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News Framing: a Comparative Content Analysis of Newspapers Framing of Ethnic Issues in Nigeria

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Abstract

The study examined the extent as well as patterns of conflict and peace oriented framings in three popular and widely circulated newspapers in Nigeria through a quantitative content analysis to ascertain the framing of news on ethnic issues. The unit of analysis was individual article that contained related items while the reliability coefficients calculated using Holsti's formula resulted to 75.5%. This study discovered that in the framing of ethnic issues, the newspapers differed significantly on conflict framing. However, as much as high attention was given to conflict framing, it was discovered also that peace framing was not totally disregarded by the three newspapers. The newspapers have not entirely done very badly but have left much to be desired. The paper has significantly expanded understanding of how media cover conflicts and inflame the behaviours that lead to or worsen them.

Introduction

Ethnic conflict has been one of the reasons taunted for Nigeria development problems (Jacob, 2012; Irobi, 2005), therefore the inability of Nigeria to put an end to it or check prevalent ethnic conflicts in several regions of the country has given rise to strong concern and at the same time stimulated new interest in ethnic conflicts research (Onwuzuruigbo, 2010). Therefore, one of the critical gaps, which this study has responded to, is what Hutchison (2013) describes as inadequate research attention that is devoted to ascertaining how media and other factors responsible for changes in individual attitudes and behavior that eventually lead to conflict. This is important in order to establish the involvement of newspapers in the conflict that has set ethnic groups against each other and threatening the existence of Nigeria. For instance, Human Right

Watch report (2010) gave figures of 700 and 1000 as the death recorded in Jos crises between 2008 and 2010 respectively. Also, the Amnesty International reported (2004) that several people have been killed on account of ethnic conflicts in Nigeria since 1999. Moreover, incessant ethno-communal conflicts have led to massive displacement of people in the conflict zones thereby making them internal refugees and burden to the government.

Though, there are numerous possibilities of predictors of conflicts as identified in the structural conflict theories, however this paper focused on newspaper framing because as observed by Munteanu (2011) there is a need to investigate the role of media in inciting violence due to the fact that there has been a very close linkage of media and violence. For example, Kalyango Jr. and Vultee (2012) reiterate that media escalated the ethnic civil conflicts that culminated in genocide in 1994, during Rwanda's guerrilla war, and Ethiopia's border conflicts with Eritrea and Somalia in 1993 and 1994. Equally instructive is Kurspahic's (2003) conclusion that the media's actions can be source of hatred and an instigator of conflict.

Therefore, the issue identified in this paper in relation to the involvement of newspaper in conflicts exists, germane and requires investigation because Nigeria, like many other nations, continues to seek for lasting solutions to the barrage of intractable conflicts deterring her development and harmonious relationship among ethnic groups.

News Framing

News framing has been defined in many ways but in the context of this study, it is operationalized as frames/framing by the Punch, Trust, and the Sun newspapers on ethnic issues and conflict in Nigeria with the tendency of shaping conflict behaviours. More so, the concept of framing or frames has been one of the most abundant areas in recent research in communication, politics and sociology because framing can clarify and interpret the extent the media affect publics' understanding of politics (Lecheler & De Vreese, 2012).

Earlier, framing theory has its origins in politics and psychology, but was later applied in the study of how journalists shape and control news by scholars like Todd Gitlin and Gaye Tuchman in the late 1970s (Karnes, 2008). Ever since that time several researchers on the impact of news coverage have come up with many overview of framing. Kostadinova and Dimitrova (2012) submit that frames are significant because they sway people's understanding, sentiments and outlooks toward issues and events in societies. Also attesting to this, de Vreese, Boomgaarden, and Semetko (2011) disclose that news framings have the capacity to put forth a strong influence on public attitude. To Karnes (2008)

framing is the practice by which a person decides what portions of information to present when conveying a story to the public. Tankard, Hendrickson, Silberman, Bliss, and Ghanem (1991) describe framing as shaping of idea for news content which creates a perspective and stimulates the issue through the use of selection, stress, exclusion, and amplification. In line with this submissions (McQuail, 2005; Tuchman, 1978) note that news framing is set in agreement with some hidden structure of meaning through which the audience is prompted to seeing the world in a similar manner as the journalists do. Speaking in a similar tone, the social constructivists claim that the media make available frames of reference for the audience that directly or indirectly suggest certain meaning of events or even infer certain connections between issues (Kostadinova & Dimitrova, 2012).

