PEACE JOURNALISM OR WAR JOURNALISM? AN ANALYSIS OF NEWSPAPER COVERAGE OF ETHNO-RELIGIOUS CONFLICTS IN SOUTHERN KADUNA, NIGERIA (2020-2021)

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Abstract

This research examines how the *Nation, Punch, Vanguard* and *Daily Trust* newspapers reported Southern Kaduna conflicts in terms of frequency, direction, placement and level of sensationalism between September 2020 and March 2021. The media which are powerful tools of communication can aid in promoting peace, unity and development, as well as creating conflict along ethnic, religious and political inclinations. The study which was anchored on social responsibility and agenda setting theories used both content analysis and critical discourse analysis in order to code and interpret the data collected. A total of two hundred and twenty-four (224) editions of the newspapers under review were selected using the stratified random sampling technique by days of the week. Out of the sample, only 203 editions were accessed, coded and content analysed. The research reveals, among other things, that the reports on Southern Kaduna conflicts were mostly straightforward news constituting 92% which lack sufficient context and background. The reports were also given less prominence as almost all the reports were buried or hidden in the inside pages. Also, most of the reports on Southern Kaduna conflicts were inflammatory and sensational in order to keep the audience glued to the newspapers at the expense of accuracy and professionalism. The study therefore suggests that, media organisations should organise extensive training on conflict-sensitive reporting so as to arm reporters with professional requisite knowledge of reporting conflicts such that the reports don't trigger more conflicts. Also, media organisations should not report conflicts in straight news format only instead; they should use editorials and features which are usually in-depth and analytical with sufficient context and background needed for conflict-sensitive journalism. And, the media should also give prominence and priority to conflict incidences in order to attract the desired government intervention which will bring about lasting solutions.

Keywords: *Ethno-religious conflict, peace journalism, conflict sensitive reporting, Southern Kaduna.*

1. BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

Virtually, all the societies of the world experience conflict at one point or the other. Even at individual level, conflict usually emanates as a result of differences of opinions and approach to issues. Thus, conflict is inevitable in every human society. Conflict in itself constitutes no social menace, especially when the parties involved use it to improve their society. But what makes conflict bad is the fact that it sometimes becomes destructive and violent. Generally, most societies around the world are overwhelmed by destructive and violent conflicts which have continued to rob them of progress and development. This situation is pronounced in Africa especially taking into account the destructive conflicts that engulfed the continent, ranging from the Rwanda genocide to the conflicts in the Middle East.

Generally, conflict entails struggle and rivalry for objects to which individuals and groups attach importance. These objects can either be material or non-material. The material objects may include scarce resources like money, employment, and position including political ones, promotion in both the private and public organizations. The non-material objects include culture, tradition, religion and language. Conflict can be defined as disagreement, clash, collision, struggle or contest between two or more parties. It can also be seen as a situation in which there are opposing ideas, opinions, feelings or wishes; a situation in which it is difficult to choose. However, violent conflicts sometimes take ethnic or religious colouration, and at other times political or regional colouration, depending on what the people involved want to achieve (LEE & MASLOG, 2005).

Religion has the capacity to serve as both a force for good and for evil in violent conflict situations. Many of those involved in violent conflict situations use religion or ethnic identities to rally support, justify their actions and proclaim

a "moral or religious superiority" over others. The ethno-religious conflict, which is one of the most common conflicts especially in Nigeria, is not a new phenomenon as people engage in bloody confrontation in the name of religion. The religious, communal and ethnic upheavals and increasing ethnic jingoism of recent years seem to point to a loss of faith in the unity of the Nigerian nation and a retreat to ethnicity and particularism resulting from claims of discrimination, marginalization and exploitation by sections of the national community (MALAM, 2006; MCGOLDRICK, 2005).

Some authors observe that the growth of ethno-religious intolerance in the country has its foundation on the activities of the colonial masters that brought Christianity with them and antagonized African Traditional Religion as idolatry. Tracing the history of ethno-religious conflicts in Nigeria, it was noticed that before Nigeria was colonised by the British, the country had a multi-cultural/multi-ethnic, multi-lingual and even multi-political culture and was extremely heterogeneous and complex. In related analysis, it was remarks that:

Nigeria is a multi-ethnic plural society with the Igbo, Hausa and Yoruba representing the three largest groups. Each of these ethnic groups, prior to colonial invasion had existed independently on its own and had its own socio-cultural, political and economic systems by which the entire life of its members was organized. These systems varied quite markedly among these ethnic groups so much so that in some cases they were mutually antithetical and contradictory. It was rather these disparate ethnic groups that the colonial overlords forcefully hammered into one geo-political amalgam as Nigeria.

The two major religions in Nigeria, Christianity and Islam, have over the years tried to outdo each other in terms of belief, adherence, structure, growth and control of resources within the Nigerian state. Consequently, a dimension of fanaticism was introduced into the religious practice. Unfortunately, the so-called religion has become a source of discord, anarchy and bloodshed in Nigeria in recent times. ISIGUZO (2013) asserts that ethnicity and religion are real and are identities that people are willing to die for.

Presently, the fanatical and radical posture of these two religions though a total deviation from their core values, has resulted in religious crisis in Nigeria, leading to the destruction of lives and property. Instead of entrenching peace, understanding, unity and stability, these religions have somehow watered the whole essence of Nigeria's nationhood down the drain. Furthermore, Kukah and Achebe cited in ACHUNIKE (2007) observe that "both Christianity and Islam today straddle across the Nigerian polity without apologies and are aggressively proselytized." This has led to a serious rivalry between Christians and Muslims. That is why Ahmadu in ACHUNIKE (2007) also states that:

The presence of oriental religions in Nigeria thrust a discordant note into the serene religious atmosphere. Throughout the history of their developments, Islam and Christianity have existed in mutual hostility. Though, emerging from the same roots with almost identical literature and tenets, their strides for proselytization have often been marked by violence and intolerance.

The issue of religious dichotomisation in Nigeria has been much pronounced more than any other form of division. In 1985, there was a Muslim - Christian conflict in Gombe and Bauchi States; a religious riot in Kaduna, Kaduna State between the Christians and Muslims and in 1991, Bauchi riots disrupted the National Sports Festival holding in Bauchi State then. Others include, the 1980-1982 Maitatsine religious conflict in Kano; the 1987 Kafanchan ethno-religious conflict; the 1992 ZangonKataf ethno-religious crises; the 1996 Fulani/Karimjo inter-ethnic conflict in the Karim-lamido area of Taraba State, the 1998-2000 conflict in Okitipupa area of Ondo state; the 1999 conflict between the Hausas and the Yorubas in Shagamu; the 1999-2000 conflict in Kano; the 1999-2002 Wukari, Takum, Taraba/Benue States' conflicts; the 2000 Aguleri and Umuleri inter-communal conflict in Anambra state; the 2000-2001 conflict in Burutu local government of Delta state; the 2000-2001 Modakeke conflict in Osun state; the 2005 Jos YelwaShandam ethno-religious conflicts; the 2008-2011

ethno-religious and political conflicts in Jos Plateau and Bauchi States, the 2016 Karimjo/ Fulani inter-ethnic clash in Ardo-kola area of Taraba State (YAHAYA, 2011). It was the realisation of these religious conflicts in Nigeria that prompted former military dictator, Gen. Babangida to describe one of such religious riots as "civilian equivalent of coup" in a national broadcast (BERELSON, 1952; NKECHI, 2012; MCQUAIL, 1983).

