

HISTORICAL TRAJECTORIES OF MEDIA ENGAGEMENT IN CONFLICT MITIGATION AND NATION-BUILDING IN NIGERIA

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Abstract

This paper examines how the media has engaged with conflict resolution and nation-building in Nigeria. It explores the changing roles of newspapers, broadcast media, and digital platforms in tackling internal conflicts and fostering national unity, starting from the colonial era up to now. The study conduct a historical analysis of the Nigerian media's contributions to conflict resolution and national development, with objectives that include: (i) tracing the evolution of the media in Nigeria across different political eras; (ii) examining specific instances where media interventions have influenced peacebuilding and development; and (iii) identifying challenges and proposing sustainable policy recommendations for enhancing its role. Using historical and content analysis, it tracks how early nationalist newspapers raised political awareness and fight against colonial rule. After independence, the media continued to play a role in managing civil unrest, political crises, and ethnic and religious tensions. It points out times when the media facilitated dialogue and reconciliation, as well as instances where it deepened divisions with biased or sensational reporting. The rise of social media in the 21st century is examined as a new space for citizen engagement and activism, emphasizing both its advantages and drawbacks. Ultimately, the study concludes that while the media has been a powerful tool for nation-building and conflict management in Nigeria, its effectiveness depends on factors like institutional independence, adherence to professional ethics, and responsible practices. The article wraps up with suggestions for boosting the media's role as a reliable force for peace and national development.

Keywords: Media, Conflict Resolution, Information Dissemination, Public, Mediator, Mitigate

Introduction

The media industry is viewed as a strong institution that influences public opinion, resolves problems, and helps a country's progress. In nations with ethnic variety and political volatility, such as Nigeria, the media may either serve to reduce violence or exacerbate it. Since attaining independence in 1960, Nigeria has gone through cycles of military coups, civil war, ethnic and

religious turmoil, and challenging attempts at democratic reform. Throughout each era, the media had tremendous power, acting as both a forum for public discussion and a weapon for propaganda or manipulation. The problem is around the media's double-edged role. It has been praised for its role as a watchdog, mobilizer, and peacebuilder, while being vilified as a source of division and bloodshed. It has been observed that, for the most part, the Nigerian media reflects its owners', and in most cases, the out-of-region or political sphere, resulting in conflict-driven coverage (Oso, 2012; Abati, 2010). On the other hand, the media has shown extraordinary tenacity in the face of colonial constraints, military persecution, and a lack of democratic administration (Omu, 1978; Uche, 1989). The purpose of this study is to analyze the historical trends of media activity in Nigeria, assessing and documenting its impact.

Awolowo (1958) eloquently argues that the media is inextricably linked to the masses in their mutual relationship and collective aspirations for the development of the state or society as a free, better, and happier place for all. Since the early 19th century, the media has also been referred to as the "Fourth Estate of the Realm" because of its most important functions to society and the masses at large. Firstly, other than disseminating news, the press (media) is the most powerful channel through which the masses of people may express their sentiments and opinions on any subject of the day. Second, and as a result of the first trait, the press (media) has always and continues to be inextricably linked with the masses. Finally, press freedom is synonymous with citizen liberty. The reverse is likewise true: the liberty of the citizen is neither more nor lesser than the liberty of the press (media).

In other words, the measure of press liberty (media) is the degree of freedom enjoyed by citizens, and vice versa. The preceding lines clearly state that the media encompasses publishing (newspapers and magazines), broadcasting (radio and television), and the internet. It is also acceptable to argue that the media and the masses, or people, are inextricably linked in their desire for a better society. Given the foregoing, it is possible to conclude that the media is a very effective instrument or method of obtaining information from the people and transmitting it to the government, as well as from the government to the citizens. This emphasizes the media's critical function as a bridge between the public and the government. As a result, it is more adapted to carrying out the critical role of conflict resolution in Nigeria. This important function of the media, as well as a brief history of its origins, will be extensively examined later in this study.