Methodology

The study employed quantitative content analysis to ascertain the actual content and framing of newspaper stories on ethnic issues in Nigeria. It examined the extent and patterns of conflict oriented and peace oriented framings published by three popular and widely circulated newspapers in Nigeria. Content analysis is one of the most standard methods to scientifically examine empirical data about features and subliminal meanings, frames and goals of media texts and images (Pürer, 2003).

Research Design

This study sets out to determine, from the twelve months periods (a six month-period each ranging between December 2013 to May 2014 and December 2014 to May 2015), the extent that newspaper framing of ethno-political issues and conflicts in Nigeria display peace and conflict oriented framing, the indicators of conflict and peace that are most salient on the ethnic issue in Nigeria newspapers, and differences in the framing of the ethnic issues among the newspapers.

The periods were selected for this study for the following reasons. Firstly, the period of December 2013 to May 2014 was within the stretch of months that Nigeria experienced an increase in the rate of ethnic conflicts across the six geo-political zones. Secondly, the period of December 2014 to May 2015 was when the political activities in Nigeria hit up the ethnic tension and conflict behaviour reached the tipping point that placed Nigeria on the edge of ethnic war. Similarly, the periods were suitable for this study having been confirmed by several scholars that politics and political campaign periods are likely stimulant of conflict especially in a multiethnic society. For instance, Carment,

James and Taydas (2009), Saideman (1998) have indicated that most conflicts are only casually ethnic but are inspired by a combination of non-ethnic influences usually political and economic. Buttressing this also, Alulo (2003) emphasized that one of the four factors that hinder peace and unity in Nigeria is the issue of majority and minority domination in politics which usually becomes an issue during election. In the same vein, Okoli and Iortyer (2014) stressed that political activities in Nigeria have been a veritable dimension of threats to ethnic unity and stability.

Population and Sampling

The population of this content analysis involved all news stories published in the three newspapers namely the Punch, Sun and Daily Trust. The three newspapers were selected purposively to meet the following objectives which are germane to the study: circulation strength, and their wide range of coverage of political, ethnic, religious and national issues. Similarly, the three newspapers were chosen because of their different ideological posture. In line with this, Riffe, Lacy and Drager (1996) confirmed the accuracy of purposive sampling in the selection of relevant media for analysis. Another reason for purposively selecting these newspapers is due to the fact that these newspapers' archives are accessible online. Stories were obtained from the respective newspapers' online archives: <http://www.punchng.com/> (The Punch newspaper), <http://dailytrust.com.ng/> (Daily Trust newspaper), and <http://sunnewsonline.com/new> (The Sun newspaper).

Meanwhile, stratified sampling was adopted in selecting the study's units analyzed as well as the stratification of samples by periods. According to Cho, Kong, and Lin (2004, February), Macnamara (2005) stratified samples is applicable when selecting units for analysis such as articles or adverts from certain days or weeks over a period. Similarly, Riffe, Lacy and Fico (2014) and Riffe, Lacy, Nagovan and Burkum (1996) have identified stratification of media publications over a period by month or week as providing optimum results.

Unit of Analysis: The unit of analysis was individual article that contained related items such as news stories, feature articles, news analysis, interpretative and investigative stories and editorial articles, while paragraph was treated as the measurement unit in locating both conflict and peace framing. Several studies (Hackett & Schroeder, 2008; Zheng, 2006) have used individual article as their unit of analysis having found it suitable to achieve a holistic analysis.

