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PUBLIC PERCEPTIONS OF CONFLICT REPORTING ON TELEVISION NEWS IN NIGERIA

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ABSTRACT

Conflict is inevitable in our society. It attracts the attentions of the public as well as the mass media. Television for example, because of its effect of sounds and pictures, and as a major source of news and information has strong influence on the public. Television news reports conflict in our society. This paper examines public perceptions of conflict reporting in television news and its dimensions. In order to determine public perceptions of conflict reporting in television news, two hundred copies of questionnaire were administered to the public. Research questions and hypothesis were designed to test the impact or relationship between reporting conflict on television and conflict as a social reality. The data gathered and analysed shows that public perceptions of conflict reporting in television news are affected by gatekeeping and agenda-setting postulations arising from media dependency assumptions. Invariably, the media are reflections of events in the society and they play roles in the structuring of audience perceptions. However, conflict reporting in television news is not significant to public perceptions of conflict as a social reality.

Keywords: *conflicting reporting, television news and public perceptions*

INTRODUCTION

Among the great inventions in the early electronic age, television is one of the most appealing. As integral part of everyday life, it helps to determine how people spend their time, what they learn, what they think and talk about especially in local, national and international issues. Rodman (2006) says television remains Americans' (and other countries) most time consuming activity, next to sleeping, "and it is the world's main source of news and information" (p.258). It is a medium, as Rodman argues, through which politics is conducted and it is humanity's main form of entertainment, and powerful sales tool. Television is one of the most powerful social forces capable of shaping people's beliefs, values and lifestyles. It is the greatest and persistent influence in the life of Nigerians (Udejah 2004). It serves as an instrument of social control, influences, promoting various interests in Nigeria.

The unique features of television, like social influence partly explained why the medium remained until the early 1990s the exclusive control and preserve of government both Federal and State in Nigeria. Before the deregulation of the broadcast sector in 1992, government in Nigeria feared that television may be used to cause violent conflicts because of its social influence on viewers. Further to this, the regulatory framework provided by the Federal Government under the National Broadcast Commission (NBC), as well as other government officials, "further underscores the significance attached to the medium" (Gambo, 2002: 105).

Television news presents us conflict as they see it. Nigeria had witnessed so many conflicts especially from religious, ethnic and political ones. The amalgamation of different cultural, religious and political tendencies in 1914 brought about a re-ordering of the terrain, throwing up new challenges in the relationship between various interests and sections of the country (Owens-Ibie, 2002). While the struggle for independence witnessed some consensus among the political gladiators, it also revealed conflict between them, occasioned by the differing response to their socio-cultural and political loyalties. The trend of conflict has remained highly dynamic whereby making the media as a vibrant market for conflict reporting. The various crises recorded in Nigeria, like in Kaduna, Bauchi, Jos, Lagos, Ogun, Ekiti, Benue, the Niger Delta region and different parts of the country attracted the attentions of the television stations.

As an inevitable aspect of human interaction, and an unavoidable concomitant of choices and decisions, conflict cannot be avoided (Okolie, 2009). Akpuru-Aja (2009) argues that conflict is a continuing reality of social existence. It involves two or more parties that have incompatible interest over power, resources, values, identity and attitude, or differential strategy of achieving the ends desired. On a daily basis conflict is

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The media environment is so monopolized by television that its lessons or news are continually learned and relearned. This view stresses the cultivation theory by Gerber to the relation of social reality. According to Gerber and his colleagues, television is responsible for a major 'cultivating' and 'acculturating' process according to which people are exposed systematically to a selective view of society on almost every aspect of life, a view which tends to shape their beliefs and value accordingly (Gerber et al., 1967 in McQuail, 2005:102). Television news therefore is a source of identity and sense of social aspiration. For example, millions of Nigerians are conscious of 9:00pm everyday because of NTA news. The Nigerian Television Authority is now a social point or identity to many Nigerians. Social identity or construction of reality, as Baran (2002:375) observes is "influenced by the attitudes and perceptions presented by our mass media".

