

ASSESSING THE ROLE OF PRINT MEDIA IN CONFLICT MANAGEMENT IN NIGERIA: A THEORETICAL EXPLORATION

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Abstract

This study explored the role of print media in managing conflict in Nigeria, focusing on ethno-religious tensions and political conflict. Drawing upon historical analysis, theoretical frameworks, empirical evidence, and case studies, the study examined the multifaceted dynamics of conflicts in Nigeria and the potential contributions of print media to conflict management. The historical analysis revealed deep-rooted ethno-religious tensions and political conflict in Nigeria, exacerbated by colonial legacies and governance challenges. Theoretical frameworks, such as agenda-setting theory and peace journalism, offer valuable insights into the ways in which print media influences conflicts and shapes efforts towards peacebuilding. Empirical studies and case analyses illustrated the complex and sometimes contradictory role of print media in conflict management, highlighting the importance of media plurality, editorial independence, and adherence to peace journalism principles. (What was the conclusion?) Based on the findings, recommendations were made to enhance the role of print media in conflict management, including promoting media pluralism, training media practitioners in peace journalism principles, and fostering collaboration between media outlets, civil society organizations, and government agencies.

Keywords: Conflict management, ethno-religious tensions, Nigeria, political instability, print media.

Introduction

In Nigeria, a country rich in diversity encompassing ethnicity, religion, and culture, the print media has stood as a formidable force in shaping public opinion and steering social discourse (Omu & Umoren, 2017). Over time, the Nigerian media landscape has undergone significant transformations, marked by shifts in ownership, regulatory frameworks, and technological advancements. Against this backdrop, this paper endeavours to probe the role of print media in navigating conflicts within the Nigerian milieu. Through an exploration of theoretical paradigms and extant literature, this study aims to illuminate avenues through which the print media can contribute to conflict resolution and peacebuilding endeavours in Nigeria.

To comprehend the dynamics of conflict management in Nigeria, it becomes imperative to delve into the historical context within which these conflicts have emerged and evolved. Nigeria's narrative is punctuated by a succession of ethnic, religious, and political tensions, frequently culminating in violent conflicts and societal unrest (Suberu, 2001). From the era of pre-colonial tribal rivalries to the aftermath of post-independence power struggles, Nigerian society has grappled with deep-rooted divisions that have manifested in various forms of conflict.

The lingering echoes of colonialism have reverberated through Nigeria's socio-political fabric, exacerbating existing fault lines and giving rise to fresh sources of conflict (Osaghae, 2019). The arbitrary

demarcation of borders and the imposition of colonial rule disrupted traditional power structures, fostering competition and animosity among diverse ethnic and religious groups. This colonial legacy continues to cast a shadow over contemporary conflicts in Nigeria, with ethnic and religious identities often serving as rallying points for mobilization and confrontation.

In tandem with ethno-religious tensions, Nigeria has been ensnared in the quagmire of political instability and governance challenges since attaining independence in 1960 (Ekeh, 2016). A saga of military coups, flawed elections, and feeble institutions has eroded public trust in governance structures, fueling grievances across various segments of the populace. The relentless struggle for power and resources, be it at the national, state, or local levels, has frequently precipitated political violence and societal unrest, further exacerbating the country's conflict dynamics.

Amidst these multifaceted challenges, the print media has emerged as a pivotal actor in shaping public perceptions, framing narratives, and catalysing dialogue on contentious issues (Agbo & Oso, 2018). Through the dissemination of news, editorial commentary, and investigative journalism, print media outlets wield considerable influence in molding public opinion and sculpting the discourse surrounding conflict and peacebuilding initiatives. However, the efficacy of the print media in conflict management hinges on a multitude of factors, including media ownership, editorial autonomy, professional ethics, and regulatory frameworks.

In dissecting the role of print media in conflict management, this study draws upon various theoretical frameworks from the domains of communication, peace studies, and political science (Galtung, 1998). One such framework is the agenda-setting theory,

which postulates that the media exerts significant influence in determining the salient issues for the public and policymakers alike. By accentuating specific conflicts or peacebuilding endeavours, the print media can mold public perceptions and sway policy agendas.

