



**PUBLIC ASSESSMENT OF MEDIA EFFECTIVENESS IN ETHNO-RELIGIOUS
CRISIS MANAGEMENT IN NIGERIA: A STUDY OF NORTH-WEST STATES**

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Abstract

The media is a powerful instrument in shaping public perception about issues. That is why it is the belief that it can be used to build as well as to destroy human society. This study attempt to establish the inherent nature of crises in human society as well as the significant role media play in forming and shaping people's perception of events or issues. The media helping in enhancing social interaction and can as well exaggerate violence through reportage. The survey method was employed with 364 questionnaires administered to respondents using purposive and accidental sampling method because of the sensitivity of the issue under study. The study result shows that the media play a significant role in peacebuilding, preaching tolerance, promoting harmonious working relationships and in creating understanding among the diverse tribes and ethnicity in Nigeria. The study recommends among others that; that there is a need to enhance the performance of media in the process of conflict management, reconciliation and reportage to enable a peaceful common future for all citizens. The Media practitioners are regarded as a purveyor of public safety and are expected to be responsible, accountable, fair, objective, accurate, balanced and professional in the exercise of their professional duty of reporting ethno-religious crisis.

Keywords: Media, Ethno-Religious, Crisis, Management, Nigeria and North-West

Introduction

Ethno-religious crisis in Nigeria has been one of the daunting and disturbing challenges confronting the corporate existence of Nigeria as an indivisible entity in recent times. Since independence and the early 1980s till date, ethnic and religious crises have become a re-occurring decimal. Nigeria has witnessed a series of ethno religious conflict. The first major violent religious conflict in post-colonial Nigeria occurred in Kano between December 18th and 29th 1980. Since the early 1980s, amongst the 19 states that constitute Northern Nigeria, there is virtually none that has not witnessed one form of crisis or the other. Most of the ethno religious crises are experienced in the north central part of Nigeria.

Ironically, crisis reportage, by its nature, holds a powerful attraction for the mass media and her audience. According to Owens-Ibie (2002). Conflict resolution experts have adjudged the mass media as indispensable tools for the management of a crisis. That was why Nwosu, (2004) affirms that; the mass media are considered to be very important in conflict management because they are information merchants, conduits or carriers of various shades and colours of information and in times of conflicts, or even wars, adequate or inadequate management of information is considered to be a critical factor in the emergence, escalation or reduction of tension points at various levels, tensions which depending on how they are managed, can determine the end or continuation of conflicts

Therefore, it becomes pertinent to examine the effectiveness of the mass media in ethno-religious crisis in Nigeria, in order to establish whether the media played their role, as a critical component of interventions towards crisis prevention and resolution and peace building journalism in Nigeria.

Statement of the Problem

The situation in Nigeria on ethno religious crises is alarming. The peace and unity of any given nation determine the economic and political development of such a society (Garver, 1999). Ethnicity and religious tolerance have a role to play in the event of democracy, nation-building and national integration. In

every ethno religious crisis in the society, the public has the right to know, hence the media have to perform its surveillance function by giving the people the right information needed to make the right decision. Media inform the people by educating them about the impending dangers in their society and be the watch-dogs of the media. What is reported in the media about an individual, an organization, a government, or the community is always regarded as genuine. It is against this backdrop that the need for effective coverage of the ethno religious crisis is inalienable to the media. Therefore, the researcher is thus targeted at ascertain the roles of the media in curtailing ethno-religious violence in Nigeria.

The objective of the Study

1. To determine the perception of the public on the role of the media in ethno religious crisis management North Western Nigeria.
2. To what extent does audiences' exposure to media messages help mitigate ethno-religious crisis North Western Nigeria.

Research Questions

1. What has been the general audience perception of the role of the media in ethno religious crisis management and reconciliation in the northwest?
2. What is the extent to which audience exposure to media messages mitigate ethno religious crisis?