Brief Meaning of Conflict Resolution

According to Hocker and Wilmot (1985), conflict occurs when two interdependent parties face irreconcilable goals, limited resources, or interference from the other party in accomplishing their goals. This implies that conflict arises when there is a clear contradiction between the policies and interests of the government and the people inside a state, such as during the Liberian Civil War, or between different member states. Conflict is a persistent and ongoing phenomenon in human and intergovernmental interactions. When a dispute arises between member states or competing factions inside a state, the parties involved seek peace. The search for peace might take the form of negotiation, investigation, mediation, or any other peaceful means they choose.

According to Onoja (1998), third parties have arisen as mediators with a variety of techniques for maintaining peace. Over time, such efforts have resulted in anti-war sentiments and the formation of a peace movement. It is therefore described here as any circumstance or state of conflict, antagonism, incompatibility, interference, divergence of interest, tension, division, or apathy among humans in their relationship with one another. According to Aja (2009), who focused on conflict early warning, conflict is not imposed automatically. Although human nature and social existence are predisposed to conflict, it is the inability to recognize, manage, and react to crisis signals or conflict indicators that frequently leads to conflict. According to Bujra (2002), conflict is defined as a violent, armed conflict and struggle between one or more organizations, states, or more states. Conflicts of this nature can endure anywhere from six months to twenty years, during which time some of the parties feel hurt or agitated.

According to Agbu et al. (2006), disagreements over resources, values, psychological demands, and insufficient knowledge are some of the reasons why disputes arise. Conflict is defined by Pruitt and Robbins (2006) as a perceived difference in interest or a conviction that the parties' present goals cannot be met concurrently through progressive exchanges. Every culture has conflict in one form or another. For example, the following conflict types are prevalent in Nigeria. These include political, ethnic, religious, and labor-related conflicts. Without a question, human connection, affiliation, and transaction—whether social, economic, or political—inevitably lead to conflict. Accordingly, disputes affect human civilization in both positive and negative ways, and they are essential for survival and teamwork (Salami, 2012). Gamle and Gamble (1996) have connected social-cultural conditions to the origins or causes of conflict. They contend that attitudes toward disputes are influenced by sociocultural values. Additionally, they contend that although atomic cultures perceive conflict as a constructive and problem-solving activity, collectivistic and communalistic cultures regard it as a hazardous, stressful, and dysfunctional behavior that needs to be controlled. They can be categorized as communal, institutional, ethnic, familial, gender, intergenerational,

intra or intergroup, labor, armed, environmental, personality, and technical, depending on the origins, causes, and consequences of the many types of conflict (Imoh and Sanusi, 2008).

However, according to the Cambridge Advanced Learner's English Dictionary, Second Edition, the term "resolution" merely refers to the formal, official act or procedure used to have a dispute, conflict, or crisis between opposing persons or organizations settled amicably. The strategies and procedures used to help resolve disputes and retaliation in a calm, agreeable manner have also been referred to as conflict resolution (Wikipedia, 2015). By actively sharing information about their opposing goals or ideologies with the rest of the group (such as intentions or the reasons behind their beliefs) and by participating in mutual collective negotiation, dedicated parties or groups attempt to resolve conflicts or incompatible issues or disagreements.

In terms of how the issue is handled or processed, resolution dimensions are usually parallel to the conflict dimension. Three fundamental types of resolution are distinguishable from an instructional standpoint: cognitive, emotional, and behavioral. Concerning views, perspectives, understandings, and attitudes, cognitive resolution refers to how disputants see and comprehend the disagreement. The emotional energy and feelings of the disputants regarding the disagreement are what constitute emotional settlement. Additionally, the manner the disputants behave is the focus of behavioral resolution. What's more, there is a wide variety of conflict resolution techniques and processes. Negotiation, mediation, diplomacy, and innovative peacebuilding are some examples. It is necessary to address the crucial role of the media in conflict resolution in Nigerian society after making a brief attempt at a conceptual definition of the terms "media" and "conflict resolution." This discussion should start with a brief historical overview of the media's origins in the nation as well as its general functions and influence.