Causes of conflicts as they are reported in television news have also been identified. For example, Nwachukwu (2009) believes that major conflicts in Nigeria are linked to "system disequilibria in the distribution of national development ingredients, and marginal political representation of minority groups" (p.162). Bearing similar view, Babawale (2007) in Owens-Ibie (2009) trace it to the control of oil and other mineral resources, resources allocation and the issue of religious and ethnic conflicts. Onu (2009) observes that conflict can be over resources, identity, power, status or values. Reporting conflict in television because of the effect of sights and sounds makes television emotional, appealing and perceptive. Ibrahim (2009) says conflict occur when demands, values and interests differs. In conflict reporting, there is the possibility for exaggeration of facts and figures, which may further aggravate the conflict. Reporters are often overwhelmed with what they see only, without taking time to follow or dig into the root cause of the conflict, thereby subordinating the actual issues. By so doing, reporter may unwittingly provoke the violent component of the conflict to the detriment of the cause. Only an insignificant number of the events that happened around us are reported by the news media, partly because news is defined in accordance with specific criteria. That is, journalists select those events or issues containing elements of the drama of conflict. Conflict attracts, and people find stories of conflict interesting and stimulating especially when it is reported in television. Clearly, the stronger the element of conflict, the greater the probability that it would be reported and given prominence. Also a reporter may have different dimensions to conflict reporting on television news. The dimension which the reporter may report conflict in television news may not be public perceptions of the accounts of what really happened.

However, this work looks at public perceptions of conflict reporting in television news. The central question therefore is: how is conflict reporting in television news significant to public perceptions of conflict as a social reality? Or, how do the public perceived conflict reporting in television in news?

In a broader view, this study seeks to expand the frontier of knowledge by drawing a line between previous and relevant works on this subject. The focal point of the study is to determine the significant of conflict reporting on television news and public perceptions of conflict itself. The study will also look at the manner in which conflict is reported in television news. This study among other things will be significant to mass media, conflict management personnel or peace media experts, and the society. This will enable them to know how the public perceived conflict reported on television. Does it cause more fear and tension on the audiences? Or it is far from reality? Recommendations made from the study will be useful for conflict management especially for television reporters. Also it will help the development of peace building organizations to gain a better understanding of the context in which they work and their role in that context. The study will definitely help respondents to express their views (through questionnaire) on the manner television reporters report conflict. The study will also be relevant to the researcher and other researchers in this same subject. This will help to expand the frontier of knowledge in the university community.

Research Questions

The questions framed for this study are:

- (1) What are public perceptions of the roles of television news in conflict reporting?
- (2) Does conflict reporting on television news significant to public perceptions of conflict?

Research Hypothesis

The hypothesis posed to guide us towards a systematic conclusion is:

H₀: Conflict reporting in television news is not significant to public perceptions of conflict.

H₁: Conflict reporting in television news is significant to public perceptions of conflict.

Literature Review

There exists literature on conflict reporting. For example, Eti (2009) did a work on objectivity and balance in conflict reporting. Eti believes that objectivity and balance should be the hallmark of journalism. On his party, Onu (2009) highlights methods of conflict resolution and transformation. He argues that dialogue and negotiation should be centre of conflict resolution. In his entry, Udonisor (2002) identifies problems and prospects for reporting conflict in democracy. To him, the problem of objectivity and balance accounts form a central problem in reporting conflict especially in elections. Umar (2002) worked on reporting conflict on radio. In it, he looks at the editorial dimension as crucial in reporting conflict. He believes that the editorial not only reflects the policy of the organization but it is important in shaping people's views about issues like conflict. Goodwin (1990) says it is not easy for television news to strike a balance especially on conflict reporting. This is because of many dimensions involved in the story. Owens-Ibie (2002) highlights socio-cultural consideration in conflict reporting in Nigeria, and Pate (2002) worked on reporting conflict in newspapers and magazines in democratic Nigeria. Botes (1996) in Owens-Ibie (2002) observes that the media naturally attracted to conflict. Owens-Ibie (2002) says "conflict is the bread and butter of journalism" (p.32). To him, conflict sells in journalism. Galadima (2002) notes that the aims of conflict reporting are to: create awareness of such conflict so that it does not escalate; generate ideas of how to resolve or reduce the conflict; to publicize the plight of the victims of violent conflicts for necessary assistance. Television is a strong instrument for social mobilisation. It has the ability to shape and rethink people's beliefs, opinions and feelings of various issues in life. It is the creator of 'public thoughts'. It is the central to the process of public thinking.