Coding Categories: The coding classifications for this study were adapted from

Lee and Maslog (2005)'s 13 coding categories which were initially updated from Galtung's peace and conflict indicators. It was from these that this study adapted six indicators of conflict framing and six indicators of peace framing as shown in table 1 below.

Table 1: Coding Categories for Conflict/Peace Framing (adapted for the study)

Indicators of Conflict Framing	Indicators of Peace Framing
1. Does the story report win-lose (zero-sum) option?	1. Does the story report win-win option?
2. Is good/bad tagging present?	2. Is good/bad tagging absent?
3. Is it a reactive/ waiting for violence reporting?	3. Is it a proactive/prevention story?
4. Is it about visible effects of conflict only?	4. Is it about consequences/invisible effects?
5. Is it differences oriented?	5. Is it agreement oriented?
6. Is it elite sources oriented?	6. Is it people sources oriented?

Inter-coder Reliability/Agreement: To ensure the reliability of this study, two communication graduate students and the researcher carried out the coding. The two coders were trained independently as well as practiced coding samples of articles a long with hours of explanations on the contents of the coding book and coding sheet. Riffe, *et al.*, (2005) encouraged random selection of content samples for inter-coder reliability testing. Meanwhile, Wimmer and Dominick (2006) recommend that between 10% and 25% of the body of content should be tested. Therefore, the inter-coder reliability for this study was established by randomly selecting 45 articles out of 303 representing 15 % of all the article. The study's reliability coefficients were calculated, using Holsti's formula, as follows:

$$PA_0 = \frac{2A}{(n_A + n_B)} = \frac{68}{45 + 45} = 0.755(75.5\%)$$

Scholars (Lombard, *et al.*, 2003; Macnamara, 2003; Neuendorf, 2002) have indicated that Hoslti's method of inter-coder reliability calculation is one of the most common and reliable. In line with this, the overall inter-coder reliability coefficient was 75.5%. Frey, Botan and Kreps (2000) stressed that a 70% agreement should be considered reliable. Also, in the study of Kee, Ibrahim, Ahmad and Khiang (2012), agreement level of 0.710 to 0.833 was recorded among the study's coders and recognized as reliable having passed the

necessary 70%.

Research Findings

In all, 303 newspaper articles representing the unit of analysis were counted. A total of 101 articles were selected from each of the three newspapers, *The Punch*, *Sun* and *Trust* newspapers respectively. However, from all the three newspapers, a total 1,135 measurement units (frames counts) were identified and treated to answer the three research objectives set out for this study. As shown in Table 2, from *The Punch* newspaper, a total of 117 measurement units were treated from the articles published between December 2013 and May 2014 while a total of 226 were from those published between December 2014 and May 2015 respectively making a total of 343 measurement units representing 30% from *The Punch*. Also, from the *Sun* newspaper, a total of 145 measurement units were analyzed from the articles published between December 2013 and May 2014 while a total of 355 units were treated from the articles published from December 2014 and May 2015 making a total of 500 which amounts to 44%. Then from the *Trust* newspaper, a total of 114 measurement units were derived from the articles published between December 2013 and May 2014 whereas 178 came from the articles published in the periods of December 2014 and May 2015 totaling 292 which represents 26%.

Table 2: Frequency of measurement units/frames counts by newspapers and months

Month	News papers			Total
	<i>Punch</i>	<i>Sun</i>	<i>Trust</i>	
December 2013	02	15	07	24
January 2014	11	21	15	47
February 2014	22	32	23	77
March 2014	20	19	20	59
April 2014	27	18	23	68
May 2014	35	40	26	101
	117	145	114	376
December 2014	21	35	20	76

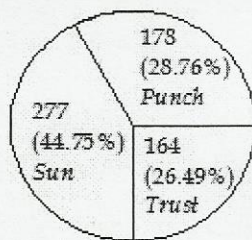
January 2015	28	52	22	101
February 2015	43	84	37	164
March 2015	69	78	41	188
April 2015	44	62	34	140
May 2015	21	45	24	90
	226	355	178	757
	343	500	292	1135