Furthermore, the tenets of peace journalism offer valuable insights into how media practitioners can contribute to conflict resolution and peacebuilding through ethical and impartial reporting (Lynch & McGoldrick, 2005). Peace journalism underscores the importance of accuracy, neutrality, and sensitivity in covering conflicts, with a pronounced emphasis on elucidating solutions rather than stoking tensions. Adhering to the principles of peace journalism, print media professionals can foster constructive dialogue and reconciliation efforts in conflict-ridden societies.

The objectives of this study are twofold: firstly, to analyse the historical and contemporary factors underpinning conflicts in Nigeria, with a specific focus on ethno-religious tensions and political instability. Secondly, to explore theoretical frameworks and empirical evidence concerning the role of print media in conflict management, elucidating the potential contributions of agenda-setting theory and peace journalism principles.

Methodology

This study adopts a qualitative research approach to investigate the role of print media in managing religious, ethnic, and political conflicts within Nigeria. The choice of a qualitative methodology is driven by the need to delve deeply into the complexities of these specific crises and their interactions with the print media landscape.

The qualitative methodology employed in this research involves

synthesizing existing literature, theoretical frameworks, and case studies related to religious, ethnic, and political conflicts in Nigeria. Special attention is paid to understanding the unique dynamics and challenges associated with each type of conflict.

To ensure a comprehensive analysis, data triangulation is utilized, drawing from diverse sources such as academic research, policy documents, media reports, and interviews with key stakeholders. This approach allows for a nuanced exploration of how print media influences perceptions, narratives, and responses to religious, ethnic, and political tensions.

By examining the theoretical underpinnings and empirical evidence surrounding these specific crises, this research aims to uncover the role of print media in exacerbating or mitigating conflicts. Through in-depth analysis and synthesis of diverse perspectives, the study seeks to contribute to a deeper understanding of how print media can be leveraged for conflict resolution and peacebuilding efforts in Nigeria.

Conceptual Clarifications

Print Media: Print media, comprising newspapers, magazines, journals, and other tangible publications, serves as a crucial conduit for disseminating news, information, and commentary to the public (McQuail, 2010). In the context of this study, print media emerges as a primary medium through which information pertaining to conflicts and peacebuilding initiatives is communicated to the Nigerian populace. Print media outlets have historically wielded significant influence in shaping public opinion and framing narratives surrounding contentious issues, including conflicts, within the Nigerian socio-political landscape (Omu & Umoren, 2017). Through news reporting,

editorial commentary, and investigative journalism, print media platforms play an indispensable role in shaping the discourse surrounding conflicts and peacebuilding efforts in Nigeria. Additionally, the tangible nature of print media enables its accessibility to diverse segments of the population, making it a potent tool for informing, educating, and engaging citizens in discussions pertinent to conflict management (Agbo & Oso, 2018).

Moreover, print media's role in conflict management extends beyond mere information dissemination to encompass agenda-setting and peace advocacy functions. Agenda-setting theory posits that the media influences public perceptions by determining the issues considered important by the public and policymakers (McCombs & Shaw, 1972). Within the Nigerian context, print media outlets have been instrumental in shaping public discourse around conflicts, thereby influencing policy priorities and public opinion. Furthermore, print media's potential contributions to peacebuilding efforts are underscored by principles of peace journalism, which emphasize accuracy, impartiality, and sensitivity in conflict reporting (Lynch & McGoldrick, 2005). By adhering to these principles, print media practitioners can play a pivotal role in promoting dialogue, reconciliation, and constructive engagement among conflicting parties, thus fostering a conducive environment for conflict resolution and peacebuilding in Nigeria.

Conflict Management: Conflict management encompasses a diverse array of strategies and interventions geared towards addressing, mitigating, and transforming conflicts within societies (Ramsbotham, Woodhouse, & Miall, 2016). This multifaceted approach involves tackling the underlying causes of conflicts, managing their escalation, and fostering reconciliation

and peacebuilding initiatives. Within the specific context of Nigeria, where ethno-religious tensions and political instability have been persistent challenges, conflict management strategies have included negotiation, mediation, dialogue, peacebuilding programmes, and reconciliation efforts. These strategies aim to not only address the immediate manifestations of conflict but also to address the deep-rooted grievances and structural issues that fuel them. By employing a range of tactics, conflict management endeavours seek to promote understanding, foster dialogue, and facilitate sustainable peace in conflict-affected societies like Nigeria.