However, this work looks at public perceptions of conflict reporting in television news. Much works have not been done on public perceptions of conflict reporting on television news. Folarin (2005) believes that perceptions depend on a complex of variable such as psychological disposition, past experiences, cultural expectations and social relationships. It means that each person tends to perceive and then decode communication message in the light of their previous expectations, current dispositions, needs, moods and memories. Folarin sees perception as the process by which we interpret sensory data. One process of interpreting sensory data is through selective perception. It is a term applied to the tendency for people's perception to be influenced by wants, needs, attitudes, and other psychological factors. Selective perception plays an important role in communication. It applies that people can react to the same message in different ways. Literature (McQuail, 2005) shows that audience attitude towards television viewing is contingent upon the degree of media dependency and exposure. As it were, heavy dependency and exposure to the media tend to shape people's beliefs, perceptions about various issues of life. Aptly put, the degree of dependency on the media is a key variable that help to explain why audience beliefs, feelings or behaviour are altered. Hence, people perceived conflict on television based on the dimension of the news and their dispositions.

Basically, television news over the years had reported various conflicts in their own perceptions. Owens-Ibie (2002) notes that the media play roles in the structuring of perception of social reality by regularly manufacturing and mirroring dissent and consent voices. Fiske (1987) notes that news can never give a full, accurate objective picture of reality. News can be gathered, uncovered or exposed. The idea is that television news offers a world of social reality from its news room or decision-room. In line with this, McQuail (2005) had argued that the picture of reality that news claims to provide cannot help but be a selective construct made up of factual information and observation that are bound together and given meaning by a particular frame angle of vision or perspective. Televisions because of the features of images create lasting impression in the minds of the viewer. Galadima (2002) says one of the perceptions of people about conflict reporting on television is when the news is distorted. This makes the conflict complex. To Gambo (2009), when the volume and quantity of news reported by the mass media continue to attract public comments, criticisms and observations, the public begin to focus mostly on the manner in which reporters and editors handled such reports. In the same vein, Ijalana (2000) in Owens-Ibie (2009) and Folarin (2005) believe that the prominence given to conflict reporting affects public perceptions.

Consistent with the above, Adoni, Cohen, & Mane (1983) identified perceptual dimensions of social conflicts as reported on television. They argued that reporter simplified the complexity of conflict report in television news. The focus on the complexity dimension stems from the argument that television news coverage tends to simplify social conflicts. Because of the 'power' of gatekeeping, conflict news in television has always been simplified. For example, the various general elections held in Nigeria from 1999 till date, had always manifest with violence, rigging, assassinations, and these are simplified by government/public owned television stations. Ramaprasad (1983) in Udonisor (2009) says media people know they are gatekeepers decide what news the public should read or hear, carve out for themselves a

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certain role in a conflict situation, particularly in a democratic environment. Eti (2009) suggests that the media should avoid the risk of over simplification of conflict, because it not only bias but may aggravate the conflict. The aggrieved party may feel offended when television news does not reflect the true picture of the conflict.

Television news, for example, especially the NTA (Nigerian Television Authority) and other governed/public owned television stations simplified the gravity or effects of the Niger Delta crises in their news programmes. Perhaps, the philosophy of NTA for the simplification of the complexities of conflicts is that of national unity which is stipulated in the 1999 Constitution (Chapter 2, section 15 (1)), and also in the National Broadcasting Commission Code (2006: 6) on general principles of objectives of broadcasting. The Code states that:

Broadcasters shall, therefore, observe basic professional tenets including caution, empathy and due sensitivity in their coverage of emergencies, calamities, riots, grief's, etc (p. 18)

It is taken therefore, that the reason for simplification of the complexities of conflicts as reported in television news is contingent upon peace media journalism. Peace journalism as against conflict or war journalism provides the atmosphere for peace. Peace media experts believe that when video of violent conflicts for example, are shown on television news, it may further aggravate conflict. During the September 11, 2001 bombing of the World Trade Centre, (WTC), peace media experts and other observers advised CNN to minimize the video footage of the bombing because of the psychological effects it may cause the family of the victims, and perhaps trigger further violence. The media believe that the complexities of social conflicts especially religious and political ones can be translated by television news reporter/editors into a simple, understandable and presentable form.