Although the fundamental causes of Kaduna crises can be traced more to political and economic rivalries rather than religious differences, in recent years, however, religion has come to the fore as one of the aspects with which people have identified most readily and which has enabled leaders to stir up violence whenever it suited their purposes. According to MALAM (2006), "since the 1980s, ethno-religious conflicts have become more frequent, more widespread, more violent and destructive of life and property." He added that, whether purely ethnic or religious, the outcome of these crises has always been similar. They have each time produced multifaceted consequences: increase in political anxiety and tension, slower process of national integration, added insecurity of lives and property and increase in poverty level by further driving away prospects of economic investment and prosperity (BIDMOS, 1993).

This study specifically examines the reportage of Southern Kaduna conflicts by the *Nation*, the *Punch*, *Vanguard* and *Daily Trust* newspapers in order to ascertain whether these newspapers contribute to the management/resolution or further exacerbation/escalation of the conflict. Sometimes the media do not have a proper understanding of how conflicts start and the people involved, thereby reporting the situation out of its sociological context which in turn contributes to the exacerbation of the conflict. Southern Kaduna conflicts have been one of the most grievous and oldest conflicts that have lingered for years, causing endless loss of lives and property, the resolution/management of which has become a mirage. Suffice it to say that the crises have now become nearly intractable. This is because since the late 1980's Kaduna State has been enmeshed in different types of conflicts (BEST, 1981).

2. STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

The critical role of mass media in reporting conflicts in multi-ethnic and multi-religious Nigeria is quite imperative. Nigeria as a country has been plagued by different conflict incidences which have continued to rob and retard the country's developmental ambitions. According to ABDULLAHI & SAKA (2007) no less than one hundred politically, ethnically and religiously motivated conflicts have occurred in Nigeria since the re-emergence of democracy in May 1999. This figure kept skyrocketing at an alarming rate which makes the role of mass media, particularly of newspapers, even more demanding.

Whereas there is much commentary on the role of media in religious crises in Africa and Nigeria in particular, there seems to be only few systematically conducted studies on the phenomenon (MALAM, 2006; BREWER, 2000). According to media scholars and commentators in Nigeria, media have been found to exacerbate conflicts to some extent, hence, the need for the media to be conflict-sensitive in their reportage (OKOYE, 2009; PATE, 2010; ABDU & UMAR, 2002; NYABOLA, 2014). Some even alleged that the media is being recruited in conflict situations to blow trumpets, ignite or precipitate violence among peace loving people or communities and most times these types of accusations come from the conflict parties who think and expect the media to be their mouthpiece or instrument of propaganda (BRYANT & THOMPSON, 2002).

Mass media is argued to have an enormous power, capable of shaping public opinion through its agenda setting role. This shows that the media reports on issues particularly conflicts, can to a large extent influence the way parties to a conflict react or perceive the situation in terms of whether the media's influence is negative or positive. Unfortunately, the media (particularly the newspapers) are seen to be sentimental in their conflict reportage through their choice of words, placement of stories, the way headlines are written, editorial/columnist biases and the general way stories are being portrayed.

Media sensitivity to conflict empowers reporters to report conflicts professionally

without feeding the flames. Reporting reliable and unbiased information to the public in a time of violent conflict requires additional journalistic skills and a deeper understanding of what causes the conflict, how it develops and ends. It is against this backdrop that this study seeks to analyse how the *Nation*, the *Punch, Vanguard and Daily Trust* newspapers have fared in their reportage of Southern Kaduna conflicts from September 2020 to March 2021 vis-à-vis frequency, placement, direction and level of sensationalism (CASTLY, 1973).

3. AIM AND OBJECTIVES

This study specifically aims to examine the reportage of Southern Kaduna conflicts of September 2020 to March 2021 by the *Nation*, the *Punch*, *Vanguard* and *Daily Trust* newspapers, in order to ascertain whether these newspapers contribute to the management/resolution or further exacerbation/escalation of the conflict. To this end, the study has the following objectives:
(1) To examine the frequency of reportage of Southern Kaduna ethno-religious conflicts in the *Nation*, the *Punch*, *Vanguard* and *Daily Trust* newspapers during the period of study.
(2) To ascertain the direction of reports of Southern Kaduna ethno-religious conflicts in the *Nation*, the *Punch*, *Vanguard* and *Daily Trust* newspapers during the period of study.
(3) To identify the placement and length of reports of Southern Kaduna ethno-religious conflicts in the *Nation*, the *Punch*, *Vanguard* and *Daily Trust* newspapers during the period of study.
(4) To examine the extent to which reports on Southern Kaduna ethno-religious conflicts were sensational in the *Nation*, the *Punch*, *Vanguard* and *Daily Trust* newspapers during the period of study.

4. MEDIA AND CONFLICT REPORTING IN NIGERIA

The data compiled at the Johns Hopkins University School of Advanced International Studies (SAIS) indicates that from 1998 to 2014, more than 29,600 people have been killed in more than 2,300 incidents reflecting a wide range of ethnic, religious, political and economic tensions across large portions of the Nigerian polity. As a consequence, after each round of violent clashes in any part of Nigeria, the country becomes poorer, its image gets messier, hatred and ill feelings increase among the people and feelings of animosity envelop the land. Long standing relationships are destroyed and the entire process of development arrested. The country and its people become the collective victims as millions are displaced in their own land (PATE & DAUDA, 2017).

Debates over the role of the media during conflicts are not a new development. As the watchdog and the fourth estate of the realm, the media have duties and responsibilities that are clearly defined as well as those not clearly defined. One of the most argued is, how the media should act in a diverse and multi-ethnic society vis-à-vis situations of conflict. In any diverse society, it is essential for the media to ensure a harmonious interaction among people and groups with plural, varied and dynamic cultural identities. But the situation is different in Nigeria as diversity breeds cleavages and the media have been found to be accomplices to such divisions.

The media's involvement with conflicts the world over has not been so much impressive and this according to BRATIC & LISA 2007 is largely attributable to the fact that standard journalism practice itself is a victim of conflict. Also, it was stated that contemporary journalism schools even make trainee journalists understand that an outstanding attribute of news is conflict. Not unexpectedly, this affects the conduct of journalists in the course of performing their duties either as reporters or editors. BRATIC & LISA, 2007 further note that several scholarly studies have submitted that the media are more likely to perpetuate violent conflict than contribute to its peaceful resolution.

Resorting to history, they recall that news media have often been used to promote wars and conflicts. Citing LASSWELL (1948), they recall the examples of how the media helped to further the goals of the Allies during the World War 1. They add that even as recently as for the Rwanda and Yugoslavia wars, the role of the local media in the promotion of violence was so dominant

even as the western media with all their ubiquity were not able to affect the course of the escalating conflict.

> …correspondents do not need military officers to censor them or bend them to their will. In nearly all wars, journalists will tend to take sides, despite their vocation's mission and their training. In wars of national survival, they will instinctively veer towards patriotism. In wars of choice, if they are embedded, they will usually subconsciously bond with their hosts. If they are freewheeling in conflicts such as Bosnia, Rwanda or Darfur, and many other wars to come, they may well consciously indulge in advocacy.

Considering the plethora of ethno-religious conflicts that dotted the Nigerian landscape before and since the restoration of civilian rule in May 1999 and the heap of complaints from some observers that journalists are biased, sensational, unpatriotic and pre-occupied with commercial gains when reporting conflicts among others; ADISA (2012) maintains that these allegations are not peculiar to Nigeria because across the globe, media have been used as tools to inflame grievances and accelerate the escalation towards violent conflicts.