Ethno-Religious Tensions: Ethno-religious tensions in Nigeria are complex and deeply ingrained, arising from a myriad of historical, socio-economic, and political factors. As Uzodike (2004) elucidates, these tensions are rooted in historical grievances, dating back to pre-colonial tribal rivalries and exacerbated by post-independence power struggles. The competition for scarce resources, political marginalization, and cultural disparities among Nigeria's diverse ethnic and religious groups further fuel these tensions. Consequently, ethno-religious conflicts often erupt, leading to violence, discrimination, and social divisions that threaten the peace and stability of the nation. These conflicts have profound implications for governance, social cohesion, and economic development, underscoring the imperative for effective conflict management strategies (Adigun & Olayiwola, 2018). Addressing ethno-religious tensions requires a nuanced understanding of the root causes and dynamics of these conflicts, as well as concerted efforts from policymakers, community leaders, and civil society actors to promote dialogue, reconciliation, and inclusive governance (Isah, 2015).

Political Instability: Political instability in Nigeria has been a pervasive challenge, characterized by a complex web of factors that have contributed to uncertainty, volatility, and disruptions within the political system (Diamond, 2002). These factors include electoral irregularities, weak governance structures, corruption, and power struggles among political elites (Ojo, 2013). Electoral malpractices, such as vote rigging and manipulation, have undermined the integrity of democratic processes, eroding public confidence in the electoral system and exacerbating tensions among various political factions. Moreover, pervasive corruption within government institutions has led to a lack of accountability and transparency, further eroding public trust in governance structures. Additionally, power struggles among political elites have often degenerated into violent conflicts, particularly during election cycles, leading to widespread social unrest and instability (Ojo, 2013). These dynamics of political instability have perpetuated a cycle of mistrust, disillusionment, and discontent among the Nigerian populace, exacerbating socio-economic inequalities and widening divisions within society.

Colonial Legacy: The colonial legacy in Nigeria, as elucidated by Mamdani (1996), encompasses the enduring socio-economic, political, and cultural impacts of colonial rule on the post-colonial society. This legacy has left an indelible mark on various aspects of Nigerian life, including governance structures, land tenure systems, ethnic relations, and socio-economic disparities. The arbitrary drawing of borders by colonial powers, often without regard for pre-existing ethnic and cultural boundaries, has led to the coalescence of disparate groups within artificial nation-states, fostering inter-group tensions and conflicts (Suberu, 2001). Furthermore, the imposition of colonial institutions and legal frameworks has

perpetuated inequalities and power imbalances, exacerbating grievances among marginalized communities (Osaghae, 2019). Additionally, the colonial exploitation of natural resources has contributed to economic disparities and social unrest, fueling discontent and political instability (Ekeh, 2016). These historical legacies continue to reverberate in contemporary Nigeria, shaping patterns of conflict and posing significant challenges to peace and stability in the country (Omu & Umoren, 2017). Therefore, understanding and addressing the colonial legacy is crucial for comprehensively analyzing the dynamics of conflict management in Nigeria and devising effective strategies for peacebuilding and reconciliation.

Agenda-Setting Theory: Agenda-setting theory, as posited by McCombs and Shaw (1972), asserts the influential power of the media in shaping public discourse by determining the salient issues that capture public attention. In the context of conflict management, this theory suggests that the print media plays a pivotal role in shaping public perceptions of conflicts and influencing policy priorities. By selecting which conflicts to cover and how they are framed, print media outlets wield significant influence over which issues are deemed important and worthy of public attention. For instance, coverage that emphasizes the humanitarian aspects of a conflict may garner more public sympathy and influence policymakers to prioritize humanitarian aid and peacebuilding initiatives. Conversely, sensationalized or biased coverage may exacerbate tensions and perpetuate divisive narratives, influencing public opinion and policy decisions (Adetunji & Obadare, 2016). Thus, agenda-setting theory underscores the importance of responsible journalism in conflict management, highlighting the need for print media practitioners to critically evaluate their role in shaping public

perceptions and promoting constructive dialogue and reconciliation efforts.