Literature Review

History of Ethno-Religious Conflicts in Nigeria

Ethnic and religious crises are part of the most recurring issues in Nigeria's body politics. The problems have permeated the Nigeria landscape since the colonial period, and till the present time. There seems not to be a solution at sight to the accompanying crises of ethnic rivalry and religious intolerance in the country. Following the Berlin Agreement of 1885, Nigeria became an official colony of the British and was granted it political independence on 1st October 1960 after many struggles. The struggle for decolonization was delayed in Nigeria because there was a lack of cooperation between diverse groups in southern and northern Nigeria (Aderinto & Akinwale, 2012). The

struggle became pronounced in western Nigeria which became the centre of mobilization and campaign against colonialism since 1934.

Establishment of various media houses on regional consideration could not help to solve the crises already planted by the colonial administrators although each regional media outlet established reinforced ethnic consciousness in its domain, thereby, making it possible for Nigerians to develop a sense of divided loyalties, partly to the nation and to the ethnic and religious group.

In Nigeria today, the dominant ethnic groups treat the minority ethnic groups with suspicion and different religious worldview clash at the slightest provocation. Institutional efforts made to satiate these tendencies since independence in 1960 has proved inadequate and has not yielded the desired result.

Roles of Mass Media in Crisis Resolution

The role the media plays in crises situations depends upon the function it assigns to itself even in the normal situation. Media's role in any country depends largely upon the social, political, economic and legal conditions prevalent in that country. The historical, cultural background and traditions also influence media narratives (Sawant, 2011). Mass media play a unique role in providing information and making people aware of the situation during crises. The press can also calm the populace and encourage them to do positive actions, and vice versa terrorized the masses and created chaos. Various studies have shown that mass media can play a vital role before while and after the crisis. Awoshakin (2002) opined that the media have the power to encourage conflict and violence or to assist in conciliation. Van de Veen (1997) says many advocates of crises prevention are convinced that the media can play a critical role in defusing tensions and forging peace. He opined that conflict sells, cooperation or the process of resolving conflict does not, thus because of this, it could be argued that the media tend to dramatize conflicts (either openly or tacitly) by focusing irreconcilable differences between the parties, extreme positions and inflammatory statements, violent or threatening acts and win-or-lose outcomes.

In crises reporting the media must play these roles (Galadima, cited in Pate 2002, p. 61);

1. The journalist must be so meticulous in the stories that have to do with the crisis. The essence of this carefulness is to avoid being accused of taking sides, inflaming the crisis or posing as a security threat to the nation.
2. The journalist should not capitalize on the crisis, especially the one that affects people directly, to sell their stories and make money.
3. Avoid showing stories with gory pictures during a crisis. By gory pictures, we mean pictures or photographs of beheaded persons, burnt persons, etc. More so, the journalist should not mention names of persons affected by the crisis.
4. The journalist must be very careful when dealing with the parties involved in the crisis. This is because, as noted by Galadima in Pate (2002), every party to a crisis would always want to use the media to promote its interest at the expense of their opponents.
5. The journalist must also be conscious of the media laws governing media reports on crisis and crises; every crisis has security implications. More so, the journalist must be conscious of the ethics of his profession.

Challenges facing Crisis Reporters in Nigeria

Crisis reporters in Nigeria are faced with numerous challenges raging from religion, ethnicity, culture, time, ownership factor, unprofessionalism, etc. on the aforementioned challenges, Asemah and Edegoh (2012) explained that when you have crisis between two different religious and ethnic groups you are likely to favour the religion and ethnic group you belong to as a journalist. Eti (2009) gives some challenges faced by crisis reporters as follows:

- **Nature of crisis:** The nature of crisis constitutes a bane to balance and objective reporting. Conflict, especially when it gets violent, affects the editor's judgment of news value (Eti, 2009).
- **The culture of the environment:** Another challenge is the prevailing culture of the land where it operates. Siebert, Peterson and Schramm as cited by Agbese (2006, p. 17) posted the long sustained view that "the media takes on the forms and colouration of the social and political structures within which it operates." Udomisor (2002, p. 91) refers to this as 'environmental factors.' He reasons that a poor democratic structure characterized by bribery, looting and embezzlement of public

funds, a situation that media practitioners are sufficiently acquainted with and are effectively positioned to participate in, will have a telling effect on the practice of objective journalism. This is because; the press is only a reflection of the society in which it operates (Eti, 2009). **Reliance on the group (opinion) leaders for information:** When a crisis happens, the journalist may not be able to get firsthand knowledge. Hence, they rely on opinion leaders of the group, either religious or ethnic group. The leaders might not give the correct information, and this will make the reporter provide incorrect reports.

