Research Article

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Mediating Conflict versus Peacebuilding through the Lens of Journalism: A Nigerian Perspective on Conflict-Sensitive Reporting

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Abstract

This study delves into the essential role of media in fostering dialogue and resolving intercultural conflicts within the complex socio-political landscape in Nigeria. As one of the largest media markets in the world, Nigeria presents a unique opportunity to explore how both traditional and digital media influence the dynamics of conflict. The rapid rise of social media has reshaped conflict escalation patterns, creating both challenges and opportunities for effective conflict management. This paper underscores the duality of media as a driver of conflict and a potential peace mediator, emphasising the need for strategic usage. Drawing on contemporary case studies, the analysis demonstrates how media platforms have shaped cultural clashes and political protests. Key recommendations include promoting media literacy, instituting regulatory frameworks to address inflammatory content, and implementing journalist training programmes aimed at sensitive conflict reporting. Ultimately, this study highlights the critical role of the media in bridging cultural gaps and advancing sustainable development through ethical and informed reporting.

Keywords: *conflict-sensitive journalism, peacebuilding, intercultural dialogue, conflict Resolution, ethnic conflict, cultural diversity*

1. Introduction

Nigeria, with its vast cultural diversity spanning over 300 ethnic groups, has experienced a turbulent history of ethnic and religious conflicts, including the Nigerian Civil War (1967-1970). Despite policies designed to promote unity and equity – such as the introduction of indigenous languages in

education and the establishment of the National Youth Service Corps – tensions remain pervasive. These conflicts are often rooted in perceived marginalisation and cultural disparities, manifesting in various forms. Examples include the ongoing agitation for Biafran independence in the southeast, violent disputes between Fulani herders and Middle Belt farmers, and persistent demands for restructuring the Nigerian state. These disputes, often exacerbated by political, religious, and cultural factors, highlight the deeply entrenched divisions in the nation (Adisa, 2015; Dunu, Ugbo, & Bebenimibo, 2018a).

Within this context, the role of the media is pivotal. Nigerian media outlets bear the responsibility not only of reporting these conflicts but also of doing so in ways that foster peace and mutual understanding. Conflict-sensitive journalism, which involves presenting news with consideration for its potential to exacerbate tensions, is essential. By adopting this approach, the media can help mitigate conflicts, educate the public on the importance of tolerance and coexistence, and provide platforms for diverse voices to engage in constructive dialogue.

Moreover, the media wields significant influence over public opinion and government policy. By shedding light on the underlying causes of conflicts and advocating for solutions, media platforms can pressure authorities to act decisively while holding them accountable. This includes reporting transparently on government efforts to manage conflicts and promoting collaboration between the state, civil society, and the public.

Recent scholarship has increasingly emphasised the value of conflict-sensitive journalism as a tool for peacebuilding in Nigeria and other regions prone to unrest. Scholars argue that media practitioners must transcend traditional reportage to adopt a proactive role that prioritises intercultural dialogue and mutual respect (Aliyu & Haruna, 2021; Ekeanyanwu & Obia, 2018). Recognised internationally since the Universal Declaration on Cultural Diversity (2001), intercultural dialogue remains a cornerstone of efforts to build peace and security by encouraging understanding across cultural divides (Adisa, 2012).

Despite its potential, Nigerian media efforts in conflict-sensitive journalism have been inconsistent, with criticisms of biased and sensationalist reporting exacerbating tensions (Adisa, 2012; Dunu et al., 2018a). This inconsistency highlights the urgent need for enhanced journalist training and incentives to adopt practices that prioritise conflict resolution. By equipping journalists with the tools to engage in responsible and balanced reporting, the media can play a transformative role in de-escalating disputes and preventing future crises.

This paper explores the nexus between conflict-sensitive journalism and intercultural dialogue as mechanisms for mediating conflicts in Nigeria. It argues that by embracing these approaches, Nigerian media can significantly contribute to national peacebuilding efforts. Through a detailed examination of recent conflicts and media interventions, the study provides insights and actionable recommendations for journalists, policymakers, and other stakeholders committed to fostering a more harmonious society.

Following this introductory section, the paper is organised into four comprehensive sections that systematically explore the topic. The first section, 'Related Theories,' provides a theoretical framework underpinning the study, drawing on relevant perspectives to contextualise the role of media in conflict-sensitive journalism and peacebuilding. This is followed by the 'Concepts, Problems, and Issues' section, which delves into key terminologies, examines the challenges faced by the Nigerian media landscape, and identifies critical issues that hinder effective conflict resolution through media. The third section, 'Solutions, Examples, and the Way Forward,' offers practical recommendations and explores successful case studies to illustrate how media can be harnessed to promote peace and intercultural understanding. This section outlines actionable strategies that journalists, policymakers, and stakeholders can adopt to address existing challenges. Finally, the paper concludes with the 'Conclusion' section, which synthesises the key findings, reiterates the importance of conflict-sensitive journalism in Nigeria, highlights the broader implications for media practice and policy and offers recommendations.

2. Related Theories

2.1 Theoretical Frameworks on Media and Conflict

Several theories explore the intersection of media and conflict, though this paper focuses on those with direct relevance.