Peace Journalism: Peace journalism, as delineated by Lynch and McGoldrick (2005), embodies a transformative approach to conflict reporting, prioritizing accuracy, fairness, balance, and solutions-oriented coverage over sensationalism and violence-centric narratives. Contrary to traditional conflict reporting paradigms, which tend to exacerbate tensions, peace journalism endeavours to offer a nuanced comprehension of conflicts, spotlighting alternative perspectives, and fostering dialogue and reconciliation. By upholding the tenets of peace journalism, print media practitioners wield the potential to significantly impact conflict resolution and peacebuilding endeavours. Through responsible reporting practices that prioritize understanding and empathy, print media outlets can serve as catalysts for constructive dialogue, facilitating the emergence of sustainable solutions to entrenched conflicts (Lynch & McGoldrick, 2005). Thus, peace journalism not only informs but also empowers communities, offering pathways toward conflict transformation and the cultivation of a culture of peace within society.

These elaborated conceptual clarifications provide a foundational understanding of the key terms and concepts that underpin the analysis of the role of print media in conflict management in Nigeria. By integrating original citations, this paper aims to elucidate the complex dynamics of conflicts in Nigeria and explore the potential contributions of print media in fostering peace and reconciliation in the country.

Theoretical framework

The theoretical framework of this paper is anchored in communication theory and peace studies, drawing upon seminal works to

elucidate the role of print media in conflict management within the Nigerian context. Central to this framework is the agenda-setting theory, which posits that the media has the power to shape public perceptions and influence policy priorities by determining the issues and topics that receive attention (McCombs & Shaw, 1972). In the context of conflict management, agenda-setting theory underscores the importance of print media in framing the discourse surrounding conflicts, highlighting certain issues, and shaping public opinion. By drawing attention to specific conflicts or peacebuilding efforts, print media outlets can influence the public agenda, thereby playing a crucial role in shaping the trajectory of conflict resolution and peacebuilding initiatives (McCombs, 2005).

Furthermore, the theoretical framework of this paper is informed by the principles of peace journalism, which emphasize accuracy, fairness, balance, and solutions-oriented coverage in reporting conflicts (Lynch & McGoldrick, 2005). Peace journalism offers an alternative approach to traditional conflict reporting, focusing on promoting dialogue, understanding, and reconciliation rather than sensationalism and polarization. By adhering to peace journalism principles, print media practitioners can contribute to conflict resolution and peacebuilding efforts by fostering constructive dialogue, highlighting alternative perspectives, and promoting empathy and understanding among conflicting parties (Lynch & Galtung, 2010). Integrating these theoretical perspectives provides a comprehensive framework for analyzing the role of print media in managing conflicts in Nigeria and exploring avenues for promoting peace and reconciliation in the country.

Literature Review

The literature review of this paper delves into a comprehensive exploration of existing scholarly works and theoretical frameworks that inform the understanding of the role of print media in conflict management in Nigeria. Scholars such as Omu and Umoren (2017) have highlighted the historical significance of print media in shaping public opinion and influencing social discourse in Nigeria. Their work underscores the pivotal role of print media in disseminating information, framing narratives, and facilitating dialogue on contentious issues within the Nigerian context. Building upon this foundation, the literature review navigates through various dimensions of conflict in Nigeria, ranging from ethno-religious tensions to political instability.

Suberu (2001) contributes to the discourse by examining the historical roots of conflict in Nigeria, tracing the trajectory of ethno-religious tensions and political strife from pre-colonial times to the present day. His analysis sheds light on the complex interplay of historical legacies, socio-economic disparities, and governance challenges that underpin contemporary conflicts in Nigeria. Furthermore, Osaghae (1998) provides insights into the enduring impact of the colonial legacy on Nigeria's socio-political landscape, emphasizing how colonial policies and practices continue to shape patterns of conflict and governance in the country.

Ekeh (1997) adds another layer to the literature review by delving into the dynamics of political instability in Nigeria. His examination of military coups, flawed elections, and weak institutions offers valuable insights into the root causes of political instability and governance challenges in the country. By contextualizing these issues within the broader framework of conflict management, Ekeh's work enriches

the understanding of the complexities inherent in Nigeria's political landscape.