- **Time factor:** The often demand on a reporter to beat deadlines makes it practically impossible for conflict reporters to treat conflict stories exhaustively. More so, by implications, much of what comes in from the wires are materials that represent the dominant voice. The local journalist may, therefore, be swimming against the tide to find articles from a local angle to create balance (Eti, 2009).
- **Ownership Interest:** The media owner may dictate what the journalist should report about the crisis. The journalist who does not want to be sacked will comply with the dictates and directives of the owner. This mostly happens where the interests of the owners are affected.
- **Unprofessionalism:** Crisis reports are biased because more journalists who act as crisis reporters are not trained in the field of journalism. They, therefore, do not know the essentials of crisis. However, the future of conflict reporting in Nigeria Newspapers will be determined by which roles the journalists choose for themselves such as “cheerleader” or “watchdog”, “fear-monger” or “evidence-based reporters”, part of the solution or part of the problem.

Empirical Review

In a study conducted by Al-Kasim (2010) on audience perception of media coverage and management of the 2011 post-election violence in Kaduna State which was limited to only four local government areas of Kaduna State, examined the perception of the audience, elicits essential information that enhances a better understanding of the role of media in conflict management and reconciliation. The survey method was used, and the instruments for data collection were the questionnaire and in-depth interview. The study concludes that there is a need to enhance the performance of media in the

process of conflict management and reconciliation to enable a peaceful common future for all citizens.

In yet another study “The Media and the Resolution of Ethno-Religious Crisis in Nigeria” Victor and Chidi (2011) critically looked at the role of the international and local media in resolving ethnic and religious conflicts. It used the 2010 Jos Crisis in Nigeria as a case study. From the perspective of social responsibility theory, the study argued that the media owe certain indisputable obligations to society; such obligations are encouraging the preservation of public peace, morality, and security. The study used a sample survey to collect data for this study. It found out that there are loopholes in the reporting of crises, particularly in terms of proportionality and the apportioning of blames. The researchers, therefore, recommend that journalists should display impartiality in reporting, which is required under their code of ethics and which are mandatory under the social responsibility doctrine.

Furthermore, Eti (2012) carried out a research on how newspapers interpret crises issues in Nigeria through their reportage; the researcher adopted the content analytical method to examine how Nigerian newspapers report crises issues such as violent, kidnapping and hostage-taking. The paper content analyzed *The Champion*, *The Punch* and *New Nigerian* newspapers. She focused on newspapers headlines and concluded that reporting of crises situations like bombing, violent and kidnapping in the Nigerian press is ‘episodic’ in nature.

Theoretical Review

Agenda setting theory

Bernard Cohen was credited to have popularized and articulated the agenda setting theory when in 1963, as quoted by Wogu (2008) he stated the press is significantly more than a purveyor of information and opinion. It may not be successful much of the time in telling people what to think, but it is stunningly successful in determining its readers what to think about. Cohen’s assertion was coming at a time when the debate about the powerful attributes of the press was shifting from *the all-powerful* effect media phase to the *conditionally dominant* media phase

This theory posits that the news sets an agenda and impresses this agenda on the public, and consequently, the public tends to perceive this agenda as

necessary. Because of this dependence on the press by the people, it becomes “dangerous” if the news deliberately sets a plan to mislead the public. On the relevance of this theory to this research, Kunczik (1988) in Folarin (1998) points out that the opportunity for agenda-setting by the mass media becomes enhanced when the value structure of a society is in a state of flux-typical of the Nigerian nation with the menace of crisis.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Research Design

The research design for this study is the survey method. A survey is also a study of the characteristics of a sample through questioning that enables a researcher to make generalisations concerning the population of interest (Ohaja, 2003).

