

Framing of Neo-Biafra Agitations in Selected Nigerian Newspapers

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Abstract

The Biafra question remains a watershed in Nigeria's history, with the acrimony that followed the 1967-70 civil war. The issue of Biafra has come to fore again with neo-Biafra agitations where the mass media are pivotal to the escalation or de-escalation of this conflict. The media among other techniques use media frame to present issues with the intent of making the readers view the issue in a particular perspective. The study enquired into frame types, frames sources, editorial formats, media functions and the portrayal of neo-Biafra agitators in the selected newspapers. Framing theory was used for investigation. The content analysis study design was used as it helps to provide data to measure an ongoing phenomenon .A period of three months (September to November 2015) was selected. Two newspapers (*Guardian and Nigerian Tribune*) were purposively selected. Findings revealed that the *Guardian* newspaper preferred thematic frames in the coverage of the Neo-Biafra agitations, while *Tribune* preferred episodic frames. Dominant frame sources for both newspapers were Own Correspondents, followed by Public Affairs Analysts. *Tribune* had more stories that portrayed Biafra agitators negatively than *Guardian*. Both newspapers preferred news reports to other editorial formats .They were mainly framed by both newspapers as Biafra agitators, then as saboteurs and separatists and minimally as marginalized, neglected or/disadvantaged .There is a need for media practitioners to be retrained on the appropriate techniques to be used in the coverage of conflict and other social upheavals in order to serve as early warning signs to all stakeholders.

Keywords: Biafra, Framing, Media, Conflict, Newspapers.

Media Framing of Conflicts

The way information is transferred to its recipients comes through various forms of communication, all of which are framed to meet the goals of the providing source. "In social theory, a 'frame' consists of a schema of interpretation, collection of anecdotes, and stereotypes that individuals rely on to understand and respond to events" (Esser, 2009). Framing defines how news media coverage can shape mass opinion by using these specific frameworks to help guide their reader to understanding. Matthes (2009) posits that framing examines selection and salience of certain aspects of an issue by exploring images, stereotypes, metaphors, actors and messages. Entman (1993), states that "to frame is to select some aspects of a perceived reality and make them more salient in a communication text, in such a way as to promote a particular problem definition, casual interpretation, moral evaluation and/or treatment recommendation'. Benjamin (2007) defines framing as "how messages are encoded with meaning so that they can be efficiently interpreted in relationship to existing beliefs or ideas"

The Nigeria –Biafra war

Nigeria is a nation comprising of over four hundred ethnic groups has experienced myriad conflicts ranging from ethnic, religious, political as well as social. In the view of many, these conflicts are mainly hinged on majority dominance of minority ethnic groups as well as disagreements over distribution of natural resources ranging from land, river and mineral resources such as oil

. The high point of the crisis seems to have been the civil war in the late 1960s, which followed shortly after independence in 1960. Nwankwo and Ifejika (1969) add that issues including tribalism,

leadership question, and the census crisis were part of the problems that confronted pre-independence Nigeria.

Republic of Biafra was a secessionist state from Nigeria that existed between 30 May 1967 and 1970. The name was from the Bight of Biafra which is off the southern coast “The inhabitants were mostly the Igbo people who led the secession due to economic, ethnic, cultural and religious tensions among the various peoples of Nigeria” (Ojarokutu, 2009). The land mass of Biafra was made up of over 29,848 square miles (77,310km) of land with terrestrial borders shared with Niger to the north and west. It was bordered to the east by Cameroon and the Gulf of Guinea in the south. According to Mok (1969), Asika (1968) and Ekpebu (1967) the region was populated by between 12 to 14 million people. Nwakwu and Ifejika (1969) note that owing to myriad reasons such as the pogrom and other discriminatory acts against Ibos, the Advisory Committee of Chiefs and Elders and the Consultative Assembly of the Ibos met at Enugu on 27th May 1967 and mandated Lt.-Col. Chukwuemeka Odumegwu Ojukwu, then military governor of Eastern Nigeria to declare what it referred to as a “ free, sovereign and independent state by the name and title of the REPUBLIC OF BIAFRA” .The proposed state was designed to have full and absolute powers of a sovereign state ,levy war ,conclude peace ,enter into diplomatic relations etc.