Agbo and Oso (2018) contribute to the literature by focusing specifically on the role of print media in conflict management in Nigeria. Their study examines how print media outlets report on conflicts, frame narratives, and contribute to either exacerbating or mitigating tensions within the society. By analyzing newspaper articles and editorial content, Agbo and Oso highlight the diverse strategies employed by print media practitioners in shaping public perceptions and influencing policy debates on conflict-related issues.

Galtung (1998) offers theoretical insights into the role of media in conflict management through the lens of agenda-setting theory. His seminal work posits that the media plays a crucial role in shaping public perceptions and policy agendas by determining which issues receive prominence in the public discourse. By applying agenda-setting theory to the Nigerian context, scholars can gain a deeper understanding of how print media coverage influences public attitudes towards conflicts and peacebuilding efforts in the country.

Building upon Galtung's framework, Lynch and McGoldrick (2005) introduce the concept of peace journalism as an alternative approach to conflict reporting. Peace journalism emphasizes the importance of accuracy, fairness, and solutions-oriented coverage in reporting conflicts, with a focus on promoting dialogue, reconciliation, and peacebuilding. By adhering to the principles of peace journalism, print media practitioners can contribute to constructive conflict resolution efforts and foster a culture of peace in Nigeria.

Uzodike (2004) further explores the role of media in conflict resolution by examining the potential of media

interventions in promoting dialogue and reconciliation among conflicting parties. His study highlights the importance of media platforms as spaces for facilitating communication, understanding, and mutual recognition between different groups involved in conflicts. By providing avenues for dialogue and negotiation, print media outlets can serve as catalysts for conflict resolution and peacebuilding initiatives in Nigeria.

McCombs and Shaw (1972) provide empirical support for agenda-setting theory through their seminal study on the 1968 U.S. presidential election. Their research findings demonstrate the significant influence of media coverage on shaping public perceptions and priorities during election campaigns. By applying similar research methodologies to the Nigerian context, scholars can assess the extent to which print media coverage influences public attitudes and policy agendas regarding conflicts and peacebuilding efforts in the country.

Furthermore, empirical studies have examined the impact of media ownership and editorial bias on print media coverage of conflicts in Nigeria. A study by Adigun and Olayiwola (2018) found that media outlets owned by political elites or vested interests often portrayed conflicts in ways that aligned with their agendas, perpetuating partisan narratives and exacerbating divisions. This underscores the importance of media plurality and editorial independence in ensuring balanced and impartial coverage of conflicts.

Case studies provide valuable insights into how print media outlets have navigated conflicts and contributed to peacebuilding efforts in specific contexts. For example, during the Niger Delta insurgency, print media played a crucial role in raising awareness about the root causes of the conflict, advocating for dialogue between

stakeholders, and highlighting initiatives aimed at addressing socio-economic grievances (Briggs, 2012). Similarly, in the aftermath of the 2011 post-election violence, print media outlets served as platforms for promoting interethnic dialogue, reconciliation, and conflict resolution (Babalola & Akinfeleye, 2013).

In summary, the literature review of this paper synthesizes insights from various scholarly works and theoretical frameworks to provide a comprehensive understanding of the role of print media in conflict management in Nigeria. By examining historical dynamics, theoretical perspectives, and empirical evidence, this review lays the groundwork for the subsequent analysis of how print media can contribute to fostering peace and reconciliation in the Nigerian context.

Discussion of Findings

The first objective of this paper is to critically analyze the historical and contemporary factors underpinning conflicts in Nigeria, with a specific focus on ethno-religious tensions and political instability. The historical analysis reveals that ethno-religious tensions in Nigeria have deep roots, stemming from pre-colonial tribal rivalries and exacerbated by post-independence power struggles (Suberu, 2001). These tensions have been fueled by factors such as competition for resources, political marginalization, and cultural differences among various ethnic and religious groups. Additionally, political instability has been a persistent challenge in Nigeria, characterized by a history of military coups, flawed elections, and weak institutions (Ekeh, 2016). This instability has undermined governance structures and fueled grievances among the populace, contributing to social unrest and conflict.

Theoretical frameworks such as agenda-setting theory provide insights into how the media, including print media, shapes public perceptions of conflicts and influences policy priorities (McCombs & Shaw, 1972). According to agenda-setting theory, the media plays a significant role in determining the issues that are considered important by the public and policymakers. In the context of Nigeria, print media outlets have often highlighted ethno-religious conflicts and political instability, shaping public perceptions of these issues and influencing policy agendas.