Another perceptual dimension of conflict reporting is the intensification of the conflict. The notion of the intensity dimension is derived from the claim that television news tends to present only the more intense moments of social conflicts. By the frequency and the degree of coverage given to conflicts television news can heighten tensions. For instance, while the ailing President of Nigeria, Umaru Yar'adua (late) was in Saudi Arabia hospital, the electronic news media like Channel television, and foreign ones like BBC, were focusing on the intensity or heat the conflict generates in the country. Indeed, it generated a lot of controversies and conflicts of interest. When the volume of television news coverage of conflicts continue to attract public comments, criticisms, and observations their tensions, anxieties, fears begin to increase. For this, Waisbord (2002) in Eti (2009: 6) argued that news media especially the television establishes "culture of fear" which they perpetuate by portraying "a vast array of threats". Thus, such intensified portrayal of conflict in television news, as Eti (2006) observes, "presents and shapes negative perception of risk among member of the news audience, and creates a sense of helplessness when it does not cover aspects that communicate hope and a selection" (p. 6). The media are attractive to conflict. The news media wants to be in the front bench in journalism. Hence, the guiding principle in the intensification of conflict news is "if it bleeds, it leads" (Lowry, Mjo and Leigher, 2005, p.64). In other words, conflict is attractive.

By way of camera effects and manipulations, conflict coverage in television news can also be intensified. Camera shots like close-up shots, medium shots, long shots, panning up and down, zoom in and out and split screen, as Akpan (2006) notes that cameras are used to emphasized persons, things, place movement or body position.

However, some television organisations believe in telling conflict the way it happens. For example, CNN believe in reporting from the war front, so that they (CNN) can 'tell it as it is', because CNN want you to 'be the first to know'. CNN for instance, is known for its defiance of bland but blunt coverage of the Niger Delta crises especially the side of kidnapping and hostage taking. This value judgment of news, as Eti (2009) notes is not beneficial to effective solution-oriented conflict discourse because it leaves out important perspectives that could lead to conflict resolution giving priority to gory behavioural aspects. The news media thrive on conflict despite the negative impact it has on the society.

In all, conflict has been recognised as a natural phenomenon and a catalyst for change. Reporting conflict in the media can be a means to change and means by which some social values of welfare, security justice and opportunities for development can be achieved. Reporting conflict is to create awareness of such conflict. Reporters decide what the public should hear and see on television based on their perceptions and dimension of conflict.

Theoretical Framework

This study is anchored on conflict and media theories. For example, Structural Conflict Theory finds its assumption to conflict reporting. It addresses the reactions of individuals, groups, cultures, institutions and societies to changes. The main argument of the structural conflict theory is that conflict is built into the particular ways societies are structured and organised. The theory looks at social problems like political and economic exclusion, injustice, poverty, disease, exploitation, inequity as sources of conflict (Ademola, 2006). The emphasis of structural theory is thus on how the competing interests of groups tie conflict directly into the social, economic and political organisation of society as well as the nature and strength of social networks within and between community groups.

There are bound to be conflicts when political and economic structured of the state failed. Conflict reporting in television news is always tied to political and economic problems ranging from injustice, exploitation and inequity especially in the developing countries. This theory also finds similarity with Systemic Theory. Systemic theory provides a socio-structural explanation for the emergence of violent social conflicts. The position of this theory is that reason(s) for any social conflict lie in the social context within which it occurs. Conflict arises when the socio-cultural and economic systems like cherished values and traditions breakdown. The breakdown of the socio-cultural and economic systems in Nigeria has resulted to various conflicts.

