

Framing Theory Perspective of Identity and Narratives of Conflict in Nigerian Media

Aondover Eric Msughte, Sabiu Garba, Aisha Bala Rabiu



Abstract: *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.” In this direction, this study examines framing theory perspectives of identity and narratives of conflict in Nigeria media. Conflict is naturally attractive and a source of news for the media. It is “the bread and butter” of journalism. Since independence in 1960, Nigeria has suffered some of the most obstinate conflicts, most of them constructed from differences in religious and ethnic identities. Religious and ethnic nationalism has led to conflicts about control of state power, unequal allocation of resources, economic decline, and religious clashes. In this context, the media have an important role to play in promoting honest, accurate, and timely information about the issues that will reduce tension, create the conditions for equitable development and reduce the level of ignorance and fear that contribute to misunderstanding and hostility in society. This presumption confers on the media the ability to either escalate or de-escalate conflict situations. This study, therefore, focuses on identity and media narratives of conflict, triangle and levels of conflict analysis, manifest and latent conflict management, including the role of the media in managing and resolving conflict.*

Keywords: *Conflict, Framing Theory, Identity, Media, Narratives and Perspective*

I. INTRODUCTION

Nigeria is blessed with a rainbow collection of tongues and tribes. This special quality sets it several meters high above other African countries, as the giant of Africa. These special qualities ought to have been a strength and strong force to stand tall. Unfortunately, the country is deeply divided along complex regional lines, ethnic affiliation and most dangerously religious differences. These differences led to many conflicts: crises of identity, secessionist movement and minority agitation. This has become a great source of concern [1]. Nigeria is witnessing a major social crisis which [2] described as, “existential for which all institutions in the country pretend to be dispassionate” [3].

added that “issues that generate the forecast contestation include those that are considered fundamental to the existence and legitimacy of the state, over which, the competing groups tend to adopt exclusionary, winner-take all strategies; these include the control of state powers, resources allocation and citizenship.” As a result, the country has become fragile; susceptible to conflict, and this is quite considered threats to state stability. These conflicts have killed thousands and displaced a number of others, destroyed properties and wreaked havoc on the economy of the country [4].

Dapa [2] remarked that the press should be able to ask itself, what role have they played from both problems and solution ends of issues? The role of the media is more than just disseminating information; it should be part of the problem solution. This is the ideal role and responsibilities of ideal media; adding that “scholarship is growing around the belief that strategies to prevent manage or resolve conflicts and ingrained in the reporting. The media have played vital role in many conflicts around the world, the role it plays either de-escalate or escalate conflict depending on where it chooses to stand. Scholars acknowledge that the media is a vital tool for building strong institution, consensus, analyze conflicts and facilitate smooth resolution and peace building processes [5].

Within this contextual context, several studies examined the roles of media in conflict in Nigeria [6]. However, a knowledge gap exist in the area of identify and narratives of conflict in Nigeria media, which this paper intend to bridge by reviewing some of the scholarly works with a view to identify the media direction on identity-based conflicts and further recommends better ways the media can play effective role in conflict management and peace building process in Nigeria.

II. OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

1. To examine media narratives and identity-based conflicts in Nigeria.
2. To interrogate the levels of conflict analysis and conflict management.

III. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The study is anchored on the Framing Theory. According to [7] Framing Theory is a philosophical postulation that explains the way in which news content is typically shaped and contextualized by journalists [8]. believed that there are two ways through which the Framing Theory can be seen and applied in communication research. These are individual and media frames.

Manuscript received on 30 November 2021 | Revised Manuscript received on 12 December 2021 | Manuscript Accepted on 15 December 2021 | Manuscript published on 30 December 2021.

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The individual frame is mostly linked to the work of sociologist, Goffman in 1974 argued that individual frame entails individual's cognitive understanding of a given situation. On the other hand, the media frame deals with the words, images, phrases and presentation styles used in the media outlet about an issue. The choice of those words depends on the content producers, their media outlet and of course, their perception about an issue [9]. The former is associated with internal and external factors in the media organizations such as owners, editorial policy and reporters' ideological and political leanings that in one way or the other influence the structural qualities of media content and portrayal of issues. While the latter (internal factors) to frame-building occurs in a continuous interaction between journalists and other newsmakers. These collectively work together to manifest in the text represented on the pages of these papers. Framing Theory can be applied at both macro-level and a micro-level construct. The macro refers to the frame building and presentation of schemas which serve like a window through which readers can view issues such as kidnapping cases. Framing Theory is about selecting some aspects of a perceived reality and make them more salient in a communicating text, in such a way to promote a particular problem definition (regional, cultural or social), causal interpretation, moral evaluation, and/or treatment recommendation for the item described. The nexus between the theory and the study is apt because the media frame stories and such stories or words depend on the content producers which portend to issues like identity and conflict.