2.1.1 Liberal Reflection Theories: Media as a Mirror of Reality

The liberal perspective is a predominant global viewpoint, conceptualising the media as a mirror that reflects, rather than shapes, societal reality. This theory posits that the media are mere transmitters of reality, with the content they deliver representing an accurate depiction of the world. According to this view, journalists possess an inherent and honed instinct for discerning what is significant versus what is trivial, ensuring that news serves as a reliable record of events. The premise is that true professionals adhere to rigorous standards and practices, maintaining neutrality and accuracy in their reporting. Thus, the media's role is seen as a faithful reflection of societal happenings (Adisa, 2012; Dunu et al., 2018b).

2.1.2 Radical Theoretical Approaches: Media as a Constructive Force

In contrast, radical theoretical approaches challenge the notion that media merely reflect reality. Critics argue that news is shaped by organisational processes, human interactions and institutional constraints rather than being an objective mirror of reality. This perspective highlights the manner in which media content is influenced by public relations strategies, journalistic practices and the operational needs of media organisations (Adisa, 2012).

Radical functionalism, a subset of this view, asserts that the media do not passively mirror societal consensus but actively construct and reinforce it. This approach contends that media support existing power structures by consolidating dominant forces and marginalising opposition. It also emphasises that the media are powerful actors in structuring our understanding of the world by selectively highlighting certain realities while excluding others. The media's role in shaping perceptions has been evidenced in conflicts such as those in Rwanda, Nigeria (e.g., the Zangon Karaf conflict in Kaduna State, the Shagamu conflict in Oyo State) and former Yugoslavia. This perspective contrasts with the liberal view by highlighting the media's active role in creating and sustaining social narratives (Adisa, 2012).

These differing theoretical frameworks illustrate two contrasting views on media power: one where the media reflect audience perceptions and another where the media actively shape them, both examined in this paper.

3. Concepts, Problems, and Issues

3.1 Brief Definition of Key Terms

- *Conflict*: Conflict is an activity which takes place between conscious, though not necessarily rational, beings. It is defined in terms of the wants, needs, or obligations of the parties involved (Mikkelsen, & Clegg, 2018).
- *Conflict-Sensitive Reporting*: Conflict-sensitive journalism aims to avoid contributing to ongoing tensions by providing balanced coverage that reflects multiple viewpoints. This approach encourages journalists to dig deeper into the historical and social contexts behind conflicts, rather than merely reporting on surface-level events (Lohner, Neverla, & Banjac, 2019).
- *Journalism*: Journalism refers to the systematic gathering, filtering, and circulating of

information deemed to be news and in the public interest. It is a social practice, an institution, and a form of memory (Vos, 2018).

- *Media*: Media refers to the various channels of communication used to disseminate information to the public. This includes traditional forms such as newspapers, television, and radio, as well as digital platforms like social media and online news sites. Media plays a crucial role in shaping public opinion and providing a platform for public discourse (Kaplan, & Haenlein, 2018).
- *Peacebuilding*: Peacebuilding refers to a variety of measures aimed at solidifying peace and avoiding future conflict in a society, undertaken by actors such as government agencies and civil society organisations (Melin, 2021).

3.2 Conceptualising Conflict

Conflict is an inextricable aspect of the human experience, one that can either foster growth or wreak havoc, depending on how it is understood and managed. The concept of conflict is deeply embedded within the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goal 16, which aims to "promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all and build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels" (United Nations, 2015). The rising incidence of conflict worldwide underscores the urgency of adopting strategies that mitigate its destructive impacts. From the turmoil in the Middle East (e.g., Syria, Lebanon and Israel) to the persistent unrest in African nations (e.g., Nigeria, Democratic Republic of Congo, Burkina Fasso, Somalia, Ethiopia and Sudan and South Sudan), conflict is becoming an increasingly prevalent and destabilising force in global affairs (Global Conflict Tracker, 2023).

Conflict, as defined by contemporary scholars, involves a situation where groups with differing interests – be they tribal, ethnic, religious, or socioeconomic – oppose each other in pursuit of incompatible objectives. This understanding of conflict aligns with Coser's (1956) seminal definition of conflict as "a struggle over values and claims to scarce status, power and resources, in which the aims of the opponents are to neutralise, injure, or eliminate their rivals." More recently, Morton Deutsch and Peter T. Coleman have elaborated on this by emphasising that conflict is not merely a struggle but a dynamic process involving psychological, social and structural dimensions (Deutsch & Coleman, 2021).

Conflict can be categorised as intrapersonal, interpersonal, or collective, reflecting its broad applicability to various social contexts (Adisa, 2012; Brahm, 2003). For instance, intrapersonal conflict may arise from internal struggles within an individual, while interpersonal conflict typically occurs between two or more individuals. On a larger scale, collective conflicts can involve entire communities or nations, often fuelled by factors such as economic inequality, religious intolerance and ideological differences (Adisa, 2012; Dunu, Udeze & Ohi, 2018b).

