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A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF NIGERIAN NEWSPAPERS COVERAGE AND MANAGEMENT OF POLITICAL CONFLICTS IN A PLURALISTIC SOCIETY

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ABSTRACT

This paper considers Nigeria as a pluralistic society and evaluates newspapers' coverage and management of political crises and conflicts during the Obasanjo (Second Term) administration. The paper assesses the role of the Nigerian newspapers in the struggle for political positions, which breeds crisis and conflicts especially in a pluralistic society. It is the position of the paper that the Nigerian newspapers have not fared very well in this type of reporting because of the advocacy position adopted by most of them. It is also observed that editorial influence on the part of publishers may not be unconnected with this trend. Using content analysis as the main instrument of facts generation, this paper submits that the Nigerian newspapers have operated more as active players in political crisis and conflicts than as an impartial judge of such crisis, conflicts, events, analysis and controversies. This has impaired greatly the management of such crisis and conflicts. This paper therefore, cautions against advocacy journalism in the Nigerian media industry and suggests more public participation in the media industry through ownership and better professional and ethical practices.

INTRODUCTION

Communication is so vital in our lives that no nation has been known to exist without it. It is the exchange of ideas, views, information, experiences and the sharing of meanings between persons, nations, societies and cultures. This necessitates the continuous study in the area of communication and how it affects different societies and people.

The understanding of the place of communication becomes more imperative in the 21st century for obvious reasons. The 21st Century is the age of Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) powered by the developments in computer technology. The age of ICTs has taken science and technology to another level. Nations, societies, peoples and even businesses are now run with the help of technology; those that are not technology complaint lose their touch, influence and essence.

One sure way of keeping in touch with our contemporary world is through the media. The media (press or newspapers in this paper) any where in the world are generally referred to as the "Fourth Estate of The Realm" and the "watchdog of the society", meaning that the media exist as an organ of information sourcing and dissemination, educational promotion, entertainment, surveillance and social enlightenment and mobilization. These functions set the media apart as an important arm of government-

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governed relationship.

Furthermore, democratic culture has also given the press the privilege of setting the agenda of political discourse and other forms of socio-cultural cum economic discussions. This invariably makes the press very powerful and influential. How is the Nigerian press using this power in the management of crises and conflicts? What roles have they played and what positions and sides have they taken in conflict management and resolution? These posers and more will preoccupy the attention of this paper in this discourse.

The development of the Nigerian democracy [which is our study focus] and politics is closely linked with that of the press. This is so because the nationalists used the press as an instrument of struggle during the pre-independence and military era. Since then, the Nigerian press has continued to participate in the political setting of the country.

However, Nigeria as a developing nation needs a press more attuned to developmental reporting than with conflicts and crises. Nwuneli (1986) notes that too much crises journalism can have a disturbing effect on the rationality and the quietness that is needed in a developing polity. This view also receives the support of Mahatma Gandhi cited in Galadima and Enighe (2001:62-3) thus: "The press is a great power but as an unchained torrent submerges the whole countryside and devastates crops, even so an uncontrolled pen serves but to destroy."

This makes this paper relevant at this point in Nigeria's march to true democratization and development. Our democratic march has not been without problems and challenges and the press has had its own fair share. Taking some lingering political crises in Nigeria as the point of focus, the paper aims at ascertaining the role and involvement of the Nigerian press in political conflict reporting. The primary purpose here is to identify where the press has done it wrongly, praise their genuine efforts, suggest a better way forward and help the sustenance of our democratic values and culture inspite of these challenges.

Some of the issues analyzed are "Godfatherism" or political patronage, election rigging and judicial handling of election petitions, the numerous impeachment threats and actual impeachment of State Governors, their Deputies, Speakers of State Assemblies and Local Government Chairmen; and, of course, the judicial interpretation and handling of the conflicts arising from all these.

Godfatherism, for instance, is a lingering factor in the Nigerian political scene and what is happening in Nigeria today, is also happening in most other third world nations in different forms and realm [A pilot study suggests this]. It is a common conflict amongst the political class. It could be regarded as politics of sponsorship to political positions, control of political power, political patronage and the ultimate control of state treasury, personnel and resources. The Nigerian newspapers during the period under analysis are awash with streaming headlines and reports about how the Obasanjo administration used the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC) to pursue and eliminate the opposition and their sworn enemies. We saw how only four members in a twenty member State House Assembly sat and purportedly impeached a Governor from office. In Ekiti State, we also saw the emergence of two incumbent Governors before the declaration of a state of emergency. The Constitutional amendment debates, the "Third Term" agenda and political succession

disputes left sore points in our political history as a nation. Rigging is also another major political problem associated with third world democracies as well as the adjudication of political conflicts by the judicial arm of government. The newspapers under review were content analyzed to find out how the newspapers reported and managed these issues.

Finally, under this section, there is need for us to have an understanding of the pluralistic nature of the Nigerian society. There are not less than 200 different ethnic groups in Nigeria and each has its unique peculiarities, idiosyncrasies, and different linguistic and cultural patterns. In fact, the Nigerian society is diverse and heterogeneous. It is a conglomeration of forces, each buried within its frame of reference, sworn to its various petty ideals and exerting pressure and demands from the totality of the populace or the various institutions within or outside the government. These forces could be centrifugal (moving away from the centre) or centripetal (moving towards the centre).