Classical examples abound where the media are seen to have perpetuated further exacerbation of conflicts the world over. For instance in Rwanda, radio was used to lay the groundwork for genocide. In Serbia, television was manipulated to whip up ethnic tensions prior to the civil war. In the former Soviet Republic of Georgia, territorial disputes were aggravated by the media (ANTIGBA 2005) and even recently, many critics of the US war in Iraq concluded that if elite media had not backed President George Bush, it would have been difficult for the US to leave for Iraq. In Thailand, media was identified as the main energizer for the "Red Shirt" demonstrators in a three months conflict that ended violently in 2011; more so, though generally believed to be the sign of impending good governance, nonetheless, social media were recognized as the motivator of the ravaging Middle East conflicts

In line with the above submission, BRATIC & LISA (2007) further note that, scholars have

observed that journalists are trained to construct news within a "story" or narrative form that employs an antagonist facing off against a protagonist, elements of engagement in dramatic tension, within a plot with the predictable elements of "a beginning, middle and end." This form determines news in the dominant cultural narratives which reinforce the essentialist idea of just a clean war against evil enemies while encouraging opponents to press perceived advantages, however insignificant.

According to PATE & DAUDA (2017), the first casualty in any conflict situation is often the nature of communication among the conflict actors. Perhaps, that is why conflict is commonly referred to as "breakdown in communication." Ordinary statements from the actors are interpreted within the context of the conflict and this has the potential of escalating the problem. It can therefore be assumed that when third parties, like the media intervene wrongly, they can easily contribute to the escalation of the problem based on what they say and how they say them. The media, in the eyes of the public are the vanguard of accurate, factual and correct perspective of events; hence the people reliance on them. Thus, arguably, it can be easy for the media to play negative roles in conflict situations. This position was shared by PATE (2015) when he stated that:

> Part of the problem with the media is that it uses inflammatory, misleading and sensational headlines to attract sales. According to him the media demonises certain ethnic, religious or political groups in an already divided and tensed society; uses cartoons to malign a community, group or individual. The media use unrepresentative pictures in its stories above all; it can be un-objective and clearly biased in reporting against some groups, individuals or communities.

Usually, the struggle for media space by antagonists and protagonists in a conflict is mainly to influence public opinion and ultimately public policy. This is done through the media's power to set the agenda and frames of understanding. The agenda setting has long been recognised in the discussions of the role of the mass media in society, particularly

during campaign (COHEN, 1963 & LIPPMANN, 1922). This is why COHEN (1963) stated that the media may not be successful much of the time in telling people what to think, but it is stunningly successful in telling its readers what to think about.

Be that as it may, a number of attempts have been made to analyse the pattern of media coverage of diversity and conflict issues in Nigeria and Africa (ANUP, 2005; NYABOLA, 2014 & PATE, 2010). The common professional errors found from these studies show that: the media promotes prejudicial stereotypes about groups and individuals through selective reporting while inter-group conflicts are mostly reported out of fundamental sociological, economic, political and other contexts.

Media coverage of conflict situation cannot be discussed without taking into consideration the development in ICT and media technology. The advent of ICT has created new tools for telling the stories of conflicts both by the direct antagonists and the ordinary citizens who can now participate in the dramatic unfolding of conflicts, not only as a mere receiver of the messages but also as producers. With the new technology such as the social media (Facebook, YouTube, WhatsApp etc.) and sophisticated phones, conflict reports can be dish out live and in real time (LAZZARICH, 2013; ARNOLD, 1991). These developments of course raise a lot of ethical and professional issues in terms of what should or should not be reported during conflicts.

5. PEACE JOURNALISM AND CONFLICT-SENSITIVE REPORTING IN NIGERIA

The central concept of conflict-sensitive reporting is that a violent conflict attracts intense media attention that requires greater analytical depth and skills to report. This means that conflict situations should be reported without further contributing to the violence or ignoring peace-building opportunities. The aim of conflict-sensitive reporting is to achieve peace journalism in the long run. In other words, conflict-sensitive reporting just like conflict-solution journalism and constructive-conflict coverage are sub-sections of the much broader peace journalism.

The call for peace journalism and conflict-sensitive reporting is becoming a matter of great concern among journalists, scholars and stakeholders. According to GALTUNG (2000) a famous and renowned conflict resolution studies expert, what used to exist then was war journalism as opposed to their preferred alternative of peace journalism. According to him, peace journalism presents a clearly distinct model different from what war journalism had availed the world which was largely a systematic focus on "violence and who wins, like a soccer game, leaving out the invisible effects and the alternatives." (GALTUNG, 2000)

Peace journalism is a type of journalism practice that emerged in the 1970s. Norwegian sociologist, peace researcher and practitioner Johan Galtung proposed the idea of peace journalism for journalists to follow in order to show how a value bias towards violence can be avoided when covering war and conflict (MCGOLDRICK & LYNCH, 2000). They further explained that peace journalism is "when editors and reporters make choices of what stories to report and how to report them which creates opportunities for society to consider and to value non-violent responses to conflict." It is a broader, fairer and more accurate way of forming stories, drawing on the insights of the conflict, analysis and transformation.

It outlined three characteristics of peace journalism as thus:

(i). Using the insight of conflict analysis and transformation to update the concept of balance, fairness and accuracy in reporting.

(ii). Providing a new route, map tracing the connections between journalists, their sources, the stories they cover and the consequences of their journalism - the ethics of journalistic intervention.

(iii). Building an awareness of non-violence and creativity into the practical job of everyday editing and reporting.

Peace journalism proponents Lynch &McGoldrick, (2005) also describe war journalism as a focus on overt acts of violence and on the most prominent hardship that a

nation faces. While noting that the tendency of war journalism is to await and follow violent tragedies in particular, they further observe that it uses classic bureaucratic, formal expressions emphasizing external points of view. They argue that these convey a kind of call to duty from an informed, learned authority. Peace journalism reverses all of these. In contrast, Howard (2002) says peace journalism, rather than being momentary, does not limit its role to any particular stages of conflict but includes news through all stages stretching through pre-, during and post conflict.

The media, as presumed by peace journalism are in a position to constructively transform conflict away from violence by expanding the number and diversity of individuals whose ideas and perspectives are shared, given credibility and valued. While insisting that violence itself is the problem, peace journalism practitioners strive to systematically reject the simplistic approach to violence often attributing the cause to "a certain party ('the others') as "the problem" (HANITZSCH, 2004). Rather, peace journalism takes on conflict formations by identifying the parties, goals and issues involved from ethnic, historical and cultural perspectives.

In other words, it was explained that the ultimate goal of peace journalism is to make better for all parties, the possibility of sharing views as a means of finding better ways to transform or resolve a violent conflict. Peace journalism concerns itself with contexts, backgrounds and the broad, negative consequences of violent conflicts, as it explores alternatives and solutions. Peace journalism enhances the information flow and opens the range of options for addressing conflict. Its concern is a win-win strategy which declines simplistic binaries such as good/evil and/or right/wrong.

Described as naïve, biased and impractical, peace journalism and conflict-sensitive critics argue that it is a "prescriptive orthodoxy that… abandons good journalism and fails to recognize audience desires, owner prerogatives for profits and human frailty" (EKWUNIFE, 1992; HALL, 1977). According to this school of thought, peace

journalism abandons the search for truth advanced through balanced, objective reporting without acknowledging the practical limits of time, talent and energy and without providing mechanisms to facilitate the effective gathering of credible alternative information.