The Media in Nigeria

The media in Nigeria has undergone significant growth throughout the years. Newspapers existed in the nation prior to the development of the internet, television, and radio. Thus, the newspaper served as the initial medium through which the media disseminated information in society. The public, for many years, depended on authors and journalists to provide them with news about current affairs and to provide them a platform to express their thoughts about social events through local newspapers. "Iwe Iroyin Fun Awon Egba Ati Yoruba" was the nation's first newspaper, founded in 1859. Established by a missionary named Rev. Henry Townsend, it was Nigeria's first newspaper ever printed. The primary reason it was founded was as a Christian missionary tool to provide a literary curriculum for the Egba and Yoruba. In 1880,

The Lagos Times and Gold Coast Colony Advertiser began publication. It was the first English-language Newspaper in Nigeria, which catered primarily to British Colonial Officials and European settlers in Lagos (Olorunniosola). This significantly influenced the founding and production of additional journals by Nigerian elites. Nigerian Pioneer, one of the first nationalist newspapers, was established in 1914 in Accra, Ghana. Established in 1926, the Nigerian Daily Times swiftly rose to prominence as one of the country's most significant publications. It was first founded by the British as the Nigerian Printing and Publishing Company (NPPC), but local interests eventually bought it and changed its name to the Daily Times (Lawal, 2004). Equally, Dr.Nnamdi Azikiwe, who later became Nigeria's first president, founded the West African Pilot in 1937, the Nigeria Tribune in 1949, The New Nigerian in 1966, the Punch, established in 1971, and The Guardian, launched in 1983 (Adetula, 2002). The Lagos Standard, Lagos Weekly Record, ThisDay 1995 African Messenger, Vanguard 1983, and in later years, established in 1983, These publications marked the beginning of Nigeria's mass media's brief but fascinating history. They also served as inspiration for the nation's journalistic period.

In order to accelerate nationalism and the nationalists' fight for Nigeria's independence, the majority of early journalists focused their careers on opposing the wrongs of the colonial authority. They were also crucial channels for the public and government to hear complaints and opinions about their circumstances and other matters. Several notable pioneer journalists, including Mokwugo Okoye, Dutse Mohammed Ali, Anthony Enahoro, Obafemi Awolowo, Nnamdi Azikiwe, and Herbert Macaulay, were instrumental in bringing about Nigeria's independence.

However, there are thousands of local, national, and worldwide newspapers and periodicals nowadays, along with a large number of journalists spread over the nation. The Guardian, The Vanguard, The Tribune, The Daily Times, The Nigerian Observer, The Pointer, The Punch, The New Telegraph, This Day, The Daily Sketch, Tell, Newswatch, and many more are some of the current Nigerian publications and periodicals. The first Nigerian radio station was founded in Lagos in 1933, marking the beginning of electronic media in the country. It was under the jurisdiction of the Post and Telegraph Department. Initially, the station's main purpose was to function as the BBC Diffusion System, which it did during World War II. The NBS covered Ibadan, Kaduna, Kano, and Enugu in addition to Lagos. Nigeria then received its own broadcasting organization in 1956 after the House of Representatives enacted a law to that effect that year. The Federal Radio Corporation of Nigeria (FRCN) was brought into existence in 1978, twenty-two years later. The first foreign radio service, Voice of Nigeria (VON), came next in 1990.

According to Tori O. A. and Bekeh U. U. (2024), the Western Nigerian Broadcasting Corporation (WNBC) was also founded by the Western Region in 1959. With Olapade Obiesesan serving as its first chairman, television transmission in Nigeria got underway on October 31, 1959, under the name Western Nigeria Television Corporation (WNTV). The first television station in Nigeria was Western Nigeria Television (WNTV), which started airing from Ibadan in 1959. The Nigerian Television Service (NTS), which subsequently changed its name to the Nigerian Television Authority (NTA), was founded in 1962, soon after it. According to Erevelles (2012), these achievements signaled the start of television transmission in Nigeria.

In 1977, the Nigeria Television Authority (NTA) was inaugurated as a partially commercial broadcasting station that is owned by the government. It held a monopoly on national television transmission as soon as it was founded (NTA, 2016). With stations spread across the nation, it was the largest television network in Nigeria at the time. It was once known as Nigeria Television (NTV), and it began when the military authorities took control of regional television stations in 1976. At the time, it was largely considered to be the legitimate voice of the Nigerian government. When state governments and private citizens were granted licenses to run television stations across the nation in the 1990s, the NTA's monopoly on television transmission was shattered. As a result, each state in the federation has its own radio and television stations in addition to individual company owners.