Empirical evidence further corroborates the role of print media in shaping perceptions of conflicts in Nigeria. Studies have shown that print media coverage of ethno-religious conflicts often exacerbates tensions by sensationalizing violence and perpetuating stereotypes (Adetunji & Obadare, 2016). However, print media outlets have also been instrumental in raising awareness about the root causes of conflicts and advocating for dialogue and reconciliation efforts (Briggs, 2012). This highlights the complex and sometimes contradictory role of print media in conflict management.

The second objective of this paper is to explore theoretical frameworks and empirical evidence concerning the role of print media in conflict management, elucidating the potential contributions of agenda-setting theory and peace journalism principles. Peace journalism principles emphasize the importance of accuracy, fairness, and balance in reporting conflicts, with a focus on promoting dialogue and reconciliation (Lynch & McGoldrick, 2005). By adhering to peace journalism principles, print media practitioners can contribute to conflict resolution and peacebuilding efforts in Nigeria.

Case studies provide insights into how print media outlets have applied peace journalism principles in conflict-affected regions of Nigeria. For example, during the Niger Delta insurgency, print media outlets played a crucial role in advocating for dialogue between stakeholders and highlighting initiatives aimed at addressing socio-economic grievances (Briggs, 2012). Similarly, in the aftermath of the 2011 post-election violence, print media outlets promoted interethnic dialogue and reconciliation efforts (Babalola & Akinfeleye, 2013). These case studies illustrate the potential of print media to facilitate peacebuilding processes in Nigeria.

However, the effectiveness of print media in conflict management depends on various factors, including media ownership, editorial independence, and professional ethics. Studies have shown that media outlets owned by political elites or vested interests often perpetuate partisan narratives and exacerbate divisions (Adigun & Olayiwola, 2018). This underscores the importance of media plurality and editorial independence in ensuring balanced and impartial coverage of conflicts.

In conclusion, this study finds that print media plays a significant role in shaping public perceptions of conflicts in Nigeria, with both positive and negative implications for conflict management. The historical analysis highlights the deep-rooted nature of ethno-religious tensions and political instability in Nigeria, while theoretical frameworks such as agenda-setting theory provide insights into how the media influences public perceptions of these issues. Empirical evidence and case studies illustrate the complex and sometimes contradictory role of print media in conflict management, highlighting the importance of media plurality, editorial independence, and adherence to peace journalism principles.

Overall, this study contributes to our understanding of the potential of print media in fostering peace and reconciliation in conflict-affected societies like Nigeria.

Conclusion and Recommendations

In conclusion, this paper underscores the multifaceted role of print media in conflict management within the Nigerian context. Through a comprehensive analysis of historical factors, theoretical frameworks, empirical evidence, and case studies, it becomes evident that print media plays a significant role in shaping public perceptions of conflicts, influencing policy agendas, and facilitating peacebuilding efforts. However, the effectiveness of print media in conflict management is contingent upon various factors, including media ownership, editorial independence, professional ethics, and adherence to peace journalism principles. While print media outlets have the potential to contribute positively to conflict resolution and peacebuilding initiatives, they also face challenges such as sensationalism, bias, and misinformation, which can exacerbate tensions and perpetuate divisions within society. Thus, there is a need for concerted efforts from media practitioners, policymakers, and civil society actors to promote responsible journalism, foster dialogue, and support initiatives aimed at addressing the root causes of conflicts in Nigeria.

Based on the findings of this paper, several recommendations can be made to enhance the role of print media in conflict management in Nigeria. Firstly, there is a need for media pluralism and regulatory frameworks that ensure editorial independence and professional ethics among print media outlets. This includes measures to promote transparency in media ownership and prevent undue influence from political elites or vested interests. Secondly, media practitioners should be trained in peace

journalism principles and encouraged to adopt responsible reporting practices that promote dialogue, reconciliation, and understanding among diverse communities. Additionally, there is a need for greater collaboration between media outlets, civil society organizations, and government agencies to support peacebuilding initiatives and amplify the voices of marginalized groups in conflict-affected regions. By harnessing the transformative power of print media, Nigeria can move towards a more inclusive and peaceful society, where conflicts are managed constructively and sustainable peace is achieved.

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