IV. METHODOLOGY

This study is exploratory in character since it makes use of the descriptive research technique, which involves consulting and analyzing pertinent data, documents, and literature in light of the body of knowledge already available on identity and narratives of conflict in Nigerian media. The majority of the information used in the study was obtained from secondary sources that were generated from the qualitative data. These sources included official publications, relevant texts, journals, historical records, and the Internet. These sources provided concrete insights into the subject areas of the analysis. To analyze the data, a content analysis of secondary data was conducted. This made it possible to assess the body of knowledge in order to determine its applicability, consistency, replication, and rebuttal.

V. MEDIA NARRATIVES AND IDENTITY-BASED CONFLICTS IN NIGERIA

[10] noted that any system with two or more incompatible goals is said to be in conflict. Similarly, [11] added that conflict is the interaction of two or more value-systems. On this note, [10] defined conflict from social perspective as a struggle over values and claims to scarce status, power, and resources in which aims of the opponents are to neutralize, injure or eliminate the rivals. On the other hand, identity according to [12] is any special or unique attribute that gives recognition to a group, persons or individual member of a community. From conflict-based perspective, identity is any attribute of a person that makes someone readily available for attack. This attribute could be

the person's religion, ethnic affiliation, or political party. Eghosa and [13] explained that Nigeria presents a complex individuals as well as crisscrossing and recursive identities of which, religious, regional and sub-ethnic (communal) are the most salient and the main bases for violent conflicts in the country [14]. [14] pointed out that the role of Media in conflict prevention and resolution and escalation is now a global concern. The information media project is critical to sustaining peace. In their study on media and conflicts, [14] conclude that Nigerian media reports have tendency to escalate conflict and make it difficult to resolve, adding that it is more of war demotion than peace. In a similar study, [14] explained that media is a mirror and a shaper of issues, its role in conflicts is subject to question whether it helps in conflict prevention or instigation, as many studies reveal.

On this note, [15] added that the media unfortunately becomes divisive and conflict tools. Between 1993 to 1994, Radio Rwanda- *Kinyarwanda* played significant role in the country genocide that claimed over 800, 000 lives. The radio projected hate speech against the Tutsi ethnic groups; television was used in Serbia to clean a section of the country. In a similar trend, with the help of the newly established public information law, the Serbia authority cracked down on the independent media outlets. National television was used during the war to launch propaganda in what was describes as ethnic cleansing of the Kosovo people by the Serbian controlled government. Fairness and Accuracy in Reporting (FAIR) in [16] examined the frequency of pro-war and anti-war commentators on major news media, findings revealed that the media were more conflict oriented than peace. The study added that pro-war views were over-whelming and more frequent. The Iraq war witnessed unprecedented US media coverage. For instance, the owner of fox news was a strong supporter of the Iraq invasion. In the light of this, a renowned media critic, Noam Chosky severally accused the media for spreading propaganda. Similarly, [17] argued that if the elite media had not supported the 2003 war in Iraq, it would not have been easy for its invasion. Reports indicted the media for the three months civil war in Thailand. In Nigeria too, many reports fingered the media for the many crises in the country. Comparably, in the wake of clash between Fulani herders and a community in Plateau State in March 16th 2010, Mr. Ignatius Kaigama the archbishop of Jos blamed the media for twisting the whole event to reflect Muslim-Christian clash. In a similar trend, [17] argued that identity-based struggles and its attendant violence in Nigeria is a question of state function. He further explained that identity-based conflicts in Nigeria owe its origin from the colonial exploitation, adding that the nature of the British state formation in Nigeria simultaneously created ethnic particularism and ethnic animosity. Media narrative of conflict is instrumental to resolution, management or peace-building process. The fate of Nigeria's unity amidst ethnic rivalry, religious differences among others is shaped by the media narrative- how the media chooses to frame it stories [18]. [19] remarked that for example, headlines like, Fulani herders burn churches in Katsina, Odua People's Congress close shops in Alaba market,



Niger Delta militants kill Hausa traders in Port Harcourt are inimical to corporate existence of the country [20]. observed that newspaper narratives of herdsmen and farmers conflicts were laced with negative perspective and dominated with criminality frame. The author argued that Nigerian newspapers portray negative image of reality, thus exacerbating tension. In the study of Jos crisis, [21] noted that the media were biased in its reportage and has tendency to escalate conflict. The study concluded that there was unprofessionalism in the media handling of the Jos conflict. The study further recommended that the media should be conflict-sensitive enough douse tension and manage conflict. In a similar study, [18] examined media’s slant in ethnic-religions conflicts in Nigeria, the study concluded that professionalism was often jettisoned for ethnic or religious affiliation; journalists at this time write in defense of their tribes and religions. [20] on this noted remarks that nothing reveals the true character of media establishment than any crisis that pushes one section of the society against another.