A significant body of literature explores the multifaceted nature of conflict, recognising it as both an inevitable and potentially transformative phenomenon. Theorists like Karl Marx and Herbert Spencer have argued that conflict serves as a catalyst for social change, particularly in contexts where power imbalances exist. Marx, in particular, posited that social conflict is a necessary means for oppressed groups to challenge the status quo and assert their rights (Marx & Engels, 1848). However, while conflict can lead to positive social transformations, it can also have devastating consequences if not effectively managed. The ongoing conflict in the Tigray region of Ethiopia, which has resulted in severe humanitarian crises and the displacement of millions, exemplifies the destructive potential of unresolved conflicts (United Nations, 2022).

3.2.1 Understanding the Phases of Conflict

Conflicts do not emerge spontaneously; they evolve through distinct phases, and recognising these phases is crucial for effective conflict management. The latent phase of conflict is marked by

underlying tensions that have yet to surface. These tensions may stem from unaddressed grievances or competing interests. When a triggering event occurs – such as a political dispute or economic crisis – the latent conflict can escalate into an open confrontation (Adisa, 2012; Brahm, 2003). The case of the Sudanese conflict, which escalated following disputes over natural resources, illustrates how latent tensions can quickly become overt conflicts (International Crisis Group, 2021a).

Escalation, often fuelled by frustration and unmet needs, can lead to a destructive cycle of violence. Media can play a critical role in this phase, either by exacerbating tensions through sensationalist reporting or by promoting dialogue and understanding. The Rwandan Genocide of 1994 is a tragic example of how media can contribute to conflict escalation; hate radio broadcasts incited violence that led to the deaths of nearly 800,000 people (Thompson, 2007). Conversely, media can also serve as a tool for de-escalation by promoting peacebuilding initiatives and encouraging negotiation (UNESCO, 2023).

De-escalation and resolution are critical phases in the conflict cycle. A conflict may reach a stalemate, where neither side can achieve a decisive victory, often creating an opportunity for negotiation and settlement. The peace process in Colombia, which culminated in the 2016 peace agreement with the FARC rebels, exemplifies how a stalemate can be transformed into a negotiated settlement (Bouvier, 2020). Effective peacebuilding efforts in this phase aim to address the root causes of conflict and rebuild relationships, fostering long-term reconciliation and stability (Dunu et al., 2018a).

3.2.2 Typology of Conflict

To understand the complexities of conflict, it is essential to explore its various typologies. Singh (2014) categorises conflict into three primary types: primordialism, instrumentalism and constructivism. Primordialism attributes conflict to ancient hatreds and deeply ingrained animosities between different ethnic or religious groups. The enduring hostility between the Hutus and Tutsis in Rwanda, which led to the 1994 genocide, is often cited as an example of primordial conflict (Prunier, 1995).

Instrumentalism, on the other hand, views conflict as a tool used by elites to manipulate and exploit ethnic or religious identities for political or economic gain. The manipulation of ethnic divisions by political leaders in Kenya during the 2007-2008 post-election violence illustrates how instrumentalist strategies can lead to widespread conflict (Klopp, 2010).

Constructivism offers a more nuanced perspective, suggesting that identities are socially constructed and therefore malleable. Constructivist theories emphasise the role of social, cultural and historical contexts in shaping identities and conflicts. This approach recognises that conflicts are not inevitable but are influenced by the ways in which societies construct and interpret their differences (Wendt, 1999).

Given the complex and multifaceted nature of conflict, it is crucial to adopt a comprehensive approach to conflict analysis and resolution. Conflict cannot be attributed to a single cause but rather to a confluence of factors, including historical grievances, socio-economic disparities and political manipulation. Effective conflict management requires a deep understanding of these underlying dynamics and a commitment to addressing the root causes of discord.

3.2.3 Towards Practical Solutions

Addressing conflict in a practical and sustainable manner involves more than just theoretical analysis; it requires actionable strategies that can be implemented on the ground. One of the most effective approaches to conflict resolution is the promotion of inclusive dialogue that brings together all stakeholders, including those who are marginalised or disenfranchised. In Nigeria, for example, the ongoing conflict in the Niger Delta has been mitigated through initiatives that involve local communities in decision-making processes and ensure that their voices are heard (International

Crisis Group, 2022).

Additionally, the role of media in conflict resolution cannot be overstated. Media organisations must adopt responsible reporting practices that avoid sensationalism and instead focus on fostering understanding and reconciliation. Training journalists in conflict-sensitive reporting and promoting media literacy among the public are critical steps in this direction (UNESCO, 2023).

Ultimately, the goal of conflict resolution should be to create societies that are resilient to conflict and capable of resolving disputes peacefully. This requires not only addressing the immediate causes of conflict but also building the social, economic and political institutions that can sustain peace over the long term. By focusing on practical solutions and promoting a culture of dialogue and inclusivity, it is possible to move beyond conflict and towards a future of lasting peace and stability.

3.3 Application of Conflict Concepts in Contemporary Contexts

Conflict remains an ever-present reality in today's world, with its dynamics and implications evolving alongside global political, economic and social changes. The relevance of conflict, its phases and typologies are increasingly significant in understanding current global crises and developing effective strategies for conflict resolution.