STUDY OBJECTIVES

This study generally aimed at finding out how the Nigerian newspapers covered/reported political conflicts during the Obasanjo administration. Specifically, the study hopes to:

1. Find out the quality of reportage given to political conflicts in the Nigerian newspapers.
2. Determine the frequency of coverage given to political in the Nigerian newspapers.
3. Determine the methods the newspapers used in gathering information in writing their reports.
4. Determine the direction/slant or tone of the reports
5. Find out the level of prominence given to political conflicts in the Nigerian newspapers.
6. Determine the story types in which the reports appear most.

HYPOTHESES

To help focus this study, some hypotheses were formulated. They include:

1. The quality of the reports published in the newspapers would depend on the ethnic nationality of the publishers of the newspapers.
2. The slant/direction taken by the newspapers will depend on the ethnic nationality of the publisher.
3. The newspapers would depend more on investigative journalism than interviews in their coverage of political conflicts in Nigeria.
4. The prominence attached to their coverage of political conflicts in Nigeria will depend on the ethnic nationality of the publishers.

THE POLITICAL CONFLICT REPORTER

Conflict is an intractable polysemous concept, thus the inherent vagueness of most of the proposals for its management. Folarin (2004) notes that conflict is the outcome of opposing or opposed interests, concerns, needs and positions of individuals, groups, organizations/institutions and societies that have to interact whether in ad-hoc or permanent

relations, usually with a view to achieving specific, quite often selfish objectives and interests. Conflict can also be seen from another angle as a situation in which an individual, group or organization is compelled by circumstances to make a choice between two opposing courses of action, which are both unfavourable to the one compelled to make the decision or choice. When the situation described above is about political issues or politics in general terms, it is then regarded as political conflict.

The Greek philosopher, Aristotle, described man as "a political animal". This includes reporters too who have political emotions that taint their political reports. This could be very dangerous in a third world nation and in a nation of multi-ethnic, religious, cultural, linguistic and so on, like Nigeria. Therefore, political conflict reporting should not be left in the hands of the cub reporter or the inexperienced, unchallenged, and neophyte reporter. This is important for obvious reasons. Politics strives at building a stable nation, not a nation of instability. Therefore, the political reporter is supposed to play an ombudsman (middle man or mediator) role between the major players in the political field and conflict.

He is also expected to play the role of a "go-between" between the political class and the entire society in his political coverage and reporting. He is never expected to be biased and subjective, although he could be objectively opinionated; he should play down on advocacy journalism and only strives to give the society the facts the way it is and allow them to take their individual positions. In political conflict reporting, the reporter should never be a player or combatant no matter the level of provocation or involvement of his personal values. In fact, the political reporter in reporting conflicts, especially in a pluralistic society like Nigeria, must remain aloof so that the players can see him as being in the centre and consequently listen and heed to his call. This is conflict management in the media.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK AND LITERATURE REVIEW

Many theories exist to address media influence through coverage. Some of these theories are offshoots of the minimal effects and the all-powerful effects theories of the press. However, for this study, we shall hinge our discussion on two related theoretical constructs. These constructs are the Gatekeeping and the Agenda – Setting theories of the press. The rationale for selecting these theories is obvious. The two theories are without the usual controversies and debates that hamper effective application of media theories to address relevant issues. For instance, the effect of the agenda setting function of the media is without doubt. So also is the acceptance of the media role of gatekeeping. Therefore, the theories that arose from these accepted media functions have continued to remain relevant in addressing media coverage of national and international issues.

The Gatekeeping theory is a child of the gatekeeping function of the mass media of communication. Kurt Lewin formed the term "gatekeeping" at about 1951. He used the term to describe those individuals who control the "gates" or channels through which information or news passes from the source to the final consumers. Lewin's point here is that no media house, no matter the size and level of operation, can transmit all the messages it receives in the course of a day's business. Some persons have to decide which news to transmit, which to defer its transmission to another date and time, which to modify, which to delete

completely or which to kill outrightly. Such persons, according to Lewin (1951), open and close the gate that stands between the news sources and the receivers. Note, gatekeeping as a mass media activity and function does not stop at opening and closing the news gate, or rejecting and accepting news/information for publication or broadcast, it also involves the shaping and reshaping, display, timing, repetition etc of the news and information in the various media establishment. According to Professor Okwudiba Nnoli, cited in Attah (2006:42), "the media provide a consistent picture of the social world which may lead the audience to adopt the media version of social reality of fact and norm, value and expectations".

The journalist is first and foremost a gatekeeper and may have to perform this role at different periods in the news process. According to Folarin (2002), the factors influencing gatekeeping decisions include timing, ownership pattern, management policy, perceived needs and preferences of the audience, editor's perception of reality, views held by editor's colleagues, influence of advertisers, appraisal of offering by the competition, availability of photography or film footage, legal consideration, professional ethics and ideological perspectives and political orientation. The media decide what millions will learn of, and indeed how they will interpret the day's events in the nation and in the world. They create national issues and icons overnight, and can make or mar by their coverage and the slant they give to issues. The Gatekeeping Theory, therefore, revolves around the media role of news selection and dissemination in line with the influential factors listed above.

The second theoretical construct, which will also help us to analyze the performance of the Nigerian mass media industry in reporting and managing crises and conflicts, is the Agenda-Setting Theory of mass communication. According to McComb and Shaw (1974), the media emphasis on an issue influences the audience to also view the issue as important. The media attach certain weights to news stories through placement, size and frequency of appearance of such stories. Agenda-Setting posits that audiences learn these salient issues from the news media, thus incorporating a similar set of weights and importance into their own personal agenda.