The population of the Study

The population of this study comprises of residents of Northwest, Nigeria. According to 2006 estimates by the National Population Commission, the population of the selected state is put at 35,786,944 persons.

Table 1:

<i>States</i>	Population
<i>Jigawa</i>	4,348,649
<i>Kaduna</i>	6,066,562
<i>Katsina</i>	5,792,578
<i>Kano</i>	9,383,682
<i>Kebbi</i>	3,238,628
<i>Sokoto</i>	3,696,999
<i>Zamfara</i>	3,259,846
Total	35,786,944

Source: National Population Commission, 2006

To get the 2016 estimated figure for each state, the researcher used the approved 3.2 per cent growth rate to calculate the population over 10 years. Hence applying the straight line method or approach formula, all the states were calculated using the formula. The result is as shown below:

$$N_1 = N_0 (1 + K n)$$

Where N₁ = Current population at a given growth rate as at 2016.

Where N₀ = Census figures as of 2006.

K = Growth rate.

N = Numbers of years after the last census

Table 2: 2016 Estimated Figures for North-West Geo-political Zone

<i>States</i>	Population
<i>Igawa</i>	5,740,216
<i>Kaduna</i>	8,007,861
<i>Katsina</i>	7,646,202
<i>Kano</i>	12,386,460
<i>Kebbi</i>	4,274,988
<i>Sokoto</i>	4,880,038
<i>Zamfara</i>	4,302,996
Total	47,238,761

Source: Field Work

Sample Size

To arrive at a manageable sample size for the population, the researcher utilized the Sample Size Calculator as developed by the National Statistical Service of Australia (www.nss.gov.au/nss/home.nsf/pages/sample+size+calculator) in determining the sample size for this study. With a confidence level of 95% and a confidence interval of 0.05, the generated sample size was 385. It is shown below:

Determine Sample Size

Confidence Level: 95% ▼

Population Size: 47238761

Proportion:

Confidence Interval: 0.05

 Upper: 0.55000

 Lower: 0.45000

Standard Error: 0.02551

Relative Standard Error: 5.10

Sample Size: 385

Calculate Clear

Sampling Techniques

The researcher used a multi-stage sampling procedure for the study. This requires the adoption of several sampling techniques at different stages to arrive at specific respondents that truly and validly represent the entire population, especially when the population is large or complex. At first stage, the researcher selected northwest geo-political zone purposively, because the seven states: (Jigawa, Kano, Kaduna, Katsina, Kebbi, Sokoto and Zamfara) have suffered ethno-religious crises before and even now.

At the second stage sampling, the researcher clustered each selected state according to the Senatorial Districts. There are three senatorial districts in each state. At this stage, the researcher purposively selected the local government area in a senatorial district where the state capital is located, and randomly selected one local government area each from the other two senatorial districts. The researcher also randomly selected one town each from the LGAs selected for the study.

Table 3: Selected Local Government Areas

<i>States</i>	Senatorial zones	LGAs	Selected towns
<i>Katsina</i>	Katsina South (11 LGAs)	Funtua LGA	Funtua/Bakin-dutse
	Katsina North (12 LGAs)	Zango LGA	Zango/Arusu
	Katsina Central (11 LGAs) = 34 LGAs	Katsina LGA	Katsina/Garin Tandu
<i>Sokoto</i>	Sokoto South (7 LGAs)	Tambawal LGA	Faga/Sabon Gari
	Sokoto East (8 LGAs)	Isa LGA	Modaci/Isa
	Sokoto North (8 LGAs) = 23 LGAs	Sokoto North LGA	Sabo Birni/Gagi
<i>Zamfara</i>	Zamfara North (4 LGAs)	Shinkafi LGA	Tudun wada/Birnin Yero
	Zamfara West (6 LGAs)	Gummi LGA	Gummi
	Zamfara Central (4 LGAs) = 14 LGAs	Gusau LGA	Magaji/ Ungumar Dawaki

The instrument for Data Collection

Questionnaire served as an instrument for the collection of data for the study.