3.3.1 The Persistent Nature of Conflict

In the contemporary world, conflict manifests in various forms, from geopolitical tensions between nations to social unrest within states. The ongoing conflict in Ukraine, which erupted in 2014 and escalated significantly in 2022, exemplifies the destructive potential of unresolved disputes between nations. This conflict has not only resulted in widespread human suffering but has also disrupted global economic stability, highlighting the interconnectedness of modern conflicts (Snyder, 2022).

The Syrian civil war, now in its second decade, illustrates the devastating consequences of internal conflicts fuelled by a complex interplay of ethnic, religious and political factors. This war has led to the displacement of millions of people and has exacerbated regional instability, with spill over effects affecting neighbouring countries and beyond (Phillips, 2021). These conflicts underscore the continued relevance of understanding the phases of conflict, from latent tensions to open confrontation and the critical need for effective conflict resolution mechanisms.

3.3.2 Phases of Conflict in Modern Crises

Understanding the phases of conflict is crucial for policymakers and peacebuilders in today's world. The latent phase, often marked by underlying social, economic, or political grievances, can be seen in many of the recent social movements and protests worldwide. The 2020 Black Lives Matter protests in the United States, for example, were fuelled by longstanding racial injustices and inequalities that had simmered beneath the surface for years (Taylor, 2021). The transition from latent discontent to open conflict was triggered by specific incidents of police brutality, illustrating how latent tensions can erupt into widespread social unrest.

The escalation phase, where tensions rise and conflict intensifies, is evident in the ongoing situation in Myanmar. Following the military coup in February 2021, the country has experienced severe escalations in violence, with widespread protests and armed resistance against the junta. This has led to a protracted conflict with devastating humanitarian consequences, highlighting the critical need for early intervention and de-escalation strategies (International Crisis Group, 2021b).

The de-escalation and resolution phases are equally relevant today, as seen in the peace process in Colombia. The 2016 peace agreement between the Colombian government and the FARC rebels represents a significant achievement in conflict resolution. However, the implementation of the agreement has faced numerous challenges, demonstrating that the resolution phase is not the end of the conflict but rather a transition towards sustainable peace that requires continuous effort

(Bouvier, 2020).

3.3.3 *Typology of Conflict in Current Global Affairs*

The typologies of conflict – primordialism, instrumentalism and constructivism – remain pertinent in analysing contemporary conflicts. For instance, the Rohingya crisis in Myanmar can be partly understood through the lens of primordialism, where deep-seated ethnic and religious animosities have fuelled violence against the Rohingya Muslim minority. This conflict has roots in historical grievances, which is exacerbated by current political dynamics, illustrating the enduring relevance of primordialist explanations (Cheesman, 2017).

Instrumentalism is evident in the manipulation of ethnic and religious identities for political gain, as seen in the case of India's recent communal tensions. Political leaders have been accused of exploiting religious divisions to consolidate power, leading to increased violence and polarisation between Hindu and Muslim communities (Jaffrelot, 2021). Such instrumentalist strategies highlight the dangers of using identity as a tool for political ends, often resulting in long-term societal fractures.

Constructivism, which emphasises the socially constructed nature of identities and conflicts, offers insights into the potential for conflict transformation. The Northern Ireland peace process, culminating in the Good Friday Agreement of 1998, demonstrates how entrenched identities and hostilities can be redefined through inclusive dialogue and negotiation. This constructivist approach to conflict resolution has been pivotal in reducing violence and fostering reconciliation in a region long plagued by sectarian conflict (Guelke, 2019).

3.3.4 *Contemporary Solutions to Conflict*

In addressing modern conflicts, practical and sustainable solutions must focus on promoting dialogue, inclusivity and responsible media practices. The role of media in conflict is particularly crucial in the digital age, where misinformation and hate speech can rapidly escalate tensions. The recent conflict in Ethiopia's Tigray region has been exacerbated by inflammatory social media content, underscoring the need for robust mechanisms to monitor and counteract harmful online narratives (Yates, 2022).

Moreover, inclusive dialogue that involves all stakeholders, including marginalised groups, is essential for sustainable conflict resolution. The peacebuilding efforts in the Central African Republic, which have included a broad range of actors from local communities to international organisations, offer a model for how inclusivity can lead to more durable peace agreements (International Crisis Group, 2020). These efforts highlight the importance of addressing not only the immediate causes of conflict but also the underlying structural issues that fuel it.

3.4 *Application of Conflict Concepts in the Nigerian Context*

Conflict in Nigeria is a multifaceted and persistent issue, deeply embedded in the country's socio-political landscape. The concepts and phases of conflict, as well as various typologies, are highly relevant to understanding and addressing the complex challenges that Nigeria faces today. From ethnic and religious tensions to political and economic disputes, conflict remains a significant barrier to Nigeria's development and stability.

3.4.1 *The Enduring Nature of Conflict in Nigeria*

Nigeria's history is marked by numerous conflicts, many of which continue to influence the current socio-political environment. The Niger Delta conflict, which has spanned several decades, exemplifies the ongoing struggle over resource control, environmental degradation and economic

marginalisation in the oil-rich region. Despite various efforts at peacebuilding, including the 2009 amnesty programme, the underlying grievances remain unresolved, leading to periodic outbreaks of violence and militant activity (Osaghae, 2015).