Shaw (1983:132) reaffirms this view when he posits that the media, by focusing repeated and major attention on an event or set of related events, can transfer that event into an issue. Umechukwu (2001:148-150) and Folarin (2002:75-76) also agree that the mass media have an impact on agenda setting in that they have the ability to choose or emphasize certain topics thereby causing the public to perceive the issues or topics as important. This implies that the mass media pre-determine what issues are considered as important at a given time in a given society. Agenda-Setting Theory, however, does not give to the media the ultimate power to determine what the public actually thinks; but it does give them the power to determine what the public should be thinking about. The above view is a reaffirmation of Bernard Cohen (1963) statement that the media may not be successful in telling people what to think but they may be very successful in telling them what to think about

Sandman *et al* (1976:19) also sees agenda setting as the editorial decision that a particular event is not news if the news media ignores it or says so. Globally, any event given major emphasis in the mass media ultimately becomes a major event. The journalist, therefore,

effect cognitive change among individuals and at times thinks for them. This is exactly what is referred to as agenda setting, which gave birth to the Agenda-Setting Theory of the press.

The literature on the role of the mass media in political reporting (nationally, locally and internationally) abounds in published materials. No doubt, media scholars are in agreement about the role the media could play in political reporting which is a primary area of development in any polity. Politics without so much emphasis determines the well-being of a society. Even development communication has a political undertone or coloration. We shall, therefore, attempt a summary of literature review here.

Shaw and McCombs (1977:106) did a comprehensive work on agenda setting and are in acknowledgement of the fact that public surveillance of the media revolves around setting agenda for civic concern and action. This is politically significant. Generally, it is held that newsmen determine what is news, which political happening or condition will be covered or prescribed and which to downplay or give prominence in their daily coverage of national and international issues. Undesirable political conditions that may be tolerated while they remain obscure may quickly become intolerable in the glare of publicity (Umechukwu, 2001:103). McCombs and Mauro (1977) on their on part note that the media also provide clues to the public about the degree of importance of an issue. Political issues covered more prominently by the media are likely to be considered most important by media audience.

Blumler (1978:22) cited in Umechukwu (2001:104) points out that the mass media, while surveying the environment, functions essentially as agencies of social legitimation – as forces, which reaffirm those ultimate value standards and beliefs, which in turn, upholds the social and political status quo. Since the media are the eyes and ears of the citizens, their means of surveillance which tell them about political conditions, economic and social conditions, journalists need to be more objective in news reporting and imbibe a crusading posture in order to influence public opinion. It is through the gathering and dissemination of information that the people are assumed that their political system is still relevant despite the predisposition to trial and error mechanism. This is very vital if the people must have peace of mind. They need this kind of reassurance in any political system (Ekeanyanwu, 2005). This is probably the reason while Edelman (1964:38) posits that reassurance tends to keep the populace politically and economical quiescent because there is no need to act if political leaders seem to be doing their job very well.

The Nigerian mass media could also perform the function of promoting political socialization. Gerbner *et al* (1982:101) in this line, view the mass media as "the mainstream of the common symbolic environment that cultivates the most widely shared conceptions of reality". Kraus and Davies (1976), and Chaffee *et al* (1970) empirically support this. These mass communication scholars and media researchers all agree that the mass media are the primary agents of political socialization. To corroborate this view, Umechukwu (2001:106) notes thus:

> This being the case, the Nigerian mass media should present political values
> that will lead to reforms since media-cultivated facts and values are standard by
> which we can judge. Once basic orientations towards the political system have
> been formed, attitudes usually stabilize and later learning largely supplements

and refines earlier notions. Much of what the average person learns about political norms, rules, values, and events...necessarily come from the mass media. People's opinion, feelings, and evaluation about political system may spring from the their own processing of facts supplied by the media. It is, therefore, imperative that journalists should task themselves with supplying the right political values, which would create response from the people.

Still on political socialization, which the mass media is expected to promote, Okunna (1998:108) notes that through the process of socialization, the individual is made aware of and internalizes the values, norms and acceptable behaviour pattern of the society. They provide a common body of knowledge, the internationalization of which enables people to operate as effective members of their society.

It is also important at this point to briefly summarize some findings on the Nigerian press coverage of conflicts and crises. Galadima and Enighe (2001) analyzed the Nigerian press coverage of political issues and came up with the following valid conclusions:

1. *The Nigerian press are always used by their owners- private party or government – for the propagation of the interests of such owners, especially in the struggle to gain power or monopolize same*

2. *There is recklessness and partisanship on the part of the press during elections and transition to the civil rule programmes instead of restraint and responsible reporting of events.*

3. *The principle of objectivity is always abandoned by the championing of the causes of their masters political struggles*

4. *Manipulations of the press to report false election results, which caused violence, mostly in the western region, have been a common trend since independence.*

5. *Proscriptions, banning and closures of media houses with the aim of reducing (or avoiding) courses, as a result of the points mentioned earlier is another recurrent trend since the first republic*

This trend also manifested in the now sacred June 12 crises of 1992. The authors cited above note that when the Babangida political programme became an unending one; the Nigerian press abandoned their partisanship against and among the different political leanings and unanimously faced that military regime. This led to what Alade Odunewu (1994) of the Nigerian Press Council called "Suicide Squad Journalism" in Nigeria. This term was used to refer to the relentless and continued mounting of pressure on the military over the lack of sincerity of purpose in the management of both the economic and political

reconstructing programmes. The press also attacked the political class for joining the military in thwarting the efforts towards true democratization.