Method of Data Analysis

Data gathered from the field for this study will be analysed using simple descriptive statistical tools such as frequencies and percentages.

Data Presentation and analysis

Out of the 385 copies of the questionnaire distributed, 364 were returned and found usable while 21 were not returned and some not found usable. Thus,

responses from the 364 respondents will be presented in the table of frequencies and percentages and analyzed below:

Table 1: Gender of Respondents

<i>Gender</i>	Frequency	Percentage (%)
<i>Male</i>	150	41.2
<i>Female</i>	214	58.8
<i>Total</i>	364	100

Table 2: Age Distribution of Respondents

<i>Ages</i>	Frequency	Percentage (%)
<i>18-23</i>	88	24.2
<i>24-29</i>	151	41.5
<i>30-35</i>	93	25.6
<i>36 and above</i>	32	8.8
<i>Total</i>	364	100

Table 3: Occupation of Respondents

Variable	Frequency	Percentage
Civil servants	78	21.4
Unemployed	155	42.6
Employed (Others)	85	23.4
Students	46	12.6
Total	364	100

Table 4: Religion of Respondents

Variable	Frequency	Percentage
Islamic	219	60.2
Christianity	133	36.5
Traditional	-	-
Others (not specified)	12	3.3
Total	364	100

Table 5: Respondents view of been affected by crisis

<i>Variables</i>	Frequency	Percentage (%)
<i>Yes</i>	321	88.2
<i>No</i>	43	11.8
<i>Total</i>	364	100

From the table above, most of the respondents 321 (88.2%) had been affected by the crisis in the northwest.

Table 6: Audience view of media reporting crisis situations from their affected areas

<i>Variables</i>	Frequency	Percentage (%)
<i>Yes</i>	290	79.7
<i>No</i>	74	20.3
<i>Total</i>	364	100

The table indicates that 79.7% of the respondents agreed that the media reported crisis situations in their areas.

Table 7: Audience view to ascertain if the media play a role in crisis management and reconciliation

<i>Variables</i>	Frequency	Percentage (%)
<i>Yes</i>	209	57.5
<i>No</i>	155	42.5
<i>Total</i>	364	100

The table shows that higher numbers of the respondents had the view that the media played a tangible role in crisis management and reconciliation.

Table 8: Audience responses to the roles of media in crisis management and reconciliation in northwest

<i>Variables</i>	Frequency	Percentage (%)
<i>Positive</i>	285	78.3
<i>Negative</i>	79	21.7
<i>Total</i>	364	100

The above result shows clearly that 285 (78.3%) respondents were of the belief that media reports affected their society positively, shaped people's behaviour undoubtedly while 79 (21.7%) were of the belief that the affection was detrimental to the community by causing unnecessary tensions to their wellbeing.

Table 9: Extent to which media takes side or not in reporting ethno-religious crisis related issues

Variable	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	75	20.6
To some extent	133	36.5

To large extent	95	26.1
Not at all	61	16.8
Total	364	100

The result in table 9 above indicates that 75(20.6%) responded yes, 133(36.5%) agreed to the view of to some extent, 95(26.1%) agreed to a large extent and 61 (16.8%) responded not at all, disagreeing totally that the media do not take side while reporting.

Table 10: Rating media reports on peace and crisis management

Variable	Frequency	Percentage
Educative	82	22.5
Balanced and accurate	140	38.5
Biased	112	30.8
Boring	30	8.3
Total	364	100

Table 10 indicates that 22.5% respondents are of the opinion that media contents are educative, 38.5% rated it to be accurate and balanced, 30.8% shared the opinion that they are biased and 8.3% saw media reports on crisis as being boring.