The Boko Haram insurgency in the North-East region, which began in 2009, is another example of the persistent nature of conflict in Nigeria. This insurgency, rooted in religious extremism and socio-economic deprivation, has led to a humanitarian crisis with millions displaced and thousands killed. The government's counter-insurgency efforts have had limited success, with the conflict evolving into a broader regional crisis involving neighbouring countries such as Chad, Niger and Cameroon (Walker, 2016). These conflicts underscore the need for a deep understanding of the phases of conflict and the importance of addressing the root causes to achieve lasting peace.

3.4.2 Phases of Conflict in Nigeria

The phases of conflict are particularly evident in Nigeria's socio-political crises. The latent phase, characterised by underlying tensions and grievances, can be seen in the growing discontent among various ethnic groups over issues of marginalisation, resource allocation and political representation. The ongoing agitation for Biafra's independence, led by groups such as the Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB), is a reflection of longstanding ethnic grievances that have yet to be adequately addressed (Onuoha, 2017). This latent tension, if not carefully managed, has the potential to escalate into open conflict, as seen in the past during the Nigerian Civil War, 1967-1970.

The escalation phase is evident in the frequent clashes between herders and farmers across the Middle Belt region. These conflicts, driven by competition over land and water resources, have escalated into violent confrontations with devastating consequences for local communities. The failure to address these issues during the latent phase has led to a cycle of violence, displacement and retaliatory attacks, exacerbating the conflict and making resolution more challenging (Blench, 2017).

In terms of de-escalation and resolution, Nigeria has had mixed success. The 2009 amnesty programme in the Niger Delta represents a partial success in de-escalating the conflict in that region. However, the long-term sustainability of this peace remains uncertain, as the root causes of the conflict, such as environmental degradation and economic inequality, have not been fully addressed (Ibaba & Ikelegbe, 2010). This highlights the importance of comprehensive approaches to conflict resolution that go beyond short-term solutions.

3.4.3 Typology of Conflict in Nigeria

The typologies of conflict – primordialism, instrumentalism and constructivism – offer valuable insights into Nigeria's diverse conflicts. Primordialism is particularly relevant in the context of ethnic and religious conflicts, where deep-seated identities and historical grievances play a central role. The recurring violence in Jos, Plateau State, is often framed in primordial terms, as it involves long-standing tensions between Christian and Muslim communities over land and political control (Krause, 2011). These conflicts are deeply rooted in historical narratives and identity politics, making them particularly challenging to resolve.

Instrumentalism is evident in the way political elites in Nigeria manipulate ethnic and religious identities to achieve their objectives. During elections, politicians often exploit these identities to mobilise support, leading to heightened tensions and sometimes violence. The 2011 post-election violence in Northern Nigeria, which erupted after the presidential election results were announced, is a stark example of how instrumentalist strategies can lead to widespread conflict (Adibe, 2012). This use of identity for political gain undermines national unity and exacerbates existing divisions.

Constructivism, with its focus on the socially constructed nature of identities, provides a framework for understanding how conflict in Nigeria can be transformed. Efforts to promote national unity and reconciliation, such as the National Youth Service Corps (NYSC) programme, aim to foster a sense of shared identity among young Nigerians. Although the programme has had some success in

promoting inter-ethnic understanding, its impact has been limited by the broader socio-political context, where ethnic and religious identities remain highly politicised (Adebanwi, 2014). This suggests that while constructivist approaches have potential, they must be supported by broader structural changes.

3.4.4 Contemporary Solutions to Conflict in Nigeria

Addressing conflict in Nigeria requires a multi-faceted approach that includes promoting dialogue, inclusivity and responsible media practices. The media plays a critical role in either exacerbating or mitigating conflict. In recent years, the rise of social media has introduced new challenges, with the spread of misinformation and hate speech contributing to tensions, particularly during elections and other politically sensitive periods (Iwuoha, 2019). Strengthening media regulation and promoting responsible journalism are essential steps towards reducing the role of the media in fuelling conflict.

Inclusive dialogue is also crucial for sustainable conflict resolution. The ongoing peace process in the North-East, which involves not only the government and military but also local communities, civil society and international organisations, offers a model for how inclusive approaches can contribute to lasting peace (International Crisis Group, 2021c). However, for these efforts to be successful, they must address the underlying socio-economic conditions that contribute to conflict, such as poverty, unemployment and inequality.

3.5 Application of Conflict Concepts in the Nigerian Context

Conflict in Nigeria remains a deeply entrenched issue, manifesting in various forms across different regions. The concepts and phases of conflict, alongside various typologies, are crucial in understanding the persistent challenges Nigeria faces today. From ethnic and religious tensions to political, economic and criminal disputes, conflict continues to hinder Nigeria's development and stability.

3.5.1 The Enduring Nature of Conflict in Nigeria

Nigeria's history is replete with conflicts, many of which persist, shaping the current socio-political environment. The Niger Delta conflict, rooted in struggles over resource control, environmental degradation and economic marginalisation, continues to simmer despite efforts like the 2009 amnesty programme (Osaghae, 2015). The Boko Haram insurgency in the North-East, which began in 2009, exemplifies the persistent nature of conflict driven by religious extremism and socio-economic deprivation, resulting in a prolonged humanitarian crisis (Walker, 2016).