Further, the two theories above leads to frustration aggression postulation, as put together by psychologists John Dollard and his colleagues in 1939. In an attempt to explain aggression, scholars point to the wide difference between promise and performance paradigm (PPP) by government or organisations and individuals in society. Failure of these social promises or expectations invites aggression from members of the society.

Conflict reporting in television is also contingent upon the agenda-setting postulations. The mass media pre-determine what issues are regarded as important at a given time. McQuail (2005:512) says the core idea of the theory is "that the news media indicate to the public what the main issues of the day are and this is reflected in what the public perceives as the main issues". The elements involved in agenda-setting, according to Folarin (2002:95) are: the quantity or frequency of reporting; the prominence given to the reports and the degree of conflict generated in the reports. By frequently reporting of conflicts in television, an agenda 'fear' arises.

In modern society, audiences are increasingly dependent on media to understand the social world around and to act meaningfully and effective in society, to find fantasy and escape or diversion. The level of dependency is based on the degree of change and conflict present in society, and as reported by the media. Conflict as a social phenomenon is presented in television news based on what the media consider and select-as important news. The degree of this importance is based on audience dependency on television for news and other information. In all, these theories indicate that television is a major source of news and information to many Nigerians. Hence, public perceptions of conflict reporting in television news are perhaps, contingent upon what the media present to us.

RESEARCH METHOD

The study adopted the survey research method as the research design. A survey method for this study is quite appropriate in the measurement of public opinions and attitudes. The population for the study was restricted to Warri South in Delta State, Nigeria. The town has a population of 311,970 (National Population Commission, 2006 census in conjuncture with National Bureau of Statistics. See also www.population.gov.ng and www.nigerianstat.gov.ng). Two hundred (200) sample size was chosen for this study, all though, with no empirical reasons. This represents 0.064%. The study adopted the simple random sampling technique which allows respondents being drawn by unit by equal chance.

METHOD OF DATA ANALYSIS

The technique employed to analyses the obtained data are descriptive statistics of frequency count, mean and chi-square to test the hypothesis. Responses to the questionnaire were pooled, edited and scored. Nominal values were assigned to the items according to scales. The questionnaire was designed in Likert scale in matrix box. It provides the respondent with the options of: Strongly Agree (SA), Agree (A), Undecided (UD), Disagree (D) and Strongly disagree (SD). To determine the mean or benchmark for each values in Table one, we add the values of 5-1 scale or point (5+4-3+2+1=15) and divided by the scale 5 (15÷5=3). Therefore, 3.0 serves as a benchmark for acceptance or rejection to the question asked. The point of decision

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(accepted or rejected) is represented by \bar{x} in the table. That is, if response is 3.0 or exceeds 3.0 it is accepted but if it is below 3.0, it is rejected.

Further, to analysis the concept of 'perception', we employed the semantic differential scaling of 7-1 point, and chi-square. The semantic differential scaling is to ascertain respondent perceptions of the roles of television news in conflict reporting. The items provided in this table are: 'important', 'proactive', 'effective coverage', 'peace initiatives', 'fair reports', 'convincing' and 'change-inducing'. In the analysis, an item that exceeds the benchmark is on the positive side (agree options) but if below, the negative (disagree options) applied. The semantic differential scaling, the benchmark (point of decision) is 4.0. This is obtained as same above. Chi-square was used to test the hypothesis. The formula adopted was $\chi^2 = \frac{\sum (f_o - f_e)^2}{f_e} = \frac{\sum (f_o - f_e)^2}{n \times \bar{x} \times cmf} \div G$

The reliability and validity of the instrument was measured through a pre-test questionnaire or a pilot study. Two hundred (200) copies of the pre-test questionnaire were administered to respondents but they were not used for the main study. The Guttman scale of coefficient of reproducibility was adopted to measure the reliability of the instrument. A total of 15 errors were observed, the instrument yielded reliability coefficient value of 0.92 or 92%, an indication of internal consistency and validity (see Asika, 1991:65). Wimmer and Dominick (2003), Osuala (2005) and Ifegbesan (2009) believe that a pilot study makes the instrument appropriate.