Extent of conflict and peace framing in newspapers

To determine the extent that conflict and peace framing on ethnic issues are prevalent in the selected newspapers, the raw frequencies computed for all 303 unit of analysis (articles) and 1135 measurement units (frame counts) in *The Punch*, *Sun* and *Trust* newspapers showed a considerably higher number of units were framed as conflict oriented, 619, compared to 516 peace oriented. However, while the news framing as a whole was conflict oriented, however, there were marked variations in the three newspapers in relation to both orientations.

According to the findings, the *Sun* newspaper displayed the highest proportions of frames to conflict oriented framing with a total of 277 representing 45% compared to *The Punch* newspaper with 178 (29%) while the *Trust* newspaper has 164 frames amounting to (26%). Figure 1 gives a graphical explanation of the findings.

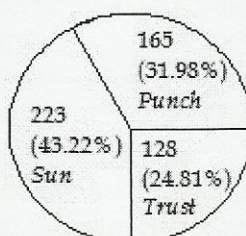
Figure 1. Prevalence of conflict framing displayed by newspapers



Total Conflict Framing by Newspapers

On the other hand, for peace oriented framing the Sun newspaper still recorded high fraction of coverage with 223 frames (43%) while *The Punch* newspaper trailed with 165 (32%) and the Trust 128 amounting to 25 percent of the total frames on peace as shown in figure 2 below.

Figure 2. Prevalence of peace framing displayed by newspapers



Salient indicators of conflict and peace framing in Nigeria newspapers

Framing involves salience (Bantimaroudis & Ban, 2001) however, according to Ghanem (1996), the frequency with which a frame or an issue is mentioned in news story is perhaps the most powerful framing device and determinant of saliency. Consequently, how issues are framed determine how public perception are guided (Bantimaroudis & Ban, 2001).

Therefore, this study's findings overall contrast showed that conflict indicators with 55% are most salient compared with peace indicators that showed 45% as displayed in table 3 below. Meanwhile, on average, each conflict indicator appears in 103 percent, whereas each peace indicator is present in only 86 percent.

Table 3: Indicators most salient across three newspapers

Indicators	Newspapers			Total
	Punch	<i>Sun</i>	Trust	
		Conflict framing		
Zero-sum option	7 (4%)	16 (6%)	21 (13%)	44
Elite sources	46 (26%)	61 (22)	34 (21%)	141
Good/bad tagging	11 (6%)	39 (14%)	29 (17%)	79
Visible effects	9 (5%)	41 (15%)	21 (13%)	71
Differences focus	56 (31%)	51 (18%)	34 (21%)	141
Reactive framing	49 (28%)	69 (25%)	25 (15%)	143
	178	277	164	619 (55%)
Average				103

		Peace Framing		
Win-win option	29 (18%)	24 (11%)	15 (12%)	68
People sources	31 (19%)	49 (22%)	23 (18%)	103
No good/bad tagging	37 (22%)	31 (14%)	14 (11%)	82
Consequences effects	22 (13%)	45 (20%)	33 (26%)	100
Agreement focus	19 (12%)	22 (10%)	18 (14%)	58
Proactive framing	27 (16%)	52 (23%)	25 (19%)	117
	165	223	128	516 (45%)
Average				86
	343	500	292	1135

Specifically, according to newspapers, salient indicator in conflict framing contrast among the six indicators of conflict oriented framing showed that the most salient is reactive framing with 69 followed by elite sources 61, differences focus 56 and others respectively as indicated in figure 3 below.