Many authors and schools of thought have adduced many reasons for the outbreak of the Nigerian Civil War. The creation of new state was among the causes of the Nigerian Civil War, also known as the Nigerian-Biafra War. Some note that it could be traced to the few years before independence in 1960 when leaders drawn from ethnic groups decided to postpone knotty constitutional issues rather than delay freedom. Some argue that the January 1966 coup where more than thirty political leaders of northern extraction were killed was a precursor of what has been described as a pogrom on the Igbos in the north and the bloody Nigerian civil war. The massive destruction of lives and property after the coup led by Nzegwu was seen as an assault on a minority ethnic group in the context of Igbos in the north. Uku (1978) in identifying the origin of the Nigerian Civil War lists the underlying causes to include the existence of linguistic and cultural divisions reflected in the hundreds of languages and cultural groups in Nigeria and the effect of colonization that further accentuated ethno-religious differences in the country.

Uku in his opinion adds that the January 1966 coup, the killing of Igbos after that coup, and the July 1966 coup too, as well as the non-implementation of the Aburi Accord also contributed to the outbreak of the civil war. Aburi is a town in Ghana where the Supreme Military Council of Nigeria met to try to resolve issues that were causing the conflict. In the January 1967 Aburi agreement senior military and Para-military leaders of each region in Nigeria had agreed on a confederate system made up of regional governments, repeal of military decrees issued since January 1966, rehabilitation payment for military men stationed in their home region. After two-and-a-half years of war, three million civilians died in fighting and from starvation as well as economic blockade of the geographical location referred to as Biafra. The breakaway republic later surrendered to the Nigerian Federal Military Government (FMG), and Biafra was reintegrated into Nigeria Ukpabi Asika was then appointed as the Administrator of the East –Central State and encouraged to begin anew through reintegration into the federation called Nigeria.

Ekpebu (1967:1) while describing the Nigerian Civil war noted that “... it is a tale of Nigerians killing Nigerians; of the diversion of scarce resources both human and material to a self-destructive warfare. This catastrophe could have been averted had selfless leadership, less greed and a greater sense of “give and take” than exhibited”.

Though the war ended in 1970 the aftermath of deep-seated bitterness and unforgiveness reign in Nigeria, because through conversations from indigenes of the south-east and other regions, the episode of the Nigerian –Civil war looks like an unending film, little wonder the burst-up in the form emerging agitations in the South –East of Nigeria.

Brief History of the Neo-Biafra Agitation

Various interest groups in the Nigerian Civil War have explained the causes, casualties as well as implications in various ways. Till date, the blame game continues across ethnic, religious, professional, ideological among other ways. These strains and unresolved questions about the very idea of federalism, ethnicity, resource control, indigenes and settlers conflict are in the centre of continuous conflicts in Nigeria. Similarly, the resurgence of agitations in the Eastern states of Nigeria in the form of Movement for the Actualization of Sovereign State of Biafra (MASSOB), Independent Peoples of Biafra (IPOB) among others show that there are unresolved issues in the 1967-1970 war. In the last few years there have been demonstration, and riots that have further unearthed strong disequilibrium among the regions in Nigeria. Movement for the Actualization of the Sovereign State of Biafra (MASSOB). Since 2009 the groups (MASSOB, IPOB) have through rallies, press conferences, interaction with Ibos in Diaspora calling for a sovereign state of Biafra that would encompass all Easterners. MASSOB in its various publications hold that it is a peaceful group and advertises a 25-stage plan to achieve its goal peacefully. Some critics of the neo-Biafra agitations hold that those championing the cause of the group did experience the horror, loss of millions of lives and the painful process of reintegration into Nigeria. They also argue that the Igbo intellectual, political and religious leadership are not part of the new agitations for a sovereign state of Biafra. The emergence of Neo-Biafra agitations in Nigeria to many students of history should not come as a surprise if one critically evaluates some of the pronouncements of the some dramatis persona during the conflict. For instance Birch and George (1968) argue that the pogrom that heralded the 1966-1970 Civil war was some form of epitaph to the Nigerian nation. They note that:

These massacres are of further significance in that it is from this point in time that the death of the old Federation dates. The very basis of the Federal system of Government was undermined. The rights of freedom of movement, to seek employment, to set up home or business anywhere in the Federation were curtailed for the majority of the easterners. The scars of these days are, and will remain for many years to come, fresh on the memories of the Eastern people, and it is obvious that any form of political association for the future between the peoples of Nigeria will have to accommodate and make allowances for these realities. As was eventually determined, over 30,000 Easterners lost their lives in the pogrom of May, July, September, and October of 1966. Hardly an Eastern family did not suffer. Over 1, 800,000 refugees flooded into the East, creating an intolerable economic and social strains on that region-the East was stunned, frightened and suspicious.

The East is ravaged by erosion, and there are claims that it has the lowest amount of Federal projects compared to other regions. In the same vein Easterners also argue that in terms of appointment into Federal Parastatals and ministries the East still lags behind other regions. The Nigerian government accuses MASSOB of violence; MASSOB's leader, Uwazuruike, was arrested and detained on treason charges. "In 2009, MASSOB launched "the Biafran International Passport" in response to persistent demand by Biafrans in diaspora" (Peter, 2008).

Another group, Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB), led by Nnamdi Kanu, a United Kingdom based Nigerian has given strength to the actualization of Biafra since 2012. "On June 16, 2015, the Supreme Council of Elders of the Indigenous People of Biafra sued the Federal Republic of Nigeria for the right to self-determination within their region as a sovereign state" (Philips, 2000). Nnamdi Kanu set up an illegal radio station, Radio Biafra, which was broadcasting at various frequencies around the world. "The Nigerian Government, through her broadcasting regulator, the Broadcasting Organization of Nigerian and Nigerian Communications Commission, sought series of modes to clamp down on the UK

based Radio Station without success” (James, 2015). On November 17, 2015 the Abia police command seized an IPOB's radio transmitter in Umuahia North, Abia State.

The groups that can aptly be referred to as Neo-Biafra agitators use various platforms to promote their quest for a rebirth of the Republic of Biafra that was short-lived to only 1967-1970. During the Nigerian civil war Biafra promoted its programmes and objectives through newspaper and Radio Biafra. In the main, according to Mr Nnamdi Kanu in an interview with SUN newspaper of April 2013 explained that the new Radio Biafra started transmitting on short waves frequency since 2009. In Nigeria the station broadcast with support from MASSOB (Movement for the Actualization of the Sovereign State of Biafra). Initially, the station is received in Enugu, Onitsha, Port Harcourt, Nnewi and Owerri and other parts of eastern Nigeria. Presently, the Federal Government claims to have blocked the signals of the station, yet there are claims that the signals of Radio Biafra are received in some parts of the country. Particularly, the social media have created more possibilities for content transmission on platforms such as YouTube, live streaming among others. The station has repeatedly been accused of hate speech, propaganda and further promoting sectionalism, tribalism and sedition.

Neo-Biafran agitators also use rallies, market boycott and engagement with the Diaspora Igbo community and others to promote the independence of Biafra. Some authors including Birch and George (1968) Nwankwo and Ifejika (1969), Njoku (1987), Mok (1969) Madiebo (1980) as well as the Christian Concern in the Nigerian Civil War agree that the Secession of Biafra which led to a bloody civil war cannot be wished away in the Nigerian nation. Specifically, Birch and George (1968, p. 28) maintain that the secession was not a preconceived act, but was a consequence of the massacre of 30,000 Ibos in the North and by the “uncertainty as to whether this overcrowded and vigorous people can in the future find secure citizenship and opportunities outside their boundaries”. This quotation was ascribed to Dame Margaret Perham in a letter published in Times of 7th September 1967. The notion is that the Biafra episode was an act of self-preservation occasioned by the manner citizens of Eastern region were killed and the attitude of the Federal Government towards the pogrom. From the foregoing it is apparent that the issues that dovetailed into the Civil War are yet ongoing in Nigeria, especially with reports of violence against Ibos in the northern part of Nigeria. This argument was aptly captured by Birch and George (1968:30) who noted that:

To the Biafrans, the onslaught of Federal troops signals the extension to his own home of the 1966 massacres in the North. The idea of a Federation, with its inherent principles of equality and mutual respect between the peoples comprising of unrestricted movement throughout its territories, with the right to set up home or business anywhere within its boundaries, is a concept which died in October 1966. It is a concept which today is not only vacuous but fraught with a deadly irony

Thus there are issues that still create for animosity among the components that make up Nigeria, hence the agitations by some people from the Eastern region of Nigeria has raised the ghost of the 1967-70 war. The resurgence of agitations in the region is becoming persistent over the last few years.

How Newspapers Cover Conflicts

Frohardt and Temin (2007) cited by Thompson (2007:399) explain that “media can be extremely powerful tools when used by those intent on instigating conflict”. They are of the view that the media are multipliers: they amplify and disseminate messages and opinions. In realization of this, combatants in local or international conflict spare no cost: human, financial or political to define or influence content in the mass media. Yoon and Gwangho (2002:92) hold that “news media, far from conveying “value-free”

or “ideology –free” objective reality, actively help to construct and reconstruct social reality by presenting a particular news frame or media frame”.

The journalist in reporting especially, during conflicts and war should consider the immediate and long-time effect of his publications .In the selection of materials to be published the press must consider public interest, safety and most importantly the consequences of the publication .Christian Concern in the Nigerian Civil War (1969, p. 11) notes that

In time of anxiety and emergency, the Pressman has a further duty to consider the probable effect of his story and to judge when he should release it at once or whether he would be wiser to refer it first to the civil authorities so that possible danger to the public may be averted. The press is intended to serve the interest of the community which it cannot do if it recklessly prints all it knows or hears or imagines regardless of the consequences

The media have to be tactful in handling of the reportage of social upheavals and other occurrences in the society. Chima (1968:) notes that there was a tendency for the media to indulge in the usual ethnic repertoire characteristic of great T.V, Radio and newspaper commentators and political analysts with high-sounding names when reporting the Biafra war. The ongoing agitations by different groups that describe themselves as championing the emergence of a new nation called Biafra is a volatile issue that the media must be tactful handling.

Problem Statement

The resurgence of agitations for Biafra Republic is vivid in demonstrations, market closures and post on the social media as well as the traditional media. Various parties for and against the creation of the new nation engage in campaigns, propaganda and media placement to push their side of the divide. The media in covering Neo-Biafra agitations spread information and misinformation, shape individuals’ view of others and heighten tension as well as promote understanding. This makes controlling the media and their messages important for anyone intent on promoting their own views. The media are seen as key to determining the shape events take, through the pattern, frequency, prominence and also the words they use to present reports. Issues such as economy, politics, religion or conflict can be presented in a style that highlights some sides to a story. This could elicit reactions, some expected, and beyond the imagination of those who package media content. When there are agitations by various groups in the society especially concerning human rights, resource control, secession, conflict or war among others, the mass media are expected to contribute to finding a lasting solution to the a situation. During various events in Nigeria the media have played pivotal roles in the outcome of such occurrences. For instance, Pre – independence nationalism, the Nigerian Independence era, Civil war, Political crises in the First republic and June 12 crises, Niger Delta conflict, Boko Haram insurgency and the Neo-Biafra agitations have been shaped by the presence, type of presence or absence that the media displayed.

The media thus use diverse techniques such as prominence, frequency, editorial format, slant and frames to influence the views or perception that stakeholders in a particular event would have .This study seeks to enquire into the type of frames, frame conditions, sources of frames, portrayal of neo-Biafra agitators and the editorial formats used in the coverage of Neo-Biafra agitators.

Research Questions

1. What frame types were used in the coverage of Neo-Biafra agitations in the selected newspapers?
2. How was Neo-Biafra agitations framed in the selected newspapers?

3 .Which editorial formats and functions were used most in the coverage of Neo-Biafra agitators in the selected newspapers?

Theoretical framework

Framing is related to the agenda- setting theory, but attention is on presenting reality in such a way that the readers are led to interpret issues or events the way the media or other opinion moulders who use the media as a platform would want the people to see it. The framing theory centres on which topics or issues are selected for coverage by the news media. It looks at the particular ways those issues are presented. McCombs, Shaw and Weaver (1997) suggest that framing can be referred to as second level agenda setting in relation to the impact of salience of media coverage on audience interpretation of news stories.

Zilman (1994:2) explains that professional journalists “structure experience for us filtering out many of the complexities of the environment and offering polished, perhaps even literary version, in which a few objects and selected attribute are highlighted”. Therefore, through the style of presentation, the media are divided between objectivity and persuasion, which is highlighted during the process of filtering stories. Framing of events in the media allows the media to structure socio-economic, political and other realities for the readers. Zilman (1994) citing Lippman (1922) notes that it is the media that sketch most of the pictures people have in their heads.

Framing implies that the way a concept or argument is presented to the readers has a very strong effect on the perception that the people would hold about the issue. For instance, on the Neo-Biafra agitations, the way various media choose to present the activities of the promoters of the idea can go a long way in the attainment of the preconceived goal or otherwise. Some can decide to refer to them as secessionists, criminals, nationalists, activists among other labels or frames

Nelson and Kinder (1996) and Nelson et al (1997) argue that frames shape opinion, by stressing specific values, facts and other considerations, labelling them with greater relevance to the issue, than they might appear to have under an alternate frame. Framing also relates to principles of selection, emphasis and presentation about issues which the mass media, politicians or other stakeholders in an issue use to interpret reality. Framing thus can determine the importance that people ascribe to certain issues or occurrences. Framing means that the media not only tell the readers what to think, but how to think about them. People acquire information about most public events from the news media. They also learn how much value to attach to a story, as a result of the emphasis placed on the news. Framing is an evolving theory from mass communication researchers and others in related fields (Psychology, Sociology and Political Science). This theory notes that the media focus attention on certain events and then place them within a field of meaning. The theory holds that frames can alter the importance attributed to certain events or reports. As Marshal McLuhan cited by Folarin (1998) posits, the press can colour events, by using them in a particular way or refusing to use them at all. Whether semantic, visual, episodic or thematic, frames play a vital role in the way people understand reports .Framing can affect the perception that people have and can as well change views that have been held by people for a long period of time .The mass media can refine, shape and re place the audience perception of Neo-Biafra agitators. Are they marginalized, victims of the terror of Nigeria’s Federalism, Secessionist, Freedom fighters. Nationalists or Patriots? Responses could be influenced by the side of the divide the reader belongs to or the frames that they were exposed to in the media.

Relevant Empirical Studies

Segvic (2005) studied the Framing of Politics in Three Croatian Newspapers over a period of 11 years. He found that two of the papers were more favourable to the government. Only a privatized weekly

(*Feral Tribune*), antagonized the government. His findings show that ownership of newspapers shapes the types of frames that are used to report stories.

Melkote (2009) investigated the manner in which the *New York Times* framed events during the month prior to the start of the 2003 war in Iraq. The study discovered negative bias in the coverage, especially towards Saddam Hussein. In essence, negative bias against individuals or personality in a conflict situation can be shaped by the frames used by the mass media. Another study on framing was carried out by Ekuma (2007) who studied Press Framing of the 2006 Nigerian Constitution Amendment Debate, and found that there were differences in the amount of pro-third term and anti-third term positions reported by each of the selected newspapers.

In a study on the Influence of Framing Effects on Belief Importance and Opinion, Nelson (1999) found that the way the issues were framed influenced the opinions people had. He also studied the framing of welfare reform and found out that the way the issue was framed affected its acceptance. Nelson (1999) noted that the use of “personal responsibility frame” or a “threat to children frame” influenced the way the audience accepted Welfare Allowance to people. In this study, the framing was on the individuals who benefitted from social security, not on social security as a welfare project.

Edy and Meirick’s (2007) study on how the United States media framed the war in Afghanistan found out that the way the U.S media earlier framed the September eleven attack, had an impact on their support of the war in Afghanistan. The results showed the complexity of the framing phenomenon and suggested the need for better measure of how the audience perceive media frames. The American media had framed the September eleven attack as an ‘enemy attack’, like a war against America from Islamic extremists. Therefore, in framing the invasion of Afghanistan, the media supported the move, with frames that talked about the need to capture or kill the enemies of America or those who are a threat to global peace.