HANITZSCH (2007) thus faults peace journalism as "a programme or frame of journalistic news coverage which contributes to the process of making and keeping peace… there are in fact many structural constraints which shape and limit the work of journalism - few personnel, time and material resources, editorial procedures and hierarchies, textual constraints, availability of sources, access to the scene and information in general just to name a few. Journalists consistently work under conditions of heavy time pressure, limited resources and tight competition (HANITZSCH 2007). The main difference between war and peace journalism is that, while the former is destructive and disintegrative, the latter is constructive, integrative and collaborative.

While it may be very difficult to authoritatively assert whether the media in Nigeria practice war or peace/conflict-sensitive journalism, the fact remains that there are challenges and issues which must have been hindering the media in carrying out this all-important task. Notwithstanding, different media scholars and public commentators have found the operations of media in Nigeria to be wanting during tense or conflict moments.

According to PATE (2015), the media in Nigeria have succeeded in creating "new conflicts" and their challenges have not only reignited the issue of polarisation, but also further engrained the volatile national integration and religious harmony. While corroborating, OSO (2017) laments that, in a country such as Nigeria where there is no elite consensus on any issue, where the so-called ruling elite class is fractured along regional, ethnic and religious lines and with precarious hegemony; the media is also perceived to be structured along the socio-political divisions. The point is that the so-called freedom of the Nigerian press is predicated on cacophonous of the fractured elite voices.

6. REVIEW OF RELATED STUDIES

ORHEWERE (2004), in his study of *Nigerian Newspaper's Coverage of 2001 Tiv-Jukun Ethnic Conflict in the Middle Belt* found that the newspapers were partly the causal agents of the conflict. YAHAYA, (2011) carried out a study on the *Ethnic and Religious Conflicts in Kaduna and Plateau States: Implications for Development in Nigeria*. He employed a qualitative research design (oral interview and documentary sources) in order to elicit relevant responses from both Christians and Muslims of Kaduna and Plateau states. Some of the major findings of the study were: Socially, the conflicts succeed in limiting social interaction and harmony between Christians and Muslims. Economically, the Nigerian economy is weakened particularly through the cost of investment by the conflicts in the affected states as well the discouragement of foreign investors from investing in the country. Politically, the country is now divided along religious lines because of such crises. One of the major suggestions for further studies is the focus on conflict prevention and management of ethno-religious crises in Nigeria.

The relationship between Yahaya's (2011) study and the present study lies on the fact that as far as conflict prevention and management of ethno-religious crises are concern in Nigeria, multi-pronged efforts are required from the government, religious leaders, stakeholders and the media which serves as the purveyor of information. This shows that the media has a role to play in that direction, hence the need for the present study.

NKECHI, (2012) carried out a similar study on *Print Media Coverage of Religious Crises in Nigeria: A Study of Daily Trust, Guardian, Nation and the Sun Newspapers.* The study used a quantitative research design (content analysis) and the social responsibility theory as theoretical framework. Major findings of the study were: Nigerian press actually used sufficient space in their publications in the reportage of religious crises-based issues between 2010 and 2011, prominence were also given to the religious crises-based stories within the study period and evidence in the research data prove that newspaper publishers of religious crises were to a great extent balanced in their reportages. The study recommends that, the mass media, especially, the print, should go beyond the 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 as well as see a peaceful, united and prosperous Nigeria as a more demanding task.

Ummi, 2014 carried out a study on *Conflict-Sensitive Reporting in Northern Nigeria: A Study of Selected Newspaper Reportage*. She used a qualitative research design (critical discuss analysis) and agenda setting as well as social responsibility theories as theoretical framework. One of the main findings of the study was that, in some conflict situations, some people used to react violently because of media reports especially when they feel that their ethnic or religious group is under attack. The study recommends that, situations that show a potential for conflict, should not be ignored by the media until the conflict becomes violent because conflict turns violent when no common ground or shared interest can be established. Therefore, in situations like these, the media should endeavour to educate the public to ties that bound and also be pro-peace in their reports.

Kajuru, 2015 carried out a research on *Audience Perception of Media Coverage and Management of the 2011 Post Election Violence in Kaduna State*. The researcher employed the survey research method and the functional theory as the theoretical framework of the study. Some of the major findings of the study were: improved professionalism in peace journalism, good knowledge and understanding of conflict, its sensitivity and how to report conflict in an objective and matured manner can be used to achieve peaceful co-existence among the people, media had played a vital role in conflict management and reconciliation through positive contribution to peace building by preaching tolerance; respect, trust and understanding among the heterogeneous people of Kaduna state, as well as setting the agenda and playing a reconciliatory role during the conflict. The study recommended that further research should examine the significance of media and how it

influences the perception and behaviour of audience in Nigeria.

BASORUN, (2015) carried out a research on the *Analysis of the Reportage of Jos Crisis and Boko Haram Insurgence by Selected Newspaper.* The study used a mixed method research otherwise known as triangulation for the purpose of collecting data and framing theory as its theoretical framework. Some of the principal findings of the study were: newspapers through the various ways they frame issues could legitimate conflict because news and other media's reports of conflict are contributory to the legitimating of conflict, it also confirmed that the major sources of conflicts in Nigeria are religion and ethnicity and newspapers present most of their stories on the crises in straight news form with minimal feature and low consideration for editorial comment, opinion/ column and letters.

Yau, 2017 carried out a research on *War or Conflict Sensitive Journalism: A Linguistic Analysis of Newspaper Reportage of Southern Kaduna Conflicts in Nigeria*. The study adopts the qualitative content analysis as the primary method of data inquiry. The analysis of the data gathered revealed that a linguistic approach to newspaper reportage of the southern Kaduna crisis represents a representation of the socio-cultural and ideological values that are intrinsic in the language used. The study found out that the approach used in reporting the southern Kaduna conflicts inclines more to the tenets of War Journalism, which is about reporting conflicts, crisis and disputes with value biased towards violence and violent groups that leads audiences to overvalue violent responses and ignore non-violent alternatives. It concentrated on reporting the differences between parties rather than the similarities, previous agreements and common progress. It was therefore recommended that there is an urgent need for socialization and orientation of journalists into the principles and practices of conflict sensitive reporting.

Based on the studies conducted by NKECHI, (2012) and BASORUN (2015), a call has been made on the media to eschew reports that are capable of inciting more violence and embrace a reporting style that is geared towards entrenching peace and unity through highlighting what binds the society rather than divides it, hence the need for this study.

7. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This treatise is anchored on the social responsibility and agenda setting theories. The social responsibility theory is an offshoot of the libertarian theory. It was developed to check the excesses of the free press. The theory sprang up in the 20th century and it posits that as much as the press should be free in the society that freedom should carry certain obligations. Simply put, press freedom does not mean the press should do as it pleases. It should operate in recognition of the societal needs and aspirations (NWABUEZE, 2012; ETI, 2009; HERMAN & CHOMSKY, 1988).

Under the free press, there is supposed to be a free flow of objective information that will allow the citizens to make intelligent political decisions and other decisions affecting their lives. The excesses and distortions in yellow journalism and sensationalism did not allow these objectives to be achieved. During that period, the press were engaged in sensationalism, invasion of privacy, defamation of character and other negative activities that fell short of the libertarian goals. According to SURESH (2003), the Hutchins Commission of 1949 found that the free market approach to press freedom had only increased the power of a single class and has not served the interests of the less well-off classes... thus the theory advocates some obligations on the part of the media to the society. A judicial mix of self-regulation and state regulation and high professional standards were imperative.