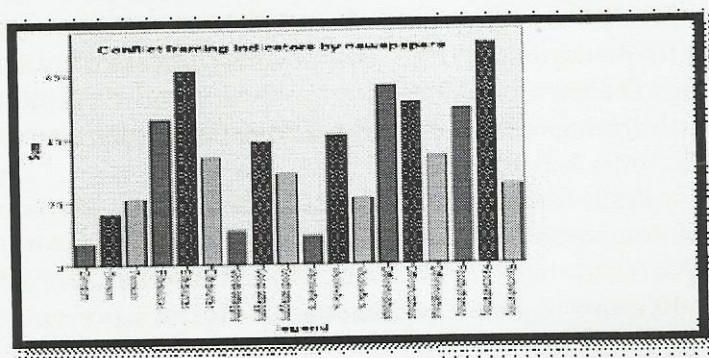
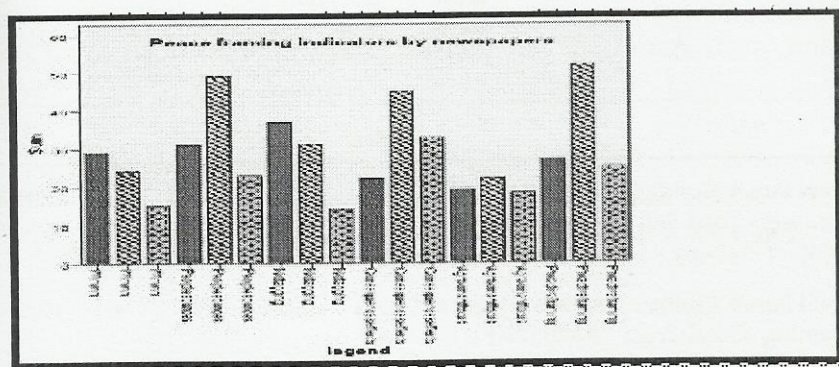


Figure 3: The most salient conflict framing indicators by newspaper

On the other hand, peace framing indicators across the three newspapers showed a slightly less count of 516 compared to conflict framing with 619 counts. As a result and in all, peace framing account for 45% of the total frames count for the newspapers, the figure 4 below shows the details.

Figure 4: Salient indicators in peace framing across the three newspapers



Differences in newspapers framing of ethnic issues

The study employed paired-samples t-test to determine whether there is a significant differences between *The Punch*, the *Sun* and the *Trust* newspapers level of conflict as well as peace framing. The findings were as indicated below.

Conflict Framing Comparison

Comparison one: *The Punch* and *Sun* newspapers conflict framing: Firstly, a paired-samples test was conducted to compare conflict framing in *The Punch* and *Sun* newspapers. The results showed that there was a difference in the scores for *The Punch* conflict framing ($M=1.8$, $SD = .96$) and the *Sun* conflict framing ($M=2.7$, $SD= 1.20$), however, the significant difference between the two newspapers were revealed in Table 4 ($t(100) = -7.15$, $p = 0.000$).

Comparison three: The *Sun* and *Trust* newspapers conflict framing: The paired-samples test conducted to compare conflict framing in the *Sun* and *Trust* newspapers showed that there was a difference in the scores for *Sun* ($M= 2.7$, $SD = 1.20$) and *Trust* ($M = 1.6$, $SD = 1.08$) conflict framing, however, the significant difference between the two newspapers were identified in Table 4

($t(100) = 6.60$, $p = 0.000$).

Table 4: Comparison of total conflict framing in *The Punch*, *Sun* and Trust newspapers

		Paired Differences				t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
	Mean	SD	Std. Error Mean	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference				
				Lower	Upper			
Pair 1	Total Punch Conflict Framing - Total <i>Sun</i> Conflict Framing	-.98020	1.37826	.13714	-1.25228	-.70811	-7.147	100.000
Pair 2	Total Punch Conflict Framing - Total Trust Conflict Framing	.13861	1.48344	.14761	-.15424	.43146	.939	100.350
Pair 3	Total <i>Sun</i> Conflict Framing - Total Trust Conflict Framing	1.11881	1.70462	.16962	.78230	1.45533	6.596	100.000

Peace Framing Comparison

The study also went further to conduct a paired-samples test to compare the total peace framing in *The Punch*, *Sun* and Trust newspapers respectively.