Data Analysis and Discussion

Data presented here was drawn from the two selected newspapers (Guardian and Nigerian Tribune) which covered a period of 3 months (September to November 2015). The period was viewed as large enough to provide data that would help to understand the framing of Neo-Biafra agitation in Nigerian newspapers, specifically, the *Guardian* and the *Nigerian Tribune*. The sampling technique used in this study was purposive sampling as only editions that had reports on Biafra were selected. In addition, this research purposively selected four days in each week that comprised of three days from Monday to Friday and one day of the weekend. In all sixty editions of the newspapers were content analyzed

Table 1: Frame Types Used in the Coverage of Neo-Biafra Agitation in the Selected Newspapers

Frame type	Thematic frame	%	Episodic frame	%
Guardian	6		15	
Tribune	19		12	
Total	25		27	

This question was designed to determine types of frames that were preferred by the selected newspapers in the framing of the Neo-Biafra agitations with a view of highlighting the differences. Episodic frames are used when the media focus on a particular event without adequate background to the report. Thematic frames are when the media provide background information to the report. Finding from Table 1 shows that the selected newspapers used more of episodic frames, slightly above the use of thematic frames. The implications of this are that the readers had mainly immediate news reports that did not require a lot of background information. Therefore the readers would not be able to critically evaluate this emergent conflict that is again raising questions on factors responsible for incessant call by ethnic nationalities for various forms of self-actualization. For instance, the re-emergence of Radio Biafra is viewed in different ways by different segments of the society, hence the need for the mass media in Nigeria to provide adequate information, background and analysis of such events.

Table 2: Dominant Frame Sources Used in the Coverage of Neo-Biafra Agitations in the Selected Newspapers.

Dominant Frame	Government	Biafran Agitators	Correspondents	Public Affairs Analysts	Foreign News agencies	Local Media
Guardian	1	-	15	6	-	-
Tribune	1	3	19	2	-	-
Total	2	3	34	8	-	-

In framing reports or news in newspapers, many stakeholders such as editors, reporters, advertisers, business interest, politicians among others. This research question sought to provide data on the dominant frames sources used in the coverage of neo-Biafra agitations. Findings showed that the selected newspapers depended more on their correspondents accounting for 34 reports, followed by Public Affairs Analysts (8) reports, Biafra Agitators had 3 reports, and Government sources 2 stories. This might be a result of the fact that the Nigerian media depend mainly on their own reporters to attach frames to content or source frames from stakeholders in the neo-Biafra conflict

Table 3: Portrayal of Neo-Biafra Agitators in the selected newspapers

Portrayal of Neo-Biafra Agitators	Guardian	Tribune
Neutral	13	11
Positive	3	6
Negative	6	14
Total	22	31

To code data on the portrayal of Neo-Biafra agitations three categories were used. These are negative, positive and neutral. *Guardian* had 6 stories that portrayed the group in negative light, while *Tribune* had 14 such stories. *Guardian* had 3 positive stories to 6 positive stories by *Tribune*. In addition *Guardian* had 13 reports that were neutral and *Tribune* had 11 that were neutral. From the findings it is clear that the selected newspapers were neutral in the coverage of the Biafran Agitators. However, the *Tribune* newspaper, which is owned by a family from the South-West of Nigeria framed the agitators negatively.

Table 4: Framing of Neo-Biafra Agitators in the selected newspapers

Framing Neo-Biafra Agitators	Guardian	Tribune	Total
Saboteurs	12	14	26
Nationalists	2	1	3
Marginalized	5	4	9

Neglected/Disadvantaged	2	2	4
Biafra Agitators	15	10	25
Others	7	10	17
Total	43	41	84

Frames used in the mass media give the audience or readers an angle to the story that they are encouraged to accept by the media. Findings on Table 4 reveal that the selected newspapers used words such as saboteurs (26), they were also described as Biafra Agitators (25). Other frames that were used minimally include marginalized (9), Nationalists (3), Neglected/Disadvantaged (4). Other frames that were listed under Others (17) include restive youths, political, ethnic thugs etc. From Table 4 it is clear that the selected newspapers viewed the agitators as mainly Saboteurs and Biafra Agitators.

Table 5: Editorial Formats Used in the Coverage of the Niger Delta Conflict

Editorial formats	Guardian	Tribune	Total
News Reports	14	18	32
Editorials	-	-	-
Interviews	2	4	6
Features	4	5	9
Cartoons	-	-	-
Photographs	1	2	3
Letter to the Editor	1	4	5
Total	22	33	55

Table 5 revealed that the selected newspapers in the choice of editorial formats or contents used more of News reports (32) followed by features (9), Interviews (6), letter to the editor (5) and photographs (3). It was interesting to note that the newspapers did not use editorials in the coverage of Neo-Biafra agitations, because editorials are pivotal to newspaper coverage of events as it represents the media outfits stand or opinion on particular issues. One major consequence that the preference for news report might have on the Neo-Biafran conflict is that most of the readers would not be able to understand the historical factors responsible for the re-emergence of demonstrations, riots and crises in the Eastern region of Nigeria. This finding agrees with Marie-Soleil Frere cited by Howard (2009) who argued that most journalists who cover conflict only focus on consequences and do not the solution.

Table 6: Media Functions Used in the Coverage of the Niger Delta

Media Functions	Guardian	Tribune	Total
Information	18	22	40
Education	-	1	1
Interpretation	3	2	5
Surveillance	-	2	2
Agenda Setting	1	4	5
Total	22	31	53

In reporting events like the Neo-Biafra agitations the media can decide to inform, educate, persuade, entertain, set agenda among others. Findings from Table 6 showed that the media used mostly information function (40) followed by interpretation (5), Agenda setting (5), Surveillance (2) and education (1). Therefore, it is clear that the selected newspapers focused only on information mainly and did not pay attention to their agenda setting, interpretation and education function. However, when conflict develop or transform the mass media are expected to provide. These findings are contrary to the view of Holihan (2009) who opine that in conflict states, the mass media are expected to frame an event in such a way to present its significance or scope and then suggest method of deescalating the conflict.

The could provide interpretative reports to help the parties in the conflict to understand themselves better and work towards a resolution.

Findings

Finding from this study revealed that the media depended more on episodic frames than thematic frames in the reportage of the agitations for a new nation to be called Biafra and also framed the agitators as saboteurs and Neo-biafra agitators than in any other way. Similarly, the selected newspapers preferred news items to other formats such as features, interviews, editorials among others. The newspapers also used information function above education, interpretation, and entertainment. The findings also show that the selected newspapers depended mainly on their correspondents and government sources for the media frames used in presenting the stories. Findings also clearly stated the fact that Nigerian Tribune newspaper framed the Biafra agitators more negatively than the Guardian newspaper. This might be as a result of the influence of ownership as well as

Conclusions and Recommendations

Framing is the social construction of a social phenomenon by mass media sources, or specific political or social movements or organizations. Frames define problems, diagnose causes as well as make moral judgments and suggest remedies (Entman 1993). It is viewed as a process of selective influence over the perception of the meaning attributed to words or phrases. The mass media report occurrences with strong influence from reporters, editors, owners, and advertisers. By emphasizing some aspects of media content, a frame creates a way for the audience to understand news report, features and other contents. In presenting content, the media engage diverse techniques one of which is framing.

This researcher recommends that media practitioners be trained regularly on appropriate use of media frames in the coverage of conflicts and other volatile issues, in order to ensure that they achieve balance and objectivity as well as contribute to the de-escalation of conflicts. In the coverage of Neo-Biafra crises, it is important for journalists to understand what Howard(2009) refers to as expected or appropriate language, spin avoidance and framing. It also important that the media report events with more details or background, beside only reporting occurrences as new items. Such does not allow the readers to get a detailed account of an event. The finding that the selected newspapers focused more on news report and information than other editorial formats and function further stresses the need to engage journalists on conflict- focused reportage with more tact in objectivity, truth and framing of conflicts.

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