In this contestation, [22] noted that the media are always at a crossroad of conflict, either as harbinger, channel of information and analyst of the conflicts or as part of the escalation or resolution of the conflicts. [22] study of media narratives of ethnic-religion conflict in Nigeria revealed that media often become parts of the conflicts, adding that “the Nigerian newspaper variously narrate the(sic) stories and comments on the conflicts based on their own ethnic nature. Findings of a similar study by [21] revealed that the media have not been given objective reports of Jos crises and this tends to escalate the crises. The study further recommended that the media as key stakeholder in conflict management and peace-building must be responsible in its contents.

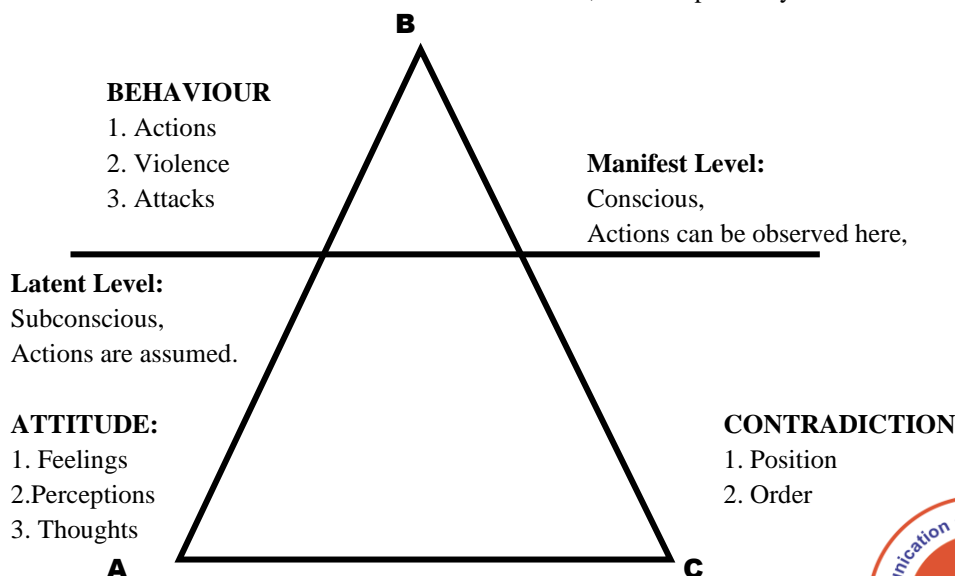
VI. LEVELS OF CONFLICT ANALYSIS AND CONFLICT MANAGEMENT

Conflict is inevitable in the affairs of man. Conflicts often occur when people’s interests become incompatible and are ready to crush any blockage. For centuries the world has been ridden with varying degree of conflicts. It has been part of human development [5]. Conflict in theoretical terms, according to [23][28][29] gained ground as a field of

scholarship after the Second World War. Thereafter, a number of theories emerged in a bid to explain conflict. The scholars further noted that conflict analysis is a process of gaining a deeper understanding and broad overview of the conflict. Dealing with conflict effectively requires analysis before any intervention. As conflict changes, takes new shape, analysis also changes even amidst negotiation. The analysis here includes collection of information, interpretation, and evaluation on the basis of available evidence. Conflict analysis requires wider perspective of the conflict. In 2000, Organization for Economic Co-operation and Developments and the World Bank remarked that 23 percent of the world children live in fragile and conflict prone states. The report further projected, that by the year 2024, the figure will drastically increase to 28, percent representing, “almost one third of the world’s child population” [24].

Conflicts analysis examines conflict profile, the context that shapes conflict, its root causes, the parties involved, consequences, levels of the conflict and its evolution. In 2016, UNICEF notes that conflicts analysis should be able to capture the multidimensionality (political, social, economic and security, etc.) of a conflict. There is no single conflict analysis method. This is because each conflict has different actors, interests, dynamics, and position. Conflict is a shapeless phenomenon. However, there are commonly used models in the analysis. For the sake of this paper, Galtung Johan triangle of conflict is employed for demonstration to simplify the narratives. The essence of the conflict analysis is to prevent relapse and provide platform for co-existence. It aims to give a thorough assessment of conflict and documentation for critical voices and stakeholders and policy-makers [25].