Comparison one: Total Punch and *Sun* newspaper Peace framing: The results indicated that there was a difference in the scores for Punch peace framing ($M = 1.63$, $SD = 1.27$) and *Sun* peace framing ($M = 2.21$, $SD = 1.10$). The difference contrasts significantly between the two newspapers as shown in Table 5. ($t(100) = -3.46$, $p = 0.001$).

Comparison two: *The Punch* and Trust newspapers Peace framing: A paired-samples test was carried out to compare the peace framing about ethnic issues in *The Punch* and Trust newspapers. Similarly, it was discovered that there was a difference in the scores for Punch peace framing ($M = 1.63$, $SD = 1.27$) and Trust peace framing ($M = 1.27$, $SD = 0.99$), however, the significant difference between the two newspapers were shown in Table 5 as $t(100) = 2.30$,

$p = 0.023$.

Comparison three: The *Sun* and Trust newspapers Peace framing: In the comparison of paired-samples test conducted to determine differences in the total peace framing in the *Sun* and Trust newspapers, the results showed that there was a significant difference. For instance, the scores for *Sun* peace framing as ($M = 2.21$, $SD = 1.10$) and Trust peace framing ($M = 1.27$, $SD = 0.99$) however, the significance difference were presented in Table 5 ($t(100) = 6.66$, $p = 0.000$).

Table 5: Comparison of total peace framing in *The Punch*, *Sun* and Trust newspaper

		Paired Differences				t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
		Mean	SD	Std. Error Mean	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference			
						Lower	Upper	
Pair 1	Total Punch Peace Framing - Total <i>Sun</i> Peace Framing	-.57426	1.66941	.16611	-.90382 -.24469	-3.457		100.001
Pair 2	Total Punch Peace Framing - Total Trust Peace Framing	.36634	1.59827	.15903	.05082 .68185	2.304		100.023
Pair 3	Total <i>Sun</i> Peace Framing - Total Trust Peace Framing	.94059	1.42001	.14130	.66027 1.22092	6.657		100.000

Generally, this study discovered that in the framing of ethnic issues, the newspapers differed significantly on conflict framing. However, as much as high attention was given to conflict framing, it was discovered also that peace framing was not totally disregarded by the three newspapers.

Discussion and Conclusions

Based on the data distribution which showed a totally different trend from either of the three newspapers, then it becomes obvious to infer that Nigeria newspapers are more to conflict framing than peace. The overall contrast showed that conflict indicators with 55% are most salient compared with peace indicators that showed 45% therefore, newspaper play a significant role in the buildup to behaviour that eventually result to conflict in Nigeria. For similar reason Tobechukwu (2007) concluded that they have not entirely done very badly but have left much to be desired. Significantly, this study found empirical evidence which answered this gap and corroborated framing theory that media bias emanates from framing and is highly instrumental to conflict behaviour formation among groups.

Furthermore, in line with framing assumptions, this study found that nature of newspapers framing on ethnic issues such as naming calling, inciting reports, as well as stressing some specific social context such as groups' differences than they might appear to have under a peace oriented frame influenced conflict behaviour. In other words, the newspapers frames affect behaviour basically by making conflict oriented frames more salient than peace oriented. Significantly also, the need to be ethnic sensitive and balance coverage are imperative to solution because by this the framing will promote groups' common interest and play down the imbalances.

This research work is important in theoretical and practical to knowledge as well as human existence. It significantly expands understanding and views of how media cover conflicts and inflame the behaviours that lead to or worsen them. Largely, the findings of this study would provide useful and rare objective information about the newspapers involvement directly and indirectly in ethnic conflict. Having been established by this study that most of what newspapers framed are conflict oriented which stimulate ethnic differences, then it is important to avoid mostly framings that contain negative portrayal and name calling because they divide further the groups in conflict.

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