The Influence of the Media:

Because the media is a significant medium for the general population, it greatly affects people and their views on critical issues. The only concrete source of news that the public relies on is the media. For instance, it was the media that allowed the world to see the momentous moment of Neil Armstrong's 1969 lunar landing. The people may learn a lot from the media; in the country nowadays, a lot of radio and television stations provide educational programming. Additionally, the general people are greatly educated via the internet. Anyone may obtain news and information about a wide range of topics and activities via the internet.

Popular cultures are positively impacted by the media as well. It informs the general audience on current trends in popular culture. In fashion, entertainment, and technology, the media highlights what is hip and excellent and distributes it to the public for full or partial consumption. Thus, the media has a significant impact on society in a variety of ways, from the distribution of information to education and entertainment, which shapes and measures public opinion on a wide range of topics. For this reason, the media is essential to the settlement of disputes in modern Nigerian society.

The Role of the Media in Conflict Resolution in Nigeria:

It is impossible to overstate the media's vast and important role in Nigerian conflict resolution. Lekan (2013) asserts that the media surely plays a significant part in resolving disputes. Communities, groups, and individuals frequently have reasons to differ on one or more issues. If the issue is not promptly handled, it might turn into a serious crisis that has to be settled peacefully. The role that the media choose to play may occasionally determine how well disputes are resolved. The media may choose to take sides in a conflict and prevent it from being readily resolved, depending on a variety of variables such as ownership, journalistic interest, and comprehension of the matter at hand. The media has the power to incite fervor with spectacular stories influenced by business interests, serve as a propaganda weapon by disseminating lies, and thwart attempts to settle disputes.

Lekan goes on to say that the media's widely acknowledged functions are to inform, educate, and amuse. The media has a significant possibility to assist in conflict resolution due to its informational and educational functions, particularly when professional ethics are closely followed. Media professionals are required by their profession's ethics to report and broadcast news in a true, accurate, fair, and balanced manner. Ufuophu-Biri (2006) makes this argument very evident when he states that the reporter is not allowed to associate himself with the news for ethical reasons. The news is not something he analyzes or interprets. Notwithstanding their ideology, philosophy, or ethnic identity, the reporter just presents the facts as they are, without taking an emotional or personal stance. "Facts are sacred, but comments are free" is one of the fundamental principles of news narrative. It is improper for the reporter to manipulate facts. He ought to present them truthfully and impartially. The media will be able to carry out its roles in resolving social conflicts in a timely, effective, and friendly manner if its ethics are properly upheld. Sadly, this hasn't always been the case with how many media professionals have covered the nation's wars. Most of the time, the media wind up making matters more complicated rather than helping to resolve disputes. Due to economic and other vested interests, many media professionals frequently choose to extend a crisis longer than is necessary.

Lekan (2013) warns that in the impartial performance of their obligations for the benefit of society as a whole, media professionals' economic and other personal interests should not take precedence over those of the general public or the impacted community or group, as the case may be. Therefore, he strongly advises that the media must step up to play the desirable role of helping to resolve conflicts, of which it cannot be immune. Where possible, the media should help prevent conflicts in accordance with its agenda-setting role. This is especially important as Nigeria and the world in general become engulfed in complex crises that have serious implications for economic, political, and social development.

The media should ideally be able to anticipate conflict scenarios and summon all parties involved before it's too late. Instead of printing or broadcasting propaganda and lies from interested parties, the media should always report both sides of a conflict truthfully. When in doubt, leave out" is the conventional media practice dictum. This ought to be adhered to consistently. Claims and counterclaims, such as those pertaining to the current skirmishes between IPOB and ENDSARS and the Nigerian Army and Police, or the earlier deaths by Boko Haram, should be thoroughly checked to avoid giving the wrong image of the situation. Instead of focusing too much on the valiant actions of the fighters, the media should make an effort to mediate the pain of conflict victims.