Table 11: Respondents view on media contributions to peace building among the diverse people of northwest

Variable	Frequency	Percentage
Strongly agree	170	46.7
Agree	95	26.1
Disagree	60	16.5
Strongly disagree	39	10.7
Total	364	100

The result indicates that 46.7% and 26.1% of the respondents strongly agreed and agreed respectively, while 16.5% and 10.7% disagreed and strongly disagreed. This indicates the media have been contributing positively to achieving peace through preaching tolerance, trust and understanding among the people of northwest.

Table 12: Respondents satisfaction of media content in ethno-religious crisis management and reconciliation

Variables	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Yes	285	78.3

<i>No</i>	79	21.7
<i>Total</i>	364	100

Table 12 has it that 285(78.3%) were for yes, that they were satisfied with the media contents ethno-religious crisis and reconciliation in northwest, while 79(21.7%) were not satisfied with the contents of the media.

Table 13: Responses on how the media can be used for best practice during any violent crisis in the country

Variable	Frequency	Percentage
Educative	35	9.6
Dialogue	62	17
Sensitization	45	12.4
All of the above	222	61
Total	364	100

Table 13 shows that the highest respondents were 222(61%) and considered all the reasons mentioned above as the way the media can be used for best practice during crisis.

Discussions of Findings

Research Question 1: What has been the general audience perception of the role of the media in ethno religious crisis management and reconciliation in the northwest?

Most of the responses show that many audiences are satisfied with the role of media in the areas of ethno religious crisis management and reconciliation and are happy with the unbiased, balanced, educative and professional competence of the press. Also, the media play a vital role in ethno-religious crisis management while 155(43.5%) were of the opinion that the media don't play any role in that regard. Table 8, 285(78.3%) agreed that the media play a positive role in crisis and reconciliation. On the issue of media contributing to peacebuilding, the data in table 11 indicates that majority of the respondents, 72.1% agreed that media contribute to peacebuilding. In the question of media taking sides, 75(20.6%) responded yes, while 133(36.5%) agreed with the view to some extent and 95(26.1%) answered to a large extent, while 61(16.8%) responded not all, disagreeing with the fact and insist that media do not take side while reporting at all.

Research Question 2: What is the extent of audience exposure to media messages on ethno-religious crisis management and reconciliation?

The extent of exposure of audience to media reports on peace and conflict is quite appreciative as 290(79.7%) as shown in Table 9 indicates that the media reported crisis situation from their affected areas. Only 74(20.3%) responded that the media never reported conflicts from their areas. Table 10 indicates that 82(22.5%) respondents are of the opinion that Media content is educative, many of the respondents 140 representing (38.5%) rated the media reports on peace and conflict as balanced and accurate, some 112 (30.8%) shared the opinion that the media reports are biased while some 30 (8.3%) sees media reports on conflicts as being boring. Table 12, majority of the respondents 78.3% were also satisfied with media contents in ethno religious crisis management and reconciliation in the northwest.

Summary and Conclusion

This study has been able to establish the inherent nature of conflicts and crises in human societies as well as the significant role of media and communication in human interaction and also carefully looked at the destructive nature of violence to the wellbeing of humanity. The study shows that with the media play a significant role in peacebuilding, preaching tolerance, respect, trust and understanding among the diverse 364 people northwest. Peace has always been the bedrock of achieving meaningful development and the media have contributed more positively to conflict prevention, transformation, resolution and even suppression through accurate, balanced, diligent, and unbiased reporting of events and happenings regardless of who is at an advantage, right or wrong. From the findings, audiences were also satisfied with media contents in ethno religious crisis management and reconciliation in the northwest.

Recommendations

1. Improved professionalism in peace journalism can be used to achieve peaceful co-existence among the people of the state.
2. Media practitioners or journalists are expected to be responsible, accountable and professional in the exercise of their profession, in the same way, and manner all other professionals are ethnically required to conduct themselves.
3. Government at all levels should double their efforts in promoting initiatives to train journalist and other media practitioners on issues of peace and security through workshops, conferences, fora, symposia and the likes.
4. The mass media, especially, the print, should go beyond mere reportage of religious crises through news stories. They should go into modern

journalistic mainstreams to help in preventing ethnic and religious intolerance in Nigeria.

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