The social responsibility theory is relevant to this study as the theory emphasised the need for an independent press that scrutinizes other social institutions and provides objective, accurate news report and expects the media to be pluralist and encourage diversity within the society. Media practitioners are expected to be responsible and accountable to the society as a whole and not only to a section of the society. Interestingly, most of the arguments for and against conflict-sensitive reporting cite the social responsibility theory as basis. While proponents of

conflict-sensitive or peace reporting are of the opinion that it is the duty of the journalist to be socially responsible to the people, by trying to report conflict issues in such a manner that will bring about peace, the opponents are of the opinion that conflict-sensitive or peace reporting goes against the social responsibility theory because it compromises the objectivity of the journalists (HOLSTI, 1969).

The agenda setting theory, although credited to Maxwell McCombs and Donald Shaw, followed different levels of conception and refinement. According to COHEN (1963):

> The press is significantly more than a purveyor of information and opinion. It may not be successful much of the time in telling the people what to think, but it is stunningly successful in telling its readers what to think about. And it follows from this that the world looks different to different people, depending not only on their personal interests, but also on the map that is drawn for them by the writers, editors, and publishers of the papers they read.

Cohen's writing became the basis of what is now called the agenda-setting function of the mass media. This perspective might have lingered in obscurity had it not been empirically confirmed by the research conducted by Maxwell McCombs and Donald Shaw. (BARAN& DAVIS, 2009). MCCOMBS & SHAW (1972) posit that:

> In choosing and displaying news, editors, newsroom staff, and broadcasters play an important part in shaping political reality. Readers learn not only about a given issue, but about how much importance to attach to that issue from the amount of information in a news story and its position. The mass media may well determine the important issues - that is, the media may set the "agenda" of the campaign.

The core idea of agenda setting theory is that the media indicates to the public what the main issues of the day are and this is reflected in what the media perceives as the main issues (MCQUAIL, 2010). FOLARIN (1998) also corroborates that:

> The media has the power to predetermine what issues are regarded as important at a given point in time in a society... this is inherent in four interdependent elements which include the amount or regularity of reporting, the status given to the reports through the positioning of stories, headline display, picture exhibition and page layout in newspapers and magazines; as well as the timing on radio and television; the extent of argument generated in the reports and the aggregate of media specific effects overtime.

The agenda-setting theory is important in this study, since the study seeks to look at how media reports on conflict situations impact on the conflict and whether the media can set the agenda for peace, prevent further conflicts from escalating or contribute to increasing the conflict. This is because the mass media sets the agenda for the public by highlighting certain topical issues. Central to the principles of the agenda setting theory is that the media make us to think about certain issues, they make us think or feel that certain issues are more important than others in our society (ANAETO, 2008).

8. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The study employed both quantitative/ qualitative content analysis and critical discourse analysis (mixed method) for the purpose of collecting data in order to achieve its objectives. Some authors describe mixed method research as the use of more than one approach to the investigation of a research question in order to enhance confidence in the ensuing findings. The population of the study was the entire editions of the selected newspapers within the period under review while the news stories; editorials and feature articles published in front, inside and back pages of the selected newspapers, related to Southern Kaduna conflicts from September, 2020 to March, 2021 were considered as the content universe.

The study adopts two types of sampling (multi-stage sampling). At the level of newspapers selection, the researcher adopts purposive sampling to select the *Nation*, the *Punch, Vanguard, and Daily Trust* newspapers. As a non-probability sampling technique, purposive sampling is a type of sampling

methods where respondents are selected on condition that they meet certain criteria. The rationale for the selection of these four national dailies (the *Nation, Punch, Vanguard, and Daily Trust* newspapers) are: they are national in outlook and published daily, they have wide readership/ circulation and corporate reputation throughout Nigeria and their ownership patterns cut across all the regions of the country (NWABUEZE & EBEZE, 2013; ONABANJO, 2010). On the other hand, the stratified random sampling technique by days of the week has been employed in order to select the editions of the *Nation,* the *Punch, Vanguard, and Daily Trust* newspapers. Stratified sampling ensures that a sample is drawn from a homogeneous subset of the population - that is, from a population that has similar characteristics. Homogeneity helps researchers to reduce sampling error (DOMINICK, 2002; WIMMER & DOMINICK, 2011; ORHEWERE & KUR, 2001).

Consequently, for the study period which was from September, 2020 to March, 2021 (7 months), two (2) editions have been selected for every week (with two days interval) from these newspapers. Each newspaper has fifty six (56) editions totalling two hundred and twenty four (224) editions (for the four selected newspapers) which is the sample size, out of which only two hundred and three (203) editions were content analysed while the remaining twenty-one (21) editions were not available. The choice of two editions for every week is supported by the claims that, ''another technique for sampling edition dates is stratification by weeks of the month and by days of the week. A sampling rule that no more than two days from one week can be chosen is one way to ensure a balanced distribution across the month (WIMMER & DOMINICK, 2011). However, the sampled dates of the selected editions can be given as thus:
September 2020 sampled editions of stories:(7, 10, 13, 16, 19, 22, 25, and 28) = 8 days
October 2020 sampled editions of stories: (1, 4, 7, 10, 13, 16, 19, and 22) = 8 days
November 2020 sampled editions of stories: (5, 8, 11, 14, 17, 20, 23, and 26) = 8 days
December 2020 sampled editions of stories: (2, 5, 8, 11, 14, 17, 20, and 23) = 8 days
January 2021 sampled editions of stories: (4, 7, 11, 14, 18, 21, 25, and 28) = 8 days

February 2021 sampled editions of stories: (3, 6, 9, 12, 15, 18, 21 and 24) = 8 days
March 2021 sampled editions of stories: (6, 9, 12, 15, 18, 21, 24, and 27) = 8 days
Thus 8 editions in every month multiply by 7 (which is the months under review) = 56
Therefore, 56 multiply by 4 (which is the number of the newspapers under review) = 224//
Therefore, 224 editions of the selected newspapers (the *Nation*, the *Punch*, *Vanguard* and *Daily Trust*) constitute the sample size of the study.

At the heart of every content analysis is the unit of analysis/measurement. Thus, the unit of analysis for this study were the news stories, editorials and feature articles, while the units of measurement were frequency (treated at nominal level), direction (treated at interval level), placement (treated at ratio level), sensational reports and the language of reports. Similarly, the content categories of this study were the ethno-religious conflicts, communal conflicts, political conflicts and economic conflicts.

Coding sheet which has been corrected and validated through a peer review in order to ascertain its validity and reliability was employed as an instrument for the collection of data (manifest content) on Southern Kaduna conflicts from the selected newspapers under investigation. On the other hand, a personal subjective interpretation of the text was used for the collection of latent or hidden meaning of the manifest content in order to provide useful information about the topic under investigation (OTITE & ALBERT, 1999; RELIEFWEB, 2006).

The researcher recruited and trained 2 coders to code the content of the selected newspapers. The coders were trained for four weeks within which they were able to familiarised themselves with the research methodology, the aim and objectives of the study, the code sheet and the coding instruction. Consequently, the two coders agreed on 99 coding decision after which each of them selected and coded 52 items from Southern Kaduna conflict reports. The items coded were news, editorials and feature articles. The inter-coder reliability co-efficient was manually calculated and determined using Holsti (1969)'s reliability formula:

Reliability = $\frac{2M}{N1 + n2}$

Where M = total number of coding decisions on which coders agreed on.

$N1$ = total number of coding decisions by coder A.

$n2$ = total number of coding decisions by coder B.