In actuality, the media is crucial to maintaining the fledgling democracy that Nigeria currently enjoys. As everyone knows, liberty and freedom are impossible without democracy. Therefore, the media must seem to be firmly and unwaveringly on the side of democracy if it hopes to preserve its freedom, which is intrinsically linked to that of the people. The media's unavoidable responsibility is to make sure that the people are the source of the state's legislative and executive branches' power and that they are able to evaluate and, if necessary, reassign their mandate on a regular basis (Awolowo, 1958). Mutual peace and harmony for the general advancement of the Nigerian State would result from this. The media has an educational purpose in addition to providing entertainment and information. Being competent, educated, truthful, and constructive are all necessary for being informative. The simplest way to undermine the accomplishments of others or draw attention to their flaws is to disparage or mock them in an effort to destroy peace in society. Awolowo (1958) asserts that "the journalist who engages in destructive criticism brings contempt and derision of the persons affected on himself and on the newspaper he represents." The media's ability to be particularly constructive is therefore crucial in order to present a fair assessment or point of view on all contentious matters and serve as a mediator or pacifier.

A free media is crucial in a nation like Nigeria, where democracy is still in its early stages and the bulk of the population is mainly uneducated and untrained in the act and notion of the contemporary state. The general public must be made aware of their civic duties and the rights that come with being a citizen in a democracy. Many residents have the propensity to assume that they will be granted the amenities and infrastructure they want and deserve without having to give up any time, effort, or financial resources. The media has to make it very evident to children that all of the world's conveniences and other positive things are the result of the labor and sacrifice of individuals who desire them. Constant friendly communication and negotiation between the people and the government is the only way to make them available. Therefore, the media must equally support government initiatives in this area with unreserved, critical, and constructive criticism.

Every indicator points to the violation and repression of fundamental human rights, including freedom of expression and freedom of association, in many regions of the nation today. Naturally, by ignoring these social ills, the media is jeopardizing its own independence. Insofar as the media cherishes its own freedom and believes in the freedom of this nation's residents, it must be bold and unrelenting in its efforts to protect the populace from the oppressors and aspiring tyrants among them. By doing this, the media will contribute to the establishment of a tranquil, healthy, and contented society in which the government and all of its agencies appropriately uphold the rule of law and the rights of the people.

Similarly, it is the media's unassailable duty to eliminate, reduce, or decrease the growing level of animosity, resentment, hatred, and division among the nation's many ethnic groups, whether through print or broadcast media platforms. Inciting remarks and hate speeches directed at one another are indicative of the nation's now-unprecedented degree of animosity, hatred, and division among its many ethnic groups. It is disturbing and does not bode well for the harmonious coexistence of the nation's varied populations, given the startling prevalence of hatred and unhealthy rivalry. Given their alarming nature, it is understandable that Prof. Yemi Osinbajo, the vice president of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, expressed concern about the persistent prevalence of hate speech in the nation and recommended that the media and other relevant parties address it. He asserted, "I believe we must figure out how to control these things (hate speeches)." I believe it is our duty, particularly as journalists, to figure out how to address this problem because it is a cancer.

Roluahpuia (2017) contends that the media has the power to either promote peace or escalate ethnic strife. Roluahpuia contends that there is a chance that local politics may have an impact on the media in an ethnically divided area by framing the media as a frame inside local politics. Imtihani (2014) found in another study that the circumstances surrounding a war had an impact on the media during that conflict. For instance, media coverage of conflict shifts from focusing on violence as it escalates to focusing on the quest for peace when disputing parties decide to engage in negotiation.

In order to foster an environment that is favorable to national unity, progress, and development, the media in our nation must, above all, guarantee that there is peace and harmony among its varied populations. In expressing the opinions of the public, the media must draw attention to and support peace efforts while deliberately highlighting the reality that war is anathema and a bad wind that never brings anybody any benefit in any community. For peace to prevail in this nation, even the most severe disagreements must be settled. For the benefit of all parties, this should be completed as soon as possible.