A further look at the performance of the press after the annulment of the June 12 presidential election revealed a complete relapse to the style of coverage which saw them tackle issues from tribal, ethnic, biased, opinionated and personal perspectives. This trend has continued to define the pattern of news coverage even today. That is why the press is now involved in the promotion of issues of marginalisation and domination of one tribe over another. In the same vein, the Nigerian Press Council (1994) supports the above views when it notes thus:

> The press had in a bid to sell, rattled the sensibilities of decent people in the
> society, not just by the bold exhibition of lack of finesse but, more
> unfortunately, by blatant publication of unverified allegations of a nature even
> bordering on criminality

Similarly, the Guild of Editors also berated the press for taking rigid stand for or against the June 12 crises. The body claims this made it very difficult for both the military and political class to resolve the crises of that annulment. The Nigerian Union of Journalist – through its past president, Mr. Zanni Zoro – have also openly acknowledged the dichotomy and recklessness among its members in the day-to-day carrying out of their job of news gathering, analysis and reporting.

METHODOLOGY
Study Design

This study is primarily meant to find how Nigerian newspapers have fared in reporting political conflicts Nigeria. To achieve this, the study adopted the content analytical approach by analyzing the reportage of some political conflicts and crises in Nigeria. The cases studied, as pointed earlier on in this paper, are typical cases of political conflict in the Nigerian political scene and so, the case study approach will enable a holistic analysis of the issues so that the recommendations will address the problem, which this paper seeks to address.

The content analytical study method is therefore adopted as the major tool of data generation. Subsequently, content categories were developed for the analysis of the newspapers studied. Four Nigerian national daily newspapers were selected for study. These are The *Guardian, Champion, Tribune and Daily Trust*. The selection of the newspapers and a 6-month study period was made purposively. The reason for using the purposive sampling technique was to meet the study objectives set by the researcher. Nworgu (1991:78) supports this reason thus:

> In purposive sampling, specific elements, which satisfy some predetermined
> criteria, are selected. Although the criteria to be used are usually a matter of
> the researcher's judgment, he exercises this judgment in relation to what he

thinks will constitute a representative sample with respect to the research purpose.

Based on this argument, the author selected the above newspapers because of their ownership patterns, circulation strength, availability, and their wide range of coverage of both national and international political issues. The *Guardian* publisher is from the South-South geo-political region, the *Champion* publisher is from the South-East, *Tribune* publisher is from the South-West while the *Daily Trust* is from the North. The reason behind this selection is to determine the extent to which the nationalities of the publishers of the newspapers influenced editorial policies and quality of reportage.

This study further developed some content classifications in order to achieve the purpose of the study. They were developed to enable the researcher determine and analyze the nature of the coverage. Consequently, the newspaper content that dealt on the crisis were classified according to the following divisions:

1. News stories
2. Features
3. Interpretative Articles
4. Editorials
5. Others

To determine the nature of prominence attached to the crises by the newspapers, the following divisions were also made:

1. Front page (FP) – very important
2. Back page (BP) – next in prominence
3. Inside Page (IP) – least important.

For Slant/direction or tone, the following labels were created:

1. Favourable
2. Unfavourable
3. Neutral

For sources of the reports, three categories were developed:

1. In-house Staff
2. News Agency Reports
3. Unidentified sources.

We also sought to determine the methods used in gathering information for the reports as indicated in the content of the stories. The following labels were established:

1. Personal Interviews
2. Investigative Journalism

3. Interviews and Investigative Journalism combined
4. Unspecified in the reports.

Furthermore, to test the quality of the reports labels like "Very High", "High", "Very Low" and "Low" were developed specifically for that purpose. Finally, the frequency of coverage was determined by measuring the total reports on political crises against the total reports on non-political conflicts.

STUDY POPULATION AND SAMPLE SIZE
The population of this study consists of all the issues/editions of the selected newspapers published in Nigeria within the 6-month study period. This amounted to 612 issues for the four newspapers. From this figure, three editions were randomly selected per week for the four newspapers. This amounted to 78 editions per newspaper. Therefore, the sample size for this study amounted to 312 issues.

However, we must also note here that the selection of the six-month study period was purposively made. The reasons or criteria for this have been made earlier in this paper. The major criterion was the citing of incidences of political conflicts within the Nigeria body polity at that period. The so-called godfathers were busy fighting their political godsons, impeachments were going on in the states and local governments, the third term agenda and constitutional amendment debates were awash in the media and the former President Obasanjo and his vice were locked in a dirty political battle of their live. Many more of such related issues could easily be identified within this period.

METHODS OF DATA PRESENTATION AND ANALYSES
Simple frequency tables were used to present data gathered for the study. These tables also helped in satisfying the objectives of setting out this particular study and assisted in the analyses of the hypotheses. However, the hypotheses were tested using the Chi-Square Test of Independence at the 5% level of significance (i.e. alpha=0.05). Chi-Square Test of Independence was used here because it is a standard measurement test instrument. Secondly, whenever we want to establish relationship between two variables or establish independence, chi-square becomes the most reliable and convenient test instrument for such measurements (Wilmer & Dominick, 2003).

Also, the Chi-square test results were further subjected to the Somers'd directional measures and symmetric measures so as to determine the strength and nature of the relationship. These tests were done using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) software to create the frequency distribution tables, cross tabulation tables, Chi-square result tables, Somers'd directional and symmetric measures tables.

SUMMARY OF DATA PRESENTATION AND RESULTS
<u>Frequency Tables</u>

TABLE 1: Distribution of Newspapers' Reports According To The Prominence Attached To The Reports

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Front Page	79	14.3	21.4	21.4
	Back Page	54	9.8	14.6	35.9
	Inside Page	237	43.0	64.1	100.0
	Total	370	67.2	100.0	
Missing	System	181	32.8		
Total		551	100.0		

TABLE 2:

Newspaper

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Guardian	110	20.0	29.7	29.7
	The Champion	61	11.1	16.5	46.2
	Tribune	84	15.2	22.7	68.9
	Daily Trust	115	20.9	31.1	100.0
	Total	370	67.2	100.0	
Missing	System	181	32.8		
Total		551	100.0		

TABLE 3: Story Classification

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	News	20	36.	54.	54.
	Features	1	1.	2.	56.
	Interpretative Articles	3	5.	8.	64.
	Editorials	2	3.	5.	70.
	Other	11	20.	29.	100.
	Total	37	67.	100.	
Missing	System	18	32.		
Total		55	100.		

TABLE 4: Slant/Direction

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Favourable	210	38.1	56.8	56.8
	Unfavourable	60	10.9	16.2	73.0
	Neutral	100	18.1	27.0	100.0
	Total	370	67.2	100.0	
Missing	System	181	32.8		
Total		551	100.0		

TABLE 5: Sources of the Reports

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	In-house Staff	231	41.9	62.4	62.4
	News Agency Reports	19	3.4	5.1	67.6
	Unidentified Source	120	21.8	32.4	100.0
	Total	370	67.2	100.0	
Missing	System	181	32.8		
Total		551	100.0		

TABLE 6: Method Used in Gathering Information

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Personal Interviews	48	8.7	13.0	13.0
	Investigative Journalism	32	5.8	8.6	21.6
	Interviews and Investigative Journalism	115	20.9	31.1	52.7
	Unspecified in the Report	175	31.8	47.3	100.0
	Total	370	67.2	100.0	
Missing	System	181	32.8		
Total		551	100.0		

TABLE 7: Frequency of Coverage of Political Conflicts and Non-Political Conflicts Reports

Type Of Report	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Political Conflict Reports	370	67.2	67.2	67.2
Non-Political Conflict Reports	181	32.8	32.8	100.0
TOTAL	**551**	**100.0**	**100.0**	

TABLE 8: Ethnic Nationality of Publisher

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	South-South	110	20.0	29.7	29.7
	East	61	11.1	16.5	46.2
	West	84	15.2	22.7	68.9
	North	115	20.9	31.1	100.0
	Total	370	67.2	100.0	
Missing	System	181	32.8		
Total		551	100.0		

TABLE 9: Quality of Reportage

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Very High	230	41.7	62.2	62.2
	High	50	9.1	13.5	75.7
	Very Low	40	7.3	10.8	86.5
	Low	50	9.1	13.5	100.0
	Total	370	67.2	100.0	
Missing	System	181	32.8		
Total		551	100.0		

As indicated above, the frequency distribution tables show the various results obtained from the analysis. Table 1 shows the placement of the stories using the established categories while Table 2 shows the various newspapers under analysis and the frequency of coverage given to political conflicts. Table 3 shows the frequency of coverage given to political conflicts according to the story classification while Tables 4 and 5 indicate the slant and the sources used in writing the reports or stories. The methods used in gathering information by the newspapers are highlighted in Table 6 while the frequency of coverage is indicated in Table 7.

Table 8 shows one of the vital results of the study. Three of the four hypotheses formulated for this study are about the potential influence the ethnic nationality of the publishers of the newspapers could have on the quality, slant and prominence of the reports in their different newspapers. This Table (Table 8), therefore, presents the frequency of coverage given to political conflicts based on the ethnic nationality of the owners or publishers of the newspapers. As shown on the Table, the newspaper owned by a northerner published 115 stories on political conflicts while the one owned by a south-south geo-political zone of Nigeria published 110 stories. The newspaper owned by an easterner had only 61 stories on political conflicts while the newspaper owned by a westerner (Yoruba) published 84 stories.

Table 9 is the last of the frequency tables and shows the distribution of the stories based on the quality of coverage. From the Table, about 62.2% of the reports were classified as "very high" in quality.

CHI-SQUARE TEST

Table 10:

Ethnic Nationality of Publisher * Quality of Reportage Crosstabulation

			Quality of Reportage				Total
			Very High	High	Very Low	Low	
Ethnic Nationality of Publisher	South-South	Count	110	0	0	0	110
		Expected Count	68.4	14.9	11.9	14.9	110.0
	East	Count	61	0	0	0	61
		Expected Count	37.9	8.2	6.6	8.2	61.0
	West	Count	29	25	30	0	84
		Expected Count	52.2	11.4	9.1	11.4	84.0
	North	Count	30	25	10	50	115
		Expected Count	71.5	15.5	12.4	15.5	115.0
Total		Count	230	50	40	50	370
		Expected Count	230.0	50.0	40.0	50.0	370.0

Table 10a:

Chi-Square Tests

	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	297.080[a]	9	.000
Likelihood Ratio	323.838	9	.000
Linear-by-Linear Association	156.319	1	.000
N of Valid Cases	370		

a. 0 cells (.0%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 6.59.

Table 10b:

Symmetric Measures

		Value	Approx. Sig.
Nominal by Nominal	Contingency Coefficient	.667	.000
N of Valid Cases		370	

a. Not assuming the null hypothesis.

b. Using the asymptotic standard error assuming the null hypothesis.

TABLE 11

Newspaper * Method Used in Gathering Information Crosstabulation

			Method Used in Gathering Information				
			Personal Interview	Investigative Journalism	Interviews and Investigative Journalism	Unspecified in the Reports	Total
Newspaper	Guardian	Count	48	32	30	0	110
		Expected Count	14.3	9.5	34.2	52.0	110.0
	The Champion	Count	0	0	0	61	61
		Expected Count	7.9	5.3	19.0	28.9	61.0
	Tribune	Count	0	0	0	84	84
		Expected Count	10.9	7.3	26.1	39.7	84.0
	Daily Trust	Count	0	0	85	30	115
		Expected Count	14.9	9.9	35.7	54.4	115.0
Total		Count	48	32	115	175	370
		Expected Count	48.0	32.0	115.0	175.0	370.0

Table 11a:

Chi-Square Tests

	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	450.669[a]	9	.000
Likelihood Ratio	514.937	9	.000
Linear-by-Linear Association	104.993	1	.000
N of Valid Cases	370		

a. 0 cells (.0%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 5.28.

Table 11b:

Directional Measures

			Value	Asymp. Std. Error[a]	Approx. T[b]	Approx. Sig.
Ordinal by Ordinal	Somers' d	Symmetric	.288	.046	6.076	.000
		Newspaper Dependent	.306	.046	6.076	.000
		Method Used in Gathering Information Dependent	.272	.045	6.076	.000

a. Not assuming the null hypothesis.

b. Using the asymptotic standard error assuming the null hypothesis.

Table 11c:

Symmetric Measures

		Value	Asymp. Std. Error[a]	Approx. T[b]	Approx. Sig.
Nominal by Nominal	Contingency Coefficient	.741			.000
Interval by Interval	Pearson's R	.533	.030	12.097	.000[c]
Ordinal by Ordinal	Spearman Correlation	.402	.054	8.418	.000[c]
N of Valid Cases		370			

a. Not assuming the null hypothesis.

b. Using the asymptotic standard error assuming the null hypothesis.

c. Based on normal approximation.

Table 12:

Ethnic Nationality of Publisher * Slant/Direction Crosstabulation

			Slant/Direction			
			Favourable	Unfavourable	Neutral	Total
Ethnic Nationality of Publisher	South-South	Count	50	60	0	110
		Expected Count	62.4	17.8	29.7	110.0
	East	Count	61	0	0	61
		Expected Count	34.6	9.9	16.5	61.0
	West	Count	84	0	0	84
		Expected Count	47.7	13.6	22.7	84.0
	North	Count	15	0	100	115
		Expected Count	65.3	18.6	31.1	115.0
Total		Count	210	60	100	370
		Expected Count	210.0	60.0	100.0	370.0

Table 12a:

Chi-Square Tests

	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	452.524[a]	6	.000
Likelihood Ratio	477.211	6	.000
Linear-by-Linear Association	95.026	1	.000
N of Valid Cases	370		

a. 0 cells (.0%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 9.89.

Table 12b:

Directional Measures

			Value	Asymp. Std. Error[a]	Approx. T[b]	Approx. Sig.
Ordinal by Ordinal	Somers' d	Symmetric	.353	.048	7.279	.000
		Ethnic Nationality of Publisher Dependent	.402	.054	7.279	.000
		Slant/Direction Dependent	.315	.044	7.279	.000

a. Not assuming the null hypothesis.

b. Using the asymptotic standard error assuming the null hypothesis.

Table 12c:

Symmetric Measures

		Value	Asymp. Std. Error[a]	Approx. T[b]	Approx. Sig.
Nominal by Nominal	Contingency Coefficien	.742			.000
Interval by Interval	Pearson's R	.507	.037	11.298	.000[c]
Ordinal by Ordinal	Spearman Correlation	.466	.054	10.112	.000[c]
N of Valid Cases		370			

a. Not assuming the null hypothesis.

b. Using the asymptotic standard error assuming the null hypothesis.

c. Based on normal approximation.

Table 13:

Ethnic Nationality of Publisher * Prominence Cross Tabulation

			Prominence			Total
			Front Page	Back Page	Inside Page	Front Page
Ethnic Nationality of Publisher	South-South	Count	16	15	79	110
		Expected Count	23.5	16.1	70.5	110.0
	East	Count	29	11	21	61
		Expected Count	13.0	8.9	39.1	61.0
	West	Count	12	5	67	84
		Expected Count	17.9	12.3	53.8	84.0
	North	Count	22	23	70	115
		Expected Count	24.6	16.8	73.7	115.0
Total		Count	79	54	237	370
		Expected Count	79.0	54.0	237.0	370.0

Table 13a:

Chi-Square Tests

	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	44.189(a)	6	.000
Likelihood Ratio	42.058	6	.000
Linear-by-Linear Association	.002	1	.963
N of Valid Cases	370		

a. 0 cells (.0%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 8.90.

Table 13b

Directional Measures

			Value	Asymp. Std. Error(a)	Approx. T (b)	Approx. Sig.
Ordinal by Ordinal	Somers' d	Symmetric	-.012	.043	-.280	.779
		Ethnic Nationality of Publisher Dependent	-.015	.052	-.280	.779
		Prominence Dependent	-.010	.037	-.280	.779

a Not assuming the null hypothesis.
b Using the asymptotic standard error assuming the null hypothesis

Table 13c

Symmetric Measures

		Value	Asymp. Std. Error(a)	Approx. T(b)	Approx. Sig.
Nominal by Nominal	Contingency Coefficient	.327			.000
Interval by Interval	Pearson's R	.002	.049	.046	.963(c)
Ordinal by Ordinal	Spearman Correlation	-.013	.051	-.241	.810(c)
N of Valid Cases		370			

a Not assuming the null hypothesis.
b Using the asymptotic standard error assuming the null hypothesis.
c Based on normal approximation.

DISCUSSIONS

From the data generated from this study, the review of related and relevant literature, observations and experience, it is obvious that Nigerian newspapers still have a lot to learn in the reportage of crises in a pluralistic society. They have not entirely done very badly but have left much to be desired. This is because of various inhibitions that the press has allowed to influence their professional performance. For instance, the Nigerian journalist have

allowed his employer, his family and relatives and friends as well as the type/nature of society to influence the way and manner they carry on with their professional duties. This, in turn, affects the handling of crises to the detriment of efforts to resolve them.

An analysis of the study findings shows that over 50% of the entire reports were mainly news stories, which is devoid of sound journalistic analysis. Conflict reports really need to be interpreted by the experienced journalist. That is why the people regard him as a watchdog of the society. One wonders how mere reports can help manage crisis in such a pluralistic society like ours. There is a glaring lack of investigative reports, which could have revealed so many hidden facts that could have helped to quicken the resolutions of the conflicts.

In simple terms, there was more to the report than was reported in the news. If the Nigerian President, for instance, did not confess through an outburst in his historic reply of the letter by the former PDP national chairman Chief Audu Ogbe, Nigerians would not have heard that both Chris Ngige and Uba have owned up before him that they collaborated to rig the gubernatorial elections in Anambra state in 2003. If the political disagreement between the former President, Olusegun Obasanjo and his Vice, Atiku Abubakar did not get out of hand, Nigerians will never have known about the PTDF scandal because the media failed to perform. Even after the scandal was blown open, the Nigerian media are yet to conclude on the issues raised in their follow-up reports. In US, two reporters, Bob Woodward and Carl Bernstein exposed the hidden facts about the "Watergate Scandal through investigative journalism". Their journalistic exploits brought the criminal investigation of the "Watergate Scandal" to a successful conclusion. It also helped settle the political quagmire that was about to engulf the US. To help calm nerves, the US President had to resign from office. That is the power of investigation journalism which was found missing in most of the newspapers under study.

In investigating journalism, you investigate and get true facts because you are not satisfied with what is said. But in interviews, you only get people's views on the cases and these views are most of the time coloured with biases, prejudices, half-truths and in extreme cases, blatant lies. This can never help in press management of conflicts; rather, they will help to prolong such cases. Stakeholders in any political conflict need the assurances from the media that their facts are sacrosanct otherwise the players will loose confidence in the industry itself and therefore, refuse to heed to the call or accept solutions from the industry. Therefore, for effective management of political crises and conflicts, the media industry must go behind the news through investigative journalism to expose the actual facts and unmask the truths. This is the only way they could remain relevant in crises and conflicts management.

On comparative analyses of the newspapers performance, The *Guardian* is rated highest amongst the newspapers under study. They gave more prominence to the reports, had more favourable reports, and had all its reports regarded as very high in quality. Other newspapers did well but still left much to be desired. However, the newspapers must be chided for allowing ethnic colouration and ownership influences to affect their professionalism negatively. This major conclusion is drawn from the fact that all the research hypotheses for this study were supported or upheld. The results from the Chi-square tests at the 5% alpha

level of significant (as shown on the Tables above) were significant enough to validate or support the hypotheses. This again raises doubt about the level of professionalism in the Nigerian media industry.

With regard to the ethnic nationality of the publishers of the newspapers influencing quality, story direction and prominence, hypotheses 1, 2 and 4 were all upheld. The first research hypothesis says that the quality of the reports published in the newspapers will depend on the ethnic nationality of the owners of the newspapers. This hypothesis was upheld after the chi-square analysis on Tables 10, 10a and 10b. The second hypothesis also states that the direction or slant taken by the newspapers in the coverage of political conflicts will depend on the ethnic nationality of the publishers of such newspapers. Again, this hypothesis was upheld after the chi-square analysis on Tables 12, 12a, 12b and 12c. The last research hypothesis was also about the ethnic nationality of the publisher influencing story placement which was used to determine prominence. This hypothesis as stated was upheld after the chi-square analysis on Tables 13, 13a, 13b and 13c.

These results, as indicated in the analysis of editorial influence caused by ownership influence, supports numerous research findings which have always found a link between these two variables – ownership and editorial influence. However, the Nigerian newspapers should be more professional minded in their reportorial duties and avoid such negative influences which tamper with their professional duties. The Nigerian National Assembly should also enact laws curtailing the influence of newspaper publishers on editorial content. This is one of the major reasons why the present author is calling for more corporate involvement in the ownership of media organizations. This call is further highlighted in the conclusions and recommendations of this study.

Another related issue that is adduced from this study is that, most times during crises, the newspapers usually focus more on personalities instead of the issues. This compounds the situation. The Nigerian press should be more concerned with the issues at stake and give accurate, truthful and unbiased account that could help manage these crises to the benefit of all. Attacking personalities instead of issues have never been good conflict management approach. The study further reveals that the newspapers were virtually intolerant of opposing viewpoints and therefore offered little opportunity for such viewpoints to be analyzed. This was evident in their featuring of only those who hold similar opinions with them on the pages of their newspapers. Thus we are daily bombarded with the views of only those who the particular newspaper subscribes to, but to the annoying neglect of the other sides of the issue. This approach negates the principle of the market place of ideas, which the press was meant to be, and further alienates the opposing viewpoints and consequently, prolongs the controversies and crises.

From the analysis of the Oyo State crises, which has to do with godfatherism, the Nigerian press really gave enough attention to the issue and in fact condemned the action of Adedibu group vehemently. This is okay in crusade and watchdogs' journalism but smacks of advocacy journalism, which have some negative connotations towards conflict resolution and management. The Adedibu group may not subject themselves to any peace initiatives or suggestions from Nigerian press because of this advocacy status or stance. They even

dismissed the media reports on the crises as mere propaganda campaigns against the self-styled strongman of Ibadan politics, Chief Lamidi Adedibu. They probably have concluded that they cannot get justice or fair hearing from the press. A cockroach can hardly be innocent in the gathering of fowls. Therefore advocacy journalism should be practiced with caution, professionalism and objectivity if it must be practiced at all.

On the positive side, some of the conflicts were given enough/prominent attention in the media. This approach should be encouraged in such related conflicts. Any crises shrouded in secrecy never or hardly get resolved but experience has shown that the ones much talked about receive quicker attention in its management and subsequent resolution. This is where all the newspapers under study must be commended. Compared to other crises reported in the media within this period, political conflicts got about 67% coverage. But as pointed out earlier, more attention should be paid to feature reports, interpretative reports, editorials and investigative reports.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The Nigerian media have rarely been found wanting in their coverage of conflicts and crises, but they have occasionally been found wanting in their management of such conflicts and crises. (What I also call qualitative coverage). The reasons for this have been exhaustively discussed above. However, the following reasons are also adduced for the press nature of coverage and performance:

1. Because the Nigerian press were actively involved in pre-independence and nationalistic struggles; they unconsciously became a part of the politics of that time. Since then, the press has found it difficult to alienate itself from partisan politics and the conflicts that do usually arise from it.

2. After the nationalistic struggles were over, there was no proper re-orientation of the Nigerian press away from militant/partisan journalism in their protection of regional interests and promotion of the media moguls/owners' political interests and objectives. This made Mytton (1983:124) cited in Galadima and Enighe (2001), to note thus: "The mass media in Nigeria have political backers and therefore given political role which emphasizes the expression of opinion and places far less importance on the reporting of facts."

The pattern of reporting crises, conflicts and its management by the Nigerian press since the nationalistic days seems to be continuing. This is clearly shown in the press handling of the crises that engulfed the principal personalities of this present civilian dispensation. Precisely, a noticeable bias was shown in the manner the former speaker of the House of Representative, Alhaji Salisu Buhari and the former Senate President, Evan Enwerem forgery scandals were handled compared to the manner the press handled the governor Tinubu's case. It is believed that because the Nigerian press is more or less Yoruba controlled or dominated press, Tinubu survived (because he is a Yoruba man) while the other personalities got drowned in the political murky waters. This kind of perception against the press cannot encourage the use of the media as a tool of conflict management and resolution. Rather, it has

potential to turn the media into a sectional media with its attendant difficulties in managing conflicts of national magnitude.

Therefore, the following recommendations are made to move the press forward in their reporting of crises and conflicts. Firstly, as I pointed out in this paper, the Nigerian press should avoid advocacy journalism (journalism of taking stands on controversial issues and goes about vehemently to advocate the acceptance of such stands notwithstanding the feelings of the audience who have not been properly sensitized on all the sides of such an issue), or practice it with caution if and when it cannot be avoided.

Again, more private participation in the ownership of the Nigerian media system should be encouraged. More media houses, more access, more analysis of issues, better coverage, more reportage and more presentation of all sides of a controversy, conflict or crises. Apart from private ownership, the public should also get involved through joint ownerships, corporate ownership, and group ownership to avoid the excesses of the private media moguls who may be hell bent on pursuing partisan interests through their media houses (Ekeanyanwu, 2005:234).

Mike Egbon, a renowned professor of communication, compiled a more comprehensive guideline to help media organizations in their reportage of crises and conflicts thus:

1. Collective national interest must supersede parochial ethnic and individual interests.
2. Press freedom should be limited where national survival is threatened or where it conflicts with constitutional provisions and rights.
3. Sensationalism that could possibly blow up crises should be seriously avoided.
4. Suppression of the truth should be avoided as it will obviously escalate the crises and create a false sense of security.
5. Professionalism and ethical considerations must be held in high esteem or sacrosanct in the management and coverage of crises.
6. Maintain a healthy skepticism and provide socially responsible criticism, avoiding relentless hostility.

In conclusion, the Nigerian press must rise above petty reporting and face the challenges of constructive and balanced reporting especially during crises/conflict periods. The press, however, should not support evil or help to perpetuate it and should therefore always take a stand against it. This must be done professionally, ethically, objectively, and cautiously. The public interest must be the guiding and overriding interest in such situations (Ekeanyanwu, 2005:234).

Finally, Conflict and Diversity Reporting should be taught in institutions of higher learning where mass communication, journalism, broadcasting or media studies are taught. This will help the journalist to become more professional in his handling of conflict-based reports.

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