Thus: $\dfrac{2 * 99}{52 + 52} = 198/104 = 1.9 //$

Therefore, the inter-coder reliability coefficient is = $1.9 //$

9. DATA PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS

A total of two hundred and twenty four (224) editions of the *Nation,* the *Punch, Vanguard and Daily Trust* newspapers were sampled out of which two hundred and three (203) editions representing ninety one per cent (91%) were content analysed. The remaining twenty one (21) editions representing nine per cent (9%) could not be analysed because it was unavailable. Also, critical discourse analysis was employed in order to analyse the latent meaning of the manifest content coded.
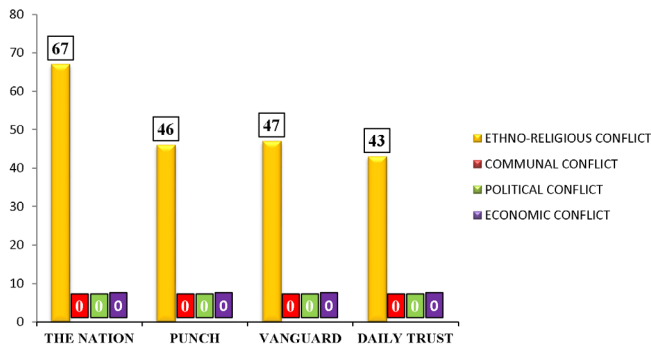
Source: Field survey, 2020-2021

Fig.1. Categorisations of Southern Kaduna conflicts

The figure above shows that a total of 203 editions representing 100% reports of the *Nation, Punch, Vanguard and Daily Trust* newspapers on Southern Kaduna conflicts were categorised as ethno-religious, while no single report was categorised as political, communal or economic conflicts. This analysis shows that, the conflicts in Southern Kaduna during the period under review were ethno-religious in nature not political, communal or economic.
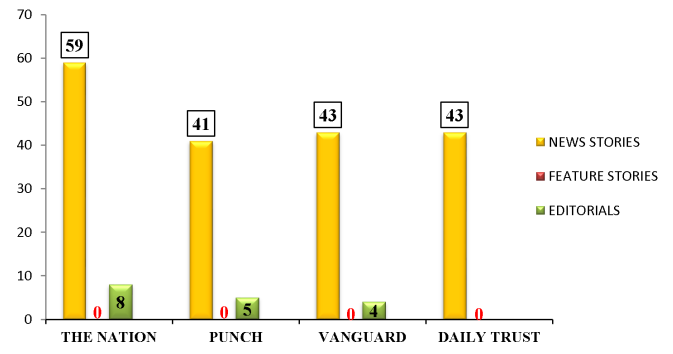
Source: Field survey, 2020-2021

Fig. 2. Units of analysis of Southern Kaduna conflicts

The figure above shows whether the reports on Southern Kaduna conflicts for the period under study were mainly news stories, editorials, feature articles or the combination of all. A total of 186 reports of all the selected Nigerian newspapers (the *Nation,* the *Punch, Vanguard* and *Daily Trust*) representing 92% were news stories, 17 reports representing 8% were editorials while no report was a feature article. Based on the foregoing statistical analysis, it can be inferred that, all the selected newspapers reported Southern Kaduna conflicts through the medium of news which is usually shallow and straight to the point without sufficient context and background needed for conflict-sensitive journalism.
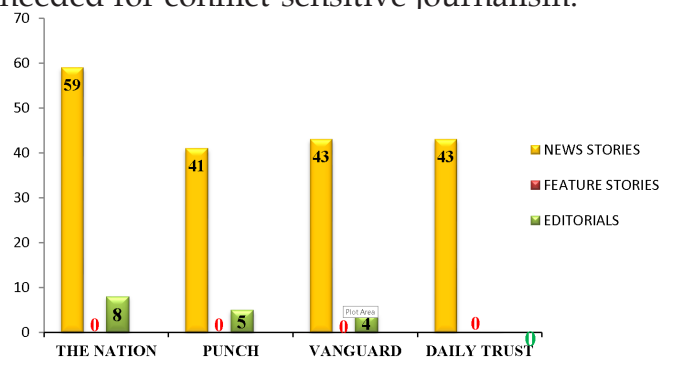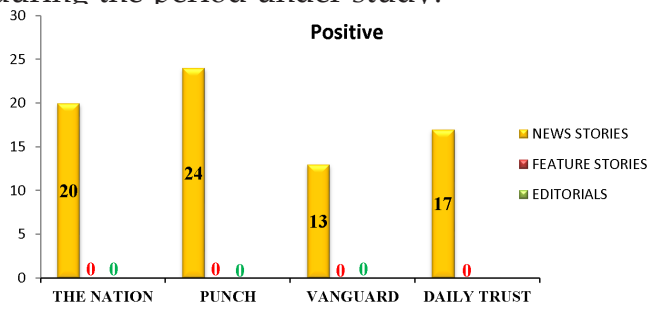

Source: Field survey, 2020-2021

Fig. 3. Frequency of reportage of Southern Kaduna conflicts
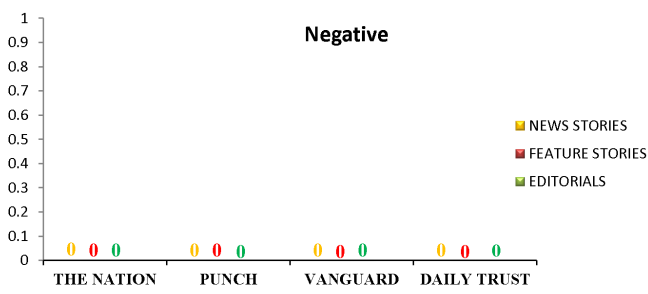
The figure above shows how often or frequent the four selected covered stories related to Southern Kaduna conflicts within the period under review. Based on the analysis

from the figure, it was discovered that the coverage of Southern Kaduna conflicts was very high (21 and above) in terms of news stories which accounts for 186 reports representing 92%, very low (1 to 10) in terms of editorials which accounts for 17 reports representing 8%. The foregoing statistical analysis revealed that the reports on Southern Kaduna conflicts were very high probably because it was dramatic, fresh and recent during the period under study.

Source: Field survey, 2020-2021

Source: Field survey, 2020-2021

Source: Field survey, 2020-2021

Fig.4. Direction of reports of Southern Kaduna conflicts

Figure 4 shows the direction of Southern Kaduna conflicts which has been categorised into positive, negative and neutral reports. A total of 122 news reports on Southern Kaduna conflicts representing 60% and 17 editorials
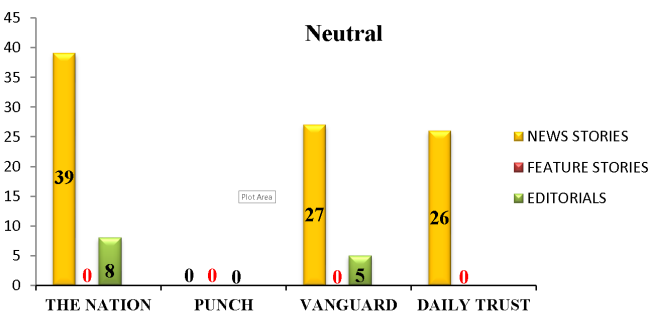
representing 8% were neutral, 64 news reports representing 32% were positive, while no report was adjudged negative. *Daily Trust* news report of January 13, 2017, page 4 "20,000 unjustly killed in Kaduna since 1980 says El-Rufai" and the *Nation* news report of December 19, 2016, page 44 "Indigenes, Fulani community meet over Southern Kaduna killings" are example of how neutral some of the newspapers under investigation were. This analysis revealed that the reports on Southern Kaduna conflicts were to some extent neutral, not biased or lopsided, which is in line with the social responsibility role of mass media in any given society.
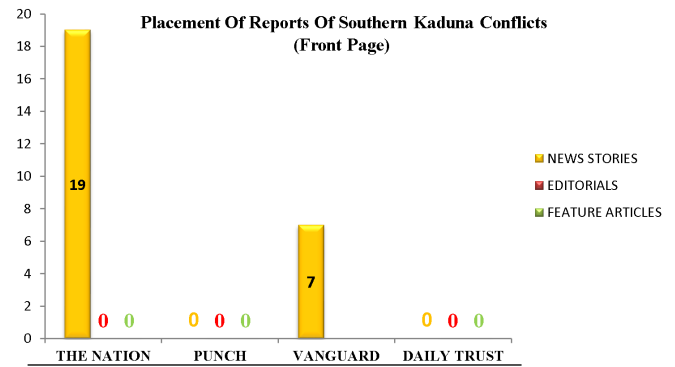