Newspapers in the southern and northern centers report on the Herders-Farmers Conflict in Nigeria differently, according to Kugbayi¹ 2024. The northern media hub tends to defend the herders, whereas the southern media center appears to favor farmers by drawing attention to the myriad crimes perpetrated by herdsman. Furthermore, the public's behavior and responses are somewhat influenced by how the media coverage is perceived. The investigation concluded that the disputes between farmers and herders have not been fairly covered by the media. The way the media covered the 1982 Maitatsine intra-Islamic religious conflicts in Kano was a prime example of how religious conflict and intolerance are often covered in Nigeria. Media coverage of the Maitatsine intra-Islamic religious dispute in Kano in 1982 stoked fervor among ethnic and religious groups. Despite the reality that many Yorubas were killed in the battle, the media decided to portray the Igbo problem in Kano as an ethno-religious and racial cleansing catastrophe rather than focusing on Maitatsine's ultra-radical and destructive doctrines that had no basis in Islamic theology. A large number of non-indigenous people, especially Igbos from Kano, left the city as a result of the reports on Maitatsine.

To put a brutal stop to the group, the military was called in. The majority of his followers were slaughtered along with the commander. The procedure claimed the lives of hundreds of Muslims. For the sake of sensationalism, the media downplayed or disregarded those realities. Following the end of the riots, the government disregarded reports about the factors that led to the formation of the Maitatsine sect, and the media did not carry out additional research into the causes of the Maitatsine phenomenon or the reasons why the government did not publish the results or carry out any recommendations that were made. In summary, the role played by the Media in some conflict situations in Nigeria is multifaceted. On the Insurgency of Boko Haram, the Media engaged in resilience building, attack reporting, and counterterrorism narratives. On the problem of the Farmer-Herdsman Conflicts the Media tried to help in resolving the conflict by talking on community radio and exposing the underlying reasons. The Media in intervening in the Niger Delta Rebellion, tried to make environmental harm visible while also escalating local complaints. Another area the Media played a role was in the Crisis of Ethno-Religion in Jos. Here, the media encouraged interfaith dialogue and tried to broker peace .

Conclusion

From the foregoing analysis, it is obvious that the media consists of the newspapers, the radio, television and the internet, all collectively referred to as the Mass Media or Media. It is clearly shown too that the media is a unique institution interlinked with the masses. In its vital activities, and remarkably involved with the important functions of resolving conflicts, fostering peace and progress in the Nigerian state in particular, and the world in general. This

particularly explains why the media is referred to as the “Fourth Estate of the Realm.” For a better understanding of the topic, a brief historical account of the emergence of the media in Nigeria has also been attempted by the author. The significant role of the media has also been exhaustively discussed. It was noted in the paper that vital functions of the media in dissemination of information, education and entertainment, are all among the important platforms through which it carries out its vital role of conflict resolution in the country. From the above, there is no doubt that the media is indeed a veritable tool for conflict resolution in the Nigerian society, where mutual distrust, disunity, hate, ethnic and religious chauvinism, and political malfeasances are now common.

Recommendations

1. All media practitioners must follow the ethics of their profession and report what is true and just about all serious conflicts in Nigeria.
2. They must carry out the vital functions of their profession to the letter – dissemination of information, education and mediation – without bias and prejudice against any party.
3. As a “Fourth Estate of the Realm”, the media has an all-important role to play in the Nigerian state to ensure peace and national development; it must be seen to do so creditably well.
4. The media serves as the eyes, the ears and mouth mouthpiece for both the masses and the government; therefore, it must be an impartial judge, mediator and arbiter before all parties as far as the resolution of conflicts is concerned.
5. The government of the country should not interfere with the free and fair duties and practices of the media so that it can serve the public as well as the government diligently and conscientiously.
6. The government, should, of necessity, provide a conducive environment for a free press or media to thrive in Nigeria. This means that the freedom of the press or media should be guaranteed in the country by the government. A gagged press is a caged society or people. Under a democratic setting, freedom of the press is tantamount to the freedom of the people to air their views without any intimidation.
7. For any society or nation like Nigeria to move forward progressively, the people must be free to ventilate their opinions and grievances through the media or press in an atmosphere devoid of rancor, abuse, oppressive laws and governance.
8. The government and all stakeholders in Nigeria must recognize and appreciate the unrelenting and unflinching role of the media towards the resolution of conflicts and cooperate accordingly for the interest of national development.

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