In the North-West, the rise of armed banditry and kidnapping has introduced a new dimension to Nigeria's security challenges. These activities, which involve violent attacks on communities, mass abductions and extortion, have escalated into a full-blown security crisis, destabilising large swathes of the region (Bello & Olaiya, 2020). The banditry problem, like the Niger Delta and Boko Haram conflicts, reflects deeper issues of poverty, governance failures and the proliferation of small arms, which fuel the cycle of violence.

3.5.2 Phases of Conflict in Nigeria

The phases of conflict are evident in Nigeria's socio-political crises. The latent phase, characterised by underlying tensions and grievances, is visible in the growing discontent across various ethnic and regional groups over issues of marginalisation, resource allocation and political representation. For example, the resurgence of Biafran separatism, led by groups like the Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB), highlights unresolved ethnic grievances (Onuoha, 2017).

The escalation phase can be observed in the frequent clashes between herders and farmers in

the Middle Belt, driven by competition over land and water resources, which have resulted in violent confrontations and significant loss of life (Blench, 2017). In the North-West, the escalation of armed banditry and kidnapping has reached alarming levels, with entire communities displaced and local economies devastated by the insecurity (Bello & Olaiya, 2020). The failure to address these issues during the latent phase has exacerbated the conflict, making resolution more challenging.

De-escalation and resolution phases in Nigeria have had varying degrees of success. For instance, while the Niger Delta amnesty programme reduced militant activities, it did not fully address the root causes of the conflict, such as environmental degradation and economic inequality, leaving the peace fragile (Ibaba & Ikelegbe, 2010). In the North-West, efforts to curb banditry, such as military operations and peace accords with bandit leaders, have had limited success, often disrupted by mutual distrust and the absence of long-term solutions (International Crisis Group, 2020).

3.5.3 Typology of Conflict in Nigeria

The typologies of conflict – primordialism, instrumentalism and constructivism – are pertinent in analysing Nigeria's diverse conflicts. Primordialism is relevant in ethnic and religious conflicts, where deep-seated identities and historical grievances play central roles. The violence in Jos, Plateau State, involving Christian and Muslim communities, often reflects primordial tensions over land and political control (Krause, 2011).

Instrumentalism is evident in how political elites manipulate ethnic and religious identities for personal gain. For example, the rise of banditry in the North-West is partially attributed to the manipulation of local grievances by political actors who exploit these tensions for political or economic gain, further fuelling the conflict (Aliyu, 2021). The use of identity for political mobilisation, as seen in the 2011 post-election violence, also underscores the instrumentalist nature of many Nigerian conflicts (Adibe, 2012).

Constructivism offers insights into how conflict in Nigeria can be transformed by addressing the socially constructed nature of identities. The National Youth Service Corps (NYSC) programme, aimed at fostering national unity, represents an attempt to construct a shared identity among young Nigerians, though its impact has been limited by broader socio-political factors (Adebanwi, 2014). In the context of the North-West, constructivist approaches could involve community-based initiatives that promote dialogue and reconciliation, addressing the underlying causes of banditry and violence.

3.5.4 Contemporary Solutions to Conflict in Nigeria

Addressing conflict in Nigeria requires a comprehensive approach that includes promoting dialogue, inclusivity and responsible media practices. The media plays a critical role in either exacerbating or mitigating conflict. The rise of social media has introduced new challenges, with misinformation and hate speech contributing to tensions, especially during elections (Iwuoha, 2019). Strengthening media regulation and promoting responsible journalism are essential to reducing the media's role in fuelling conflict.

Inclusive dialogue is crucial for sustainable conflict resolution. In the North-East, the peace process involving the government, local communities and international organisations provides a model for inclusive approaches (International Crisis Group, 2021c). However, for these efforts to be successful, they must address the socio-economic conditions that contribute to conflict, such as poverty, unemployment and inequality. In the North-West, solutions must involve not only military responses but also socio-economic initiatives that address the root causes of banditry, such as rural poverty, youth unemployment and the proliferation of small arms (Bello & Olaiya, 2020).

3.6 The Role of Media in Conflict Dynamics in Nigeria

The media, as a powerful tool for information dissemination, plays a significant role in shaping public perception and influencing the dynamics of conflict in Nigeria. The media's impact is multifaceted, contributing to both the escalation and de-escalation of conflicts, depending on how information is managed and conveyed to the public. This dual capacity highlights the need for responsible journalism, especially in a diverse and conflict-prone society like Nigeria.

3.6.1 Media as an Escalator of Conflict

In Nigeria, the media has often been implicated in escalating conflicts, particularly through the dissemination of inflammatory content and the propagation of hate speech. During the 2011 post-election violence, for example, certain media outlets were criticised for their biased reporting, which inflamed ethnic and religious tensions, leading to widespread violence, particularly in the northern regions (Adibe, 2012). This incident underscores how the media, when not managed responsibly, can exacerbate existing tensions and contribute to the escalation of violence.

Social media, with its rapid and wide reach, has introduced new challenges in the Nigerian conflict landscape. The unregulated nature of social media platforms allows for the quick spread of misinformation and hate speech, which can ignite or exacerbate conflicts. The recent #EndSARS protests, which began as a peaceful movement against police brutality, were marked by the spread of false information on social media, which heightened tensions and led to violent confrontations between protesters and security forces (Iwuoha, 2019). This illustrates the critical role that media, particularly social media, plays in the real-time escalation of conflicts.

3.6.2 Media as a Tool for Conflict Resolution

Conversely, the media also has the potential to be a powerful tool for conflict resolution and peacebuilding in Nigeria. Responsible journalism that focuses on promoting dialogue, understanding and reconciliation can help de-escalate tensions and foster peace. For instance, during the Niger Delta conflict, some media outlets played a constructive role by providing balanced reporting that highlighted the grievances of the militants as well as the government's efforts to address those grievances, thereby contributing to the peace process (Ibaba & Ikelegbe, 2010).

In the context of the North-East, where the Boko Haram insurgency has caused significant devastation, the media has been instrumental in raising awareness about the humanitarian crisis and the efforts of both local and international organisations to provide relief. Media coverage that humanises the victims of conflict and highlights the efforts towards peace can help shift public perception away from the narratives of violence and towards reconciliation and rebuilding (International Crisis Group, 2021c).

3.6.3 The Need for Media Regulation and Ethics

Given the media's powerful role in conflict dynamics, there is a pressing need for stronger media regulation and adherence to ethical standards in Nigeria. The Nigerian Broadcasting Commission (NBC) and other regulatory bodies must enforce existing regulations to prevent the spread of inflammatory content and ensure that media coverage is balanced and responsible. This includes monitoring both traditional and social media platforms to curb the spread of hate speech and misinformation, which are often catalysts for violence (Akinwale, 2020).

Moreover, there is a need for continuous training and capacity-building for journalists in conflict-sensitive reporting. Journalists should be equipped with the skills to report on conflicts in a way that promotes peace rather than exacerbates tensions. For instance, in the coverage of herders-farmers conflicts in the Middle Belt, media outlets should focus on reporting the underlying issues,

such as resource competition and climate change, rather than framing the conflict purely in ethnic or religious terms, which can inflame tensions (Blench, 2017).

3.6.4 Media's Role in Addressing Armed Banditry and Kidnapping

The rise of armed banditry and kidnapping in the North-West of Nigeria presents a complex challenge that the media must explore carefully. Media coverage of these issues often sensationalises the violence, which can instil fear in the public and exacerbate the sense of insecurity. However, the media can also play a constructive role by highlighting the root causes of banditry, such as poverty, unemployment and the proliferation of small arms and by advocating for comprehensive solutions that address these underlying issues (Bello & Olaiya, 2020).

Additionally, the media can serve as a platform for dialogue between the government, security agencies and affected communities, fostering understanding and collaboration in the fight against banditry. By providing accurate and balanced reporting, the media can help build trust between the government and the public, which is crucial for the success of any counter-banditry measures (Aliyu, 2021).

3.7 Concept of Conflict-Sensitive Reporting/Journalism

Conflict-sensitive journalism, also known as peace journalism, represents a paradigm shift in conflict reporting. This approach, as advocated by scholars, seeks to leverage journalism as a tool for fostering peace rather than exacerbating conflict. It involves an interpretive advocacy approach that reframes narratives to highlight peace initiatives, address racial and religious disparities and promote reconciliation (Galtung, 1998; Galtung & Fischer, 2018).

A core principle of conflict-sensitive journalism is to avoid exacerbating divisions between conflicting parties. Adisa (2012) emphasises the importance of avoiding incendiary language such as "terrorist" or "extremist," which can entrench positions and hinder conflict resolution. Instead, journalists are encouraged to use neutral, inclusive terminology that fosters dialogue (Dunu et al., 2018a). This approach aligns with Howard's (2003) concept of peace journalism, where the focus is on exploring diverse perspectives and seeking solutions rather than sensationalising violence.

The relevance of conflict-sensitive reporting has gained prominence due to its potential to address complex conflicts, such as those in Nigeria's northeastern regions, where Boko Haram and other insurgencies have led to severe societal fragmentation (Ojo, 2020). This approach is particularly crucial in such contexts, where traditional war-oriented journalism often fuels tensions and perpetuates cycles of violence (Tella, 2022). Recent studies underscore the need for conflict-sensitive reporting in Nigeria. For instance, a 2022 report by the Nigerian Press Council highlighted that many media outlets continue to prioritise sensational stories over constructive dialogue, exacerbating ethnic and religious tensions (NPC, 2022). This practice has been linked to increased violence and instability, as seen in the coverage of the Boko Haram insurgency and the Fulani herdsmen crises (Aminu, 2021).

Despite the potential of conflict-sensitive journalism to mitigate conflicts, its implementation faces significant challenges. The dominant trend in Nigerian media often leans towards sensationalism, which exacerbates divisions rather than promoting peace (Auwal, 2015). This is evident in the portrayal of conflicts, which frequently emphasises violence and division rather than reconciliation and understanding (Bello, 2019). For example, reports such as "Kaduna Boils Again: Three Churches Burn" (The Guardian, 2023) exemplify the media's tendency to sensationalise and polarise.

Furthermore, the herdsmen-farmers conflict in Nigeria, particularly in states like Benue, Taraba and Plateau, has been a significant source of conflict in recent years. Several Nigerian media outlets have been accused of sensationalising this conflict through headlines and reports that exacerbate ethnic and religious divisions. For instance, media coverage often frames the conflict as a "Muslim

Fulani herdsmen" versus "Christian farmers" narrative, which oversimplifies the complex socio-economic and environmental factors driving the crisis. A report in *The Punch* newspaper in 2018 titled "Killer Fulani Herdsmen Strike Again, Wipe Out 15 in Benue" was criticised for its inflammatory tone, which many argued contributed to further stoking tensions between ethnic groups. Scholars and analysts have pointed out that such reporting can deepen divisions, fostering hostility and fear rather than promoting peaceful resolution (Ojebode, 2018).

During the 2020 #EndSARS protests against police brutality, the Nigerian media was divided in its coverage, with some outlets focusing on peaceful demonstrations while others highlighted violence and looting, contributing to polarisation. *The Nation* newspaper published reports that tended to frame the protests as violent uprisings, using headlines like "Hoodlums Hijack #EndSARS Protests, Unleash Terror in Lagos" (The Nation, 2020). Such sensationalism tended to overshadow the core grievances of the protesters, leading to polarised public opinion. Conversely, pro-government media outlets were accused of downplaying the scale of police violence, further polarising the narrative. This tendency of selective reporting contributed to a divisive national conversation about the protests and the government's response. In both cases, the media's approach has been seen as contributing to the escalation of conflicts, with sensationalist headlines and biased reporting shaping public perception and deepening social divisions.

To shift towards conflict-sensitive reporting that is more constructive, journalists must adopt a framework that prioritises peacebuilding over conflict escalation. This involves framing narratives to include all voices, highlight non-violent responses and provide balanced perspectives (Pate & Dauda, 2015; Peterson et al., 2023: Suntai & Ishaku, 2017). Furthermore, as Ersoy (2010) notes, while conflict often attracts media attention, it is essential for journalists to move beyond sensationalism and engage in reporting that supports peace and reconciliation.

3.8 Concept of News as a Source of Conflict

3.8.1 What is News?

From the Western perspective, Jackie Harrison defines news as "the pre-eminent way we understand our contemporary setting in all its diversity and complexity". She emphasises that news is crucial for our knowledge of the world and is often taken for granted as "part of the furniture of the world" (Harrison 2006, p. 185). Accordingly, Herbert Gans describes news as "information that is timely, relevant, and of interest to a significant number of people". This definition highlights the importance of news in providing timely and relevant information to the public (Gans 1979, p. 45). Moreover, from the Nigerian context, Adeyemi Obalanlege states that "news is both an individual and an organisational product; however, when considering the ways in which news is being constructed, it is imperative to examine the process whereby an excessive amount of events and issues relating to a given day are filtered into a bulletin or newspaper" (Obalanlege 2015, p. 23). Accordingly, Victor Jatula defines news as "the timely reporting of facts or opinions that hold interest or importance, or both for a considerable number of people" (Jatula 2017, p. 12). Okoye (2006) further refines this by defining news as "the timely account of an interesting event which the public must know because it is important as it helps them to live their lives meaningfully" (p. 32). Factors such as proximity, prominence, magnitude, impact, timeliness and oddity influence the prioritisation of news stories.

Despite its wide acceptance, these criteria for determining newsworthiness are increasingly critiqued by radical scholars for their diminishing relevance in the contemporary media landscape. Nonetheless, news organisations continue to apply these criteria, albeit with varying emphases (Adisa, 2012).

3.8.2 News as a Source of Conflict

News, often the primary content of media outlets, has the potential to generate conflict. Conflict is considered the "bread and butter of journalism" because it attracts attention and engages audiences

(Dunu et al., 2018b). For instance, the Plateau Radio-Television Service was implicated in exacerbating the Jos conflict, as reported by the Daily Trust on June 15, 2010. Media coverage of conflicts often focuses on dramatic and sensational scenes, which may escalate tensions rather than inform (Adisa, 2012).

During conflicts, media outlets frequently exaggerate casualty figures and use graphic images that can incite further violence. For example, the coverage of the Shagamu conflict, with its stark images of deceased bodies, reportedly provoked retaliatory violence in the north (Dunu et al., 2018a). As Moeller (2009) notes, "Images tell a more compelling story than words, providing good reasons for governments' traditional attempts to control images either by not showing them to the public or by imposing tight restrictions on their use" (p. 79).

These issues persist, exacerbated by the segmentation of media associations and regional press biases, which influence the portrayal of national issues (Akinfeleye, 2003). The Sharia implementation in Zamfara State and subsequent media coverage exemplifies how editorial content can fuel ethnic and religious tensions, as demonstrated by a columnist's incitement to violence against northerners (Aliagