	Percent
Very large extent	61	35.1%
Large extent	46	26.7%
Average extent	31	17.8%
Very low extent	19	10.9%
Low extent	11	6.3%
No extent	7	4.0%
Total	174	100

Source field survey

The data presented on table Two above portrays that 61 (35.1%) respondents which is the majority had the knowledge of media reports on terrorism to a very large extent, followed by 46 (26.7%) respondents who knew about media reports on terrorism and attacks to a large extent, 31 (17.8%) respondents had the knowledge of media reports on terrorism and attacks at average extent, 19 (10.9%) respondents had the knowledge of media reports on terrorism and attacks at a very low extent, 11 (6.3%) respondents new about mass media reports on terrorism and attacks at a low extent while 7 (4.0%) respondents did not have any knowledge

about media reports on terrorism and attacks. This result shows that larger number of the respondents had great knowledge about media reports on terrorism and attacks in Nigeria.

Table 3: Audience View About Mass Media Reports on Terrorism and Attacks.

Variable	Frequency	Percent
Media reports proffer solution	11	6.3%
It exposes the perpetrators	7	4.0%
It allays public fears	6	3.4%
It heightens public fears	42	24.4%
It magnifies terrorists	28	16.1%
It condemns terrorism	31	17.8%
It causes confusion	14	8.0%
It sabotages security plans	12	6.9%
It exposes security weakness	14	8.0%
It immerses pressure on gvt.	9	5.2%
Total	174	100

Source field survey

The data projected on table Three above express that 11 (6.3%) respondents believed that mass media reports on terrorism and attacks proffer solution to security challenges in Nigeria, 7 (4.0%) respondents said that media reports on terrorism and attacks expose the perpetrators, 6 (3.4%) were of the view that media reports on terror and attacks allay public fears, 42 (24.4%) respondents which is the majority maintained that media reports on terrorism and attacks heighten public fears, 28 (16.1%) respondent held that media reports on terrorism and attacks magnify the terrorists, 31 (17.8%) respondents which is the second to the highest said that media reports on terror and attacks condemn terrorism, 14 (8.0%) respondent believed that those reports on terror attacks cause confusion, 12 (6.9%) were of the opinion that media reports on terrorism and attacks sabotage security plans, 14 (8.0%) respondents answered that media reports on terrorism and attacks expose security weakness and 9 (5.2%) respondents were of the view that mass media reports on terrorism and attacks immerse pressure on the government. This result depicts that mass media reports on terrorism and attacks heighten the fear of the public, even though it condemns terrorism.

Table 4: Audience View on How to Quench Terrorism and Attacks in Nigeria.

Variable	Frequency	Percent
Mounting surveillance eqp.	72	41.4%
Investigative reports about terr.	24	13.8%
Investigative reports of their spo.	26	14.9%
Scrutinising the military	13	7.5%
Scrutinising politicians	8	4.6%
Prosecuting Suspects	3	1.7%
Equipping the military	14	8.0%
Dialogue with the group	2	1.1%
Creating jobs for youths	12	6.9%
Total	174	100

Source field Survey

The data on table Four above establish that 72 (41.4%) respondent which is the vast majority said that the way to stop terrorism in Nigeria is through mounting of surveillance

equipment in every part of the country, 24 (13.8%) respondents viewed it that terror attacks could be stopped in Nigeria through investigative reports of the terrorists, 26 (14.9%) respondents which is the second to the highest number believed that terrorism would be stopped in Nigeria through investigative reports about the sponsors of the terrorists, 13 (7.5%) respondents ticked that terrorism and attacks in Nigeria could be put to stop by scrutinising the military, 8 (4.6%) respondent maintained that the way out of terror attacks in Nigeria is through scrutinising the politicians 3 (1.7%) respondents were of the opinion that prosecuting the suspects will be the way out of terror attacks in Nigeria, 14 (8.0%) respondents said that the way to stop terrorism and attacks in Nigeria is by equipping the military bodies, 2 (1.1%) respondents ticked that the way out of terror attacks in Nigeria is through dialogue with the terrorist groups and 12 (6.9%) respondents expressed that terrorism and attacks in Nigeria could be put to stop through creation of jobs for the youths. This result shows that surveillance equipment at all nooks and crannies will go a long way in exposing the terrorists and investigative reports about the sponsors and the terrorists will also help to salvage the situation.

Discussion of Findings

The data obtained for this study revealed that greater number of the respondents (39.7%) were exposed to media news on terrorism and attacks to a very large extent, (24.4%) respondents were exposed to terror and attack news to a large extent, (12.1%) respondents were exposed to terror attacks news at average extent. This is in agreement with the assertion by Bakare (2011), which states that Nigeria's current identity on the global media is attributed to an uprising militia sect. In the same vein, 10 out of the 12 persons (83.3%) who gave out qualitative data receive news about terror and attacks every week.