RESULTS

The sample (n=200) consist of 147 (73.5%) males and 53 (26.5%) females. The age ranges are from 18 years and above.

Table1: Respondents Perception of the Roles of Television News in Conflict Reporting
What are your perceptions of the roles of TV news in conflict reporting in Nigeria?

Items	Strongly agree	Fairly agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Fairly disagree	Strongly disagree	Items	Total score	Mean score
Positive (+)	7	6	5	4	3	2	1	Negative (-)		
Important	20	12	90	20	21	15	22	Unimportant	200	4.3
Proactive	13	20	80	1	20	32	34	Un-proactive	200	3.8
Effective coverage	13	23	77	4	9	64	10	Ineffective coverage	200	3.9
Peace initiatives	39	20	59	21	22	28	11	Not Peace initiatives	200	4.5
Fair reports	11	13	87	9	13	19	48	Unfair reports	200	3.5
Convincing reports	96	21	11	20	1	30	21	Unconvincing reports	200	5.1
Change inducing	23	29	47	35	22	21	23	Not change-inducing	200	4.2

From the results gathered, respondents see the roles of television news in conflict reporting as important to the public. The media are part of offering peace initiatives and are capable of inducing change by their convincing reports. While these roles are important, respondents argue that television news reports on conflict have not been proactive in identifying earlier signs or warnings of conflict. The data also shows that television news in Nigeria is ineffective in their coverage of conflict. In other words, poor coverage news makes their report unfair. From the finding, we concur that the roles of television news on conflict reporting are packaged according to the media initiatives. Obviously, details of conflict especially violent ones are minimizing on television.

Table: 2 Ho: Conflict reporting in television news is not significant to public perceptions of conflict.
(Expected frequency in bracket)

S/ N	ITEMS	SA	A	UD	D	SD	\bar{X} / Total	Decision
1	Because of the effects of sounds and sights (pictures), the public believe so much in television news and its information.	102 (60)	63 (82)	- (18.5)	25 (29.5)	10 (10)	4.11 (200)	Accept
2	Television news coverage on conflict does not give the true reflection or happening of the conflict.	48 (60)	124 (82)	12 (18.5)	12 (29.5)	4 (10)	4.0 (200)	Accept
3	The Nigerian mass media enjoy reporting conflict because it sells, and it does attract the public.	68 (60)	84 (82)	20 (18.5)	20 (29.5)	8 (10)	3.92 (200)	Accept
4	Conflict reporting in television news is not significant to the respondent perceptions of as a social reality.	84 (60)	84 (82)	20 (18.5)	12 (29.5)	0 (10)	4.2 (200)	Accept
5	Conflict is reported the way it happens.	14 (60)	20 (82)	20 (18.5)	110 (29.5)	36 (10)	2.33 (200)	Reject
6	The news media are capable of provoking public minds in the manner they report conflict especially when offensive and provocative comments or language are used.	52 (60)	116 (82)	24 (18.5)	8 (29.5)	0 (10)	4.06 (200)	Accept
7	There is nothing wrong in the way violent conflicts are reported in television news.	52 (60)	80 (82)	36 (18.5)	20 (29.5)	12 (10)	3.7 (200)	Accept
	TOTAL	420	571	132	207	70	1,400	

Decision Rule: Accept Ho if χ^2 computed is \geq table value but reject Ho if otherwise.

Computed value = 582.4

Critical value $\chi^2_{24, 0.05} = 36.4$

Significance level = 0.05

Calculation of degree of freedom

Df = (R-1) (C-1)

Df = (5-1) (7-1)

Df = (4)(6) = 24

Decision: Based on the decision rule that we accept Ho if computed value is greater than critical value and if not, the otherwise. We therefore, accept Ho since computed value (582.4) is greater than critical value (36.4). In this wise, conflict reporting in television news is not significant to public perceptions of conflict as a social reality.

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

From the data gathered, the following findings emerged. Respondents as shown in the study agreed that television news is a major source of information to many Nigerians. We concur in the first table above that the public perceived the roles of television news in conflict reporting as important. Because of its effects of sounds and pictures, television news is convincing and appealing. As obtained in the study the Nigerian mass media enjoy reporting conflict because it sells, and it does attract the public. In complement to this, Botes (1996) in Owens-Ibie (2002: 32) notes that the media are naturally attracted to conflict. Evidently, respondents believe that television news coverage on conflict does not give the true reflection or happening of the conflict. Hence respondents in Table 1 believe that media reports on conflict in Nigeria are not balance. This also, as we see in the study, are capable of provoking public minds in the manner they report conflict especially when offensive and provocative comments or language are used. In the same vein, some

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respondents believe that there is nothing wrong in the way violent conflicts are reported on television news. To them, the media should therefore, tell it as it is so far it is fair and balance. While some media like NTA would simplify the complexities of the conflict by providing peace initiatives, others like CHANNEL in Nigeria and CNN believe in telling it as it is, perhaps intensifying the conflict? Eti (2009:6) had argued that news media especially the television "establishes a culture of fear which they perpetuate by portraying a vast array of threats".

Using hypothesis to test the question, we concluded that conflict reporting in television news is not significant to public perceptions of conflict as a social reality. In line with this, McQuail (2005) asked if news is a reflection or distortion of reality. To him, the media provide the materials for reality construction, and the media cannot objectively report on social reality all facts are interpretations" (p.102). Invariably, people have different perceptions of the way conflicts are reported on television, and this affects their views about media roles in conflict reporting. The dimension the media report conflict may generate public debates. This finds endorsement with our earlier postulation of agenda setting theory. In view of this, Baran (2002: 375) observes that the public are influenced by the attitudes and perceptions presented by the mass media.

Arising from the findings therefore, we submit that the media play roles in the structuring of perception of conflict by regularly manufacturing and mirroring dissent and consent voices. Television news coverage of social conflict takes different dimensions namely simplification of the complexities of the conflict, intensity and solvability of conflict. These dimensions could either escalate or de-escalate conflict depending on gate keeping or agenda-setting postulations of the media especially on conflict reporting. Because the public so much believe in television due to its images and sounds, people perceptions of conflict are determined by what they see.

CONCLUSION

Conflict has always been attractive to the mass media. At the heart of conflict reporting in television news is the reporter and editor perceptual dimensions or perspectives. The media are reflections of events in the society and they play roles in the structuring of audience perception. Public perceptions of conflict reporting in television news are therefore affected or determined by gatekeeping and agenda-setting postulations arising from media dependency postulations. However, while violent conflict reports on television may trigger fear and tension, it may not reflect conflict reporting in television news as a social reality.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Arising from this study, the following recommendations but not limited to the ones below are made.

Journalists or television reporters should not allow their personal views and emotions as well as ethnic, religious political and ideological sentiments to influence their reports on conflicts as such may call to question the credibility of the reports and put their lives at risk. In all cases the principle of fairness and accuracy should apply. Television reporters should not be allowed to be used for propaganda nor use vulgar language during conflict reporting. They should avoid financial inducement to influence reports. Journalists should have adequate knowledge of the history, politics, and geography of the area where they are covering conflicts. They should also avail themselves of a wide range of expert sources to strengthen and validate the process of crisis reporting so that all stories can be put in proper context.

Media owners should not allow their interest to undermine the principles of fairness, objectivity and diversity in coverage of events. Media owners should provide adequate resources and equipment as well as insurance cover for reporters covering conflict assignments. Media employers therefore should earn the loyalty and commitment of journalists by ensuring job security.

Reporters need a legal instrument that will empower and enable them to have access to official information during conflict situations. In this regard, the Freedom of Information (FOI) bill is an essential instrument to backed reporters. The government, through its relevant agencies, should regularly brief the public whenever the nation or any area is involved in a conflict. Government should as well, provide adequate security including insurance cover for reporters involved. In all conflict situations, government should always react promptly to early signals of possible outbreak of hostilities.

In all, and importantly, television news coverage of conflict should not in any way aggravate conflict nor capable of inflaming passions, nor seem to take sides with any of the parties involved. Television reporters should equally educate people about conflict resolution processes. In other words, they should adopt the peace media initiatives.

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