Source: Field survey, 2020-2021
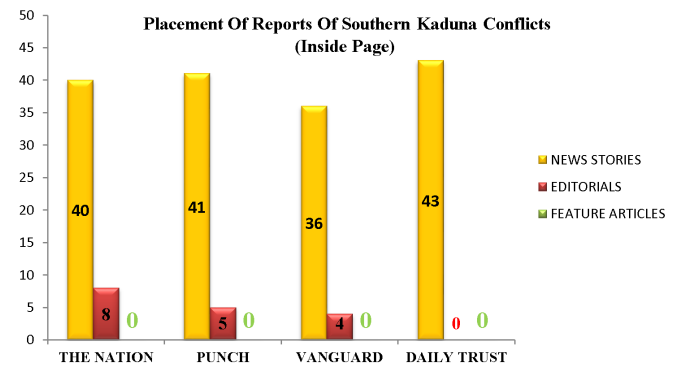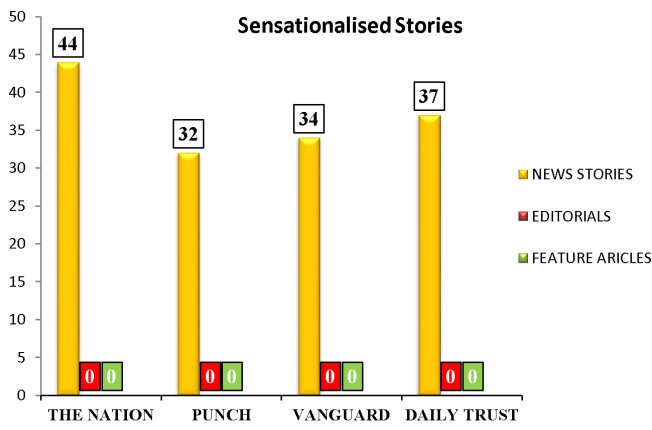

Source: Field survey, 2020-2021
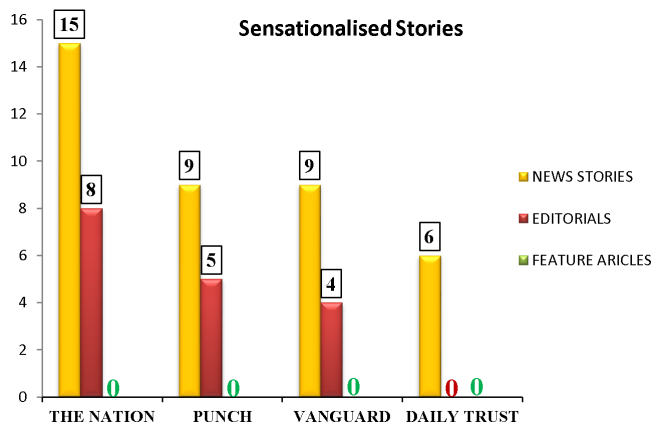
Source: Field survey, 2020-2021

Fig.5. Placement of Reports of Southern Kaduna Conflicts

The Histograms above show how Southern Kaduna conflicts had been placed in the *Nation,* the *Punch, Vanguard* and *Daily Trust* newspapers. Based on the analysis, a total of 26 news reports from all the selected newspapers which represent 13% appeared on

the front page, 160 news reports representing 79% and 17 editorials representing 8% appeared on the inside page, while no single report appeared on the back page. From the aforementioned analysis, it is evident that, as far as the reportage of Southern Kaduna crises was concern, there was a low level of prominence as almost all the reports were buried or hidden in the inside pages which may not attract the desired attention.

Source: Field survey, 2020-2021

Source: Field survey, 2020-2021

Fig. 6. Level of sensationalism of reportage of Southern Kaduna conflicts

The figures above show whether the selected four newspapers (the *Nation,* the *Punch, Vanguard* and *Daily Trust*) were sensational in their reportage of Southern Kaduna ethno-religious conflicts or not. 147 reports which were mainly news stories representing 72% were adjudged sensational, while 39 news reports representing 20% and 17 editorials

representing 8% were adjudged not sensational. For example, the *Punch* news report of January 12, 2017, page 14 "Herdsmen conquered 17 Southern Kaduna villages" and *Vanguard* news report of January 16, 2017 "Southern Kaduna: One Nigeria, a fallacy, political deception – MASSOB" are instances where some of the newspapers under consideration exaggerated the issue in order to grab attention. Based on the foregoing statistical analysis, it is evident that most of the reports on Southern Kaduna conflicts during the period under review were sensational which means the reports were intentionally exaggerated written in order to keep the audience glued to the newspapers at the expense of accuracy and professionalism.

10. MAJOR RESEARCH FINDINGS

Based on the data collected and analysed, the research work has the following findings:

1. The study found that the reports on Southern Kaduna conflicts were mainly news (92%) which is usually shallow and straight to the point without sufficient context and background needed for conflict-sensitive journalism.

2. The findings of the study also revealed that the reports on Southern Kaduna conflicts were very high (92%) probably because it was dramatic, fresh and recent during the period under study.

3. The study revealed that the reports on Southern Kaduna conflicts were to some extent neutral (68%), not biased or lopsided. This is in line with the social responsibility role of the mass media in any given society.

4. The study discovered that the reports on Southern Kaduna conflicts were not given adequate prominence, as almost all the reports (87%) were buried or hidden in the inside pages, which may not attract the desired/needed government intervention which will bring about lasting solutions.

5. The study also revealed that most of the reports on Southern Kaduna conflicts were sensational (72%), which means the reports were intentionally exaggerated written in

order to keep the audience glued to the newspapers at the expense of accuracy and professionalism.

11. DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

The findings of the study based on the analysis of the four selected Nigerian newspapers (the *Nation,* the *Punch, Vanguard* and *Daily Trust*) for the period under review require proper discussions vis-à-vis other empirical and theoretical studies carried out by other researchers in order to provide answers to the research questions under investigation.

The findings of the study based on the results from the presentation and analysis revealed that the conflicts which erupted in Southern Kaduna during the period under review were ethno-religious in nature not political, communal, economic or regional. This finding is in conformity with the assertion of BASORUN (2015) that the major sources of conflicts in Nigeria are religion and ethnicity. It also significantly confirmed the earlier observation that, since the 1980s, violent ethno-religious conflicts have become more frequent, more widespread, more violent and more destructive of life and property. Usually, whether purely ethnic or religious, the outcome of these crises has always been similar. They have each time produced multifaceted consequences: an increase in political anxiety and tension, a slower process of national integration, added insecurity of lives and property and increase in the poverty level by further driving away the prospects of economic investment and prosperity (MALAM, 2006; PUDDAPHATT, 2006; SOBOWALE, 2002). This is further confirmed by other authors that asserts that since when the country won its independence in 1960, the most destabilizing factor was ethnicity and religion. Hence, ethnicity and religion are real and represent identities that people are willing to die for once it they are exploited and manipulated by those who wish to use them in order to cause problems.