Moreover, (35.1%) respondents had the knowledge of media reports on terrorism and attacks to a very large extent, (26.7%) knew about media reports on terrorism and attacks to a large extent, (17.8%) respondents had the knowledge of media reports on terrorism and attacks at average extent. This result is corroboration with the statement by Bola (2010) which states that, conflicts in Nigeria have always gotten widespread mass media coverage. Supporting this view, Timiebi (2010) expressed that the crisis in South-south Nigeria was critically reported on the media, especially the broadcast media. In affirmation to the point, Remi (2010) maintained that the media have always given adequate reports of crisis in Jos. The qualitative data gathered for this study revealed that 9 persons out of 12 (75%) have deep knowledge of media reports on terrorism and attacks in Nigeria.

Also, (6.3%) respondents expressed that media reports on terror attacks proffer solution to insecurity in Nigeria. This is in line with view of Adamu & Ibrahim (2014) which says that the mass media are actually expected to cover and report impending dangers to the society. This crucial responsibility of the media places a critical demand on the press to cover, critically interpret and expose threats in every society. The press has the power to disseminate real information that can be helpful in resolving the crisis through wide coverage. (4.0%) respondents believed that the media stories related to terrorism and attack can uncover the terrorists. (24.4%) respondents said that media reports on stories of terror attack heighten the fear of every society. This is in the same direction with the assertion by Rather, (2012) in Ngige et al, (2016) which holds that terrorists usually seek to penetrate and control the mass media to achieve their objectives through disseminating messages of violence, thereby attracting great publicity. Mass media always promote the terrorist groups by reporting their frightful acts to their audience. Relatively, (16.1%) respondent reported that media stories on terror attacks often magnify the terrorist groups. Contrastingly, (17.8%) respondents said that media reports on terrorism condemn the act of terrorism. The

qualitative data also revealed that all the respondent (100%) maintained that although media reports on terror attacks give them the information, the reports cause fear to the public.

Part of the findings of this study is that (41.4%) respondent said that the way out of terrorism in Nigeria will be through mounting of surveillance equipment in all parts of the country. This is in alignment with the assertion by Okpara (2010) which states that, the media in Nigeria have not effectively played the surveillance role of the press in the coverage of attacks, and this has led to the unceasing crisis across the country. (13.8%) respondents pointed out that terror attacks could be quenched in Nigeria through investigative reports of the terror groups. This is in tandem with the view of Adamu and Ibrahim (2014) which states that, in reporting events of insurgency, accuracy and adequacy of reportage is mostly needed. Thus, the media have the responsibility to give the public an advantage information, both in reporting the attack and also giving details account of such event. In the same way, (14.9%) respondents believed that terrorism could be stopped in Nigeria through investigative reports of the sponsors of the terrorists, (7.5%) respondents ticked that terrorism and attacks in Nigeria could be put to stop by scrutinising the military, (4.6%) respondent expressed that the way out of terror attacks in Nigeria is through investigating the politicians.

Alternatively, (1.7%) respondents held that prosecuting the suspects is a way of stopping attacks in Nigeria, (8.0%) respondents suggested that the way to curb terrorism and attacks in Nigeria is by equipping the military, (1.1%) respondents answered that the way out of terror attacks in Nigeria is by dialogue with the terrorist groups and (6.9%) respondents expressed that terrorism and attacks in Nigeria could be put to end through creation of jobs for the youths. The qualitative result revealed that the way of stopping terrorism in Nigeria as surveillance equipment (50%), investigative reports of the terror groups (16.7%), investigative reports of the politicians (16.7%), equipping the military (16.6%).

Conclusion

This study has concluded that greater number of the respondents were exposed to media news on terrorism and attacks, the respondents have great knowledge of media reports on terrorism and attacks in Nigeria. Inasmuch as the media try to condemn terrorism, the media reports on terrorism and attacks heighten the fear of the public and magnify the terrorists.

Recommendations

In view of the findings of this study, the following recommendations were made, which will be helpful to the fight against terrorism and attacks in Nigeria.

1. There is a need for the government at both the federal and state levels to mount surveillance equipment at all nooks and crannies of the country to capture every movement of people including criminalities.
2. Journalists should step up and carry investigative reports of terrorism activities among the military personnel, politicians and the perpetrators.
3. All the media outfits in Nigeria should be compelled to go digital to enable them lay hands on terrorists and their activities.
4. Terror suspects should be openly tried at the court, and if found guilty, treated with the prescription of the Nigerian constitution. And there shall be no dialogue and no secret release of suspects.
5. The security bodies should be equipped with sophisticated arms to withstand any battle against the terror groups.
6. The Federal Government of Nigeria should try as much as possible to create jobs for the youths and engage them, knowing fully well that, the idle man is the devil's workshop.

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