Conflict is a combination of three strong interrelated elements. These elements according to Johan Galtung in 2012 are attitude, behavior, and contradiction. Johan Galtung, the father of peace journalism developed the ABC conflict triangle to highlight the various aspects of conflict. The ABC triangle provides a conceptual basis for analysis of even complex conflict. The triangle here is a metaphor. It likens conflict to an iceberg. Conflict, Just like an iceberg, only the visible top on the waterline is seen; what determines the movement and behavior of the iceberg is hidden. In a nutshell, people see only fragment aspect of conflict, until deeper analysis.



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Attitude: attitude in the ABC triangle signifies the feelings the conflict parties have for each other. In this level, the other conflict party may not be aware he is in any conflict with anyone. The attitude is a range of feelings, anger, and unusual perception about the other party. So, conflict analysts should be able to examine if any, the objective and subjective media reports of conflict and how the narratives change over time.

Behavior: behavior cannot always be hidden, the hidden attitude gradually metamorphoses to action, reaction and counter reaction. In conflict, changes influences behavior of one party toward others. Attitudes of conflicting parties at some point gradually changes and become defensive. Their feelings toward the other party become tense. The parties suddenly become hostile in approach. Provocation or insult exacerbates hostility and makes possibility for understanding or resolution mere impossible. Notwithstanding, more effort and resilience need to diffuse such tension.

Contradiction: in the context of conflict, contradiction is the root of problem. It is the central root from which all issues surrounding conflict emanate from. The contradiction could be as a struggle for resource or political position. It could also be over orderliness in a community or organization with one group claiming the law is unfair to them. At this point, factors responsible for the changes in attitude and sudden hostility must be addressed. In this context, shadow parties to conflicts, if any must be considered and be involved in the management or resolution process. In many conflicts, there are shadow parties- the sponsors and other invisible players. These people can block any positive development in the context of resolution or peace-building. If grievances are not addressed or tackled early, attacks and counter attacks metamorphose to full blown conflict. However, [26] observed that a conflict process may get started in any corner of the triangle.

Conflict management aims at limiting the destructive effect of conflict without necessarily preventing its occurrence. In conflict management, the first step is to identify the conflict state, profile-background to the conflict, actors involved and causes. Despite the inevitability of conflict do we just fold our arms? We must find ways to resolve it. Prevention and management of such awful occurrences is necessary to reduce its effects on both parties and the environment and pave way for socio-economic and political development. Conflict often evolves gradually and metamorphose to its peak and then decline to resolution or otherwise. Conflict management involves concerted effort to address the structural causes of the conflict.

There is no particular or singular method of conflict management or prevention, because what suits conflict A may not suit conflict B. The modern approach engages the religions leaders, politicians and the security personnel and other critical voices using academic and security experts to facilitate the negotiation process. These targeted leaders command followership, listenership and respect. They are assumed to have high influence to modify character and thoughts through sermons, open discussion and deliberations. The traditional approach to conflict management uses the community elders. However, this method is more suitable for local context. In a wider scope of conflict, the traditional method may not be successful. [27] further remarks that the

traditional strategies seem more appropriate for dealing with mid-level crimes rather than intra-state conflict. Adding that in a wider political context, both the traditional and the modern approaches could be employed to the deal with violet conflict. The recent military coup d'état in Niger republic provided a good example of a religious leaders role in conflict resolution. The military juntas remained unshaken by the ECOWAS boots on the ground threat. A delegation from the office of the president, Alhaji Sa'ad Abubakar II, Supreme Council of Islamic Affairs of Nigeria was able to bring the juntas to negotiation table.

[27] points out three considerations for dealing with violent conflicts. (a) A theoretical framework is necessary for evaluating conflict transformation. (b) Any approach must look at the conflict profile in relation to its social context. Social, political and economic must be taken into consideration and (c) Wider range of actors must be involved to address grievances of parties involves. Conclusively, news media as key stakeholders in conflict must be responsible in its contents. The media have demonstrated considerable responsibility in some conflicts around the world, at the same time, it has also exacerbate conflicts particularly in Nigeria. The media should be continuously utilized positively in conflict management resolution, and peace-building process. The media is powerful enough to sway actions and influence character through various framing mechanisms.

VII. CONCLUSION

This study examined identity and narratives of conflict in Nigeria media. The research showed that framing has definitional and descriptive functions in the practice of journalism since newspapers among other media are the arena for battles of ideas in society. By framing, newspapers exclude and include details in reporting conflicts; they shrink and expand them. Accordingly, the concept cannot be ignored in newspaper reporting, since issues can be arranged and presented in multiple fashions to influence debate and ensuing issue consideration and level support.

DECLARATION STATEMENT

Funding	No, I did not receive.
Conflicts of Interest	No conflicts of interest to the best of our knowledge.
Ethical Approval and Consent to Participate	No, the article does not require ethical approval and consent to participate with evidence.
Availability of Data and Material	Not relevant.
Authors Contributions	All authors have equal participation in this article.

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