The findings revealed that the reports on Southern Kaduna conflicts were mainly news which is usually shallow and straight to the point without sufficient context and background needed for conflict-sensitive journalism. This coincided with the findings of BASORUN (2015) that newspapers present most of their stories on the crises in a straight news form, with minimal feature and low consideration for the editorial comment, opinion/column and letters. It also confirmed the postulation of HOWARD (2002, 2005) that the round-the-clock working of the media readily lends itself to the reporting of momentary events, making them ignore contexts and other details that may aid the audiences' understanding of the issue being reported. The pressure of deadline, as well as the competition to be the first to break the big story, stimulates journalists to focus on conflict trends rather than laying bare the details of what led to conflicts. At any given time, any available reporter may be dispatched to go and cover events including conflicts at a short notice. Such a reporter and even his editor may not have any sufficient idea of the issues and events. According to PATE (2010), the media promotes prejudicial stereotypes about groups and individuals through selective reporting, while inter-group conflicts are mostly reported out of a fundamental sociological, economic, political context.

The findings based on the research question "What is the frequency of reportage of Southern Kaduna conflicts in the *Nation,* the *Punch, Vanguard and Daily Trust* newspapers from September, 2016 to March, 2017?" indicated that the reports on Southern Kaduna conflicts were very high because it was dramatic, fresh and recent during the period under study. This is in conformity with the position of MALAM (2006) who states that perhaps the obsession of the media to attract and sell news and products to a large section of the society made it to regard conflict/drama in particular as probably the most important news value, capable of attracting a broad audience due to its possible consequence for all. This goes to mean that the media are naturally attracted to conflicts. Furthermore, other studies states that "by always reporting a riot, killing or violent conflict and alluding primarily that a "Muslim northerner attacked a Christian southerner," the reporter inadvertently perpetuates a cleavage."

Furthermore, the findings based on the research question "What is the direction of

Southern Kaduna conflicts stories in the *Nation,* the *Punch, Vanguard and Daily Trust* newspapers from September, 2016 to March, 2017?" showed that the reports on Southern Kaduna conflicts were to some extent neutral (objective), not biased or lopsided. This is in line with the social responsibility role of the mass media in any given society. However, this contradicts the findings of other authors who states that the partisanship of the Nigerian media that were then run and funded by politicians and political parties are still being reflected in present-day media. With that arrangement, objectivity, professionalism, national patriotism and unity of purpose that used to be the hallmark of the Nigerian press before independence had given way to ethnic consideration and the pursuit of parochial interests. Similarly, BARAN (2004) states that "the media holds a selective mirror of the society where images are not equally portrayed because some things may appear bigger than they truly are; some may appear smaller while, some may disappear altogether." By selective mirror, Baran actually meant the biases and irresponsibility in media reportage of various societal issues of which ethnicity and religion are part of (SOOLA, 2009; SUBERU, 2013; WOLFSFELD, 2004).

The findings based on the research question "What is the placement of Southern Kaduna conflicts stories in the *Nation,* the *Punch, Vanguard and Daily Trust* newspapers from September, 2016 to March, 2017?" revealed that the reports on Southern Kaduna conflicts were given less prominence, as almost all the reports were buried or hidden in the inside pages which may not attract the desired/needed government intervention which will bring about lasting solutions. This strikingly contradicts the findings of NKECHI (2012) who states that the Nigerian press actually used sufficient space and gave prominence in their reportage of religious crises-based issues between 2010 and 2011.

Finally, the findings based on the research question "Are the reports on Southern Kaduna conflicts in the *Nation,* the *Punch, Vanguard and Daily Trust* newspapers from September, 2016 to March, 2017 sensational or not?" revealed that, most of the reports on Southern Kaduna conflicts were sensational which means the reports were

intentionally exaggerated written in order to keep the audience glued to the newspapers at the expense of accuracy and professionalism. It is also in line with the assertion of BASORUN (2015) that "by their very constitution, proprietorship, mode of operation and sustenance, Nigerian newspapers are akin to being sensational, gossipy, and manipulative in the treatment of stories, just for them to stay in the market." This is evidenced by their screaming headlines, scandal and gossip stories, and in some cases, pedestrian use of language (BELLO, 2005; LAITIN, 1982; YUSUF, 2002).

12. CONCLUSIONS

The importance of the media in any given society can never be underestimated. By virtue of their ability to reach and influence large numbers of people, the media carries an immense power in shaping the course of a conflict. This is because the media can aid in promoting peace, unity and development, as well as creating conflict along ethnic, religious, political and regional inclinations. In other words, the media can be used to make or mar the society depending on how it has been used. Although many examples of the media's negative contribution to the violent conflict exist, fair and accurate journalism and media content that builds confidence and counteracts misperceptions may have a potential in both conflict prevention and transformation.

However, the study concludes that, the reports on Southern Kaduna conflicts were mainly news (92%) which is usually shallow and straight to the point without sufficient context and background needed for conflict-sensitive journalism. Also, the reports on Southern Kaduna conflicts were very high (92%) because it was dramatic, fresh and recent during the period under study. It also concludes that, the reports on Southern Kaduna conflicts were to some extent neutral (68%), not biased or lopsided. This is in line with the social responsibility role of the mass media in any given society.

Similarly, the study established that the reports on Southern Kaduna conflicts were not given adequate prominence as almost all the

reports (87%) were buried or hidden in the inside pages which may not attract the desired/needed government intervention which will bring about lasting solutions. Also, most of the reports on Southern Kaduna conflicts were sensational (72%) which means the reports were intentionally exaggerated written in order to keep the audience glued to the newspapers at the expense of accuracy and professionalism.

Finally, the study concludes that instead of concentrating on the gory and grievous aspect of conflicts, journalists should look at the common good and common grounds as well as what binds the society rather than what divides it. Citizens in conflict should know the two sides of the story, what the other side actually says and how it will affect them.

Recommendations

Based on the research findings, the study therefore recommends the following:

1. Media organisations should organise an extensive training on conflict-sensitive reporting so as to equip reporters with requisite knowledge in order to report conflicts professionally without feeding the flames. This is because, reporting reliable and unbiased information to the public in a time of violent conflict requires additional journalistic skills and deeper understanding of what causes conflict, how it develops and ends.

2. Media organisations should not report conflict incidences using just the medium of news which is usually shallow and straight to the point without sufficient context and background needed for conflict-sensitive journalism. Instead, the media should report conflicts using editorials and features which are usually in-depth and analytical in nature.

3. The media should give prominence and priority to conflict incidences in order to attract the desired/needed government intervention which will bring about lasting solutions.

4. Media practitioners should avoid sensational reports of conflict situations in order to keep the audience at the expense of accuracy and professionalism. Rather, they should adhere strictly to their professional code of ethics.

Journalists need to be respected as trusted professionals who do not take sides.

5. Instead of concentrating on the gory and grievous aspect of conflicts, journalists should look at the common good and common grounds as well as what binds the society rather than what divides it. Citizens in conflict should know two sides of the story, what the other side actually says and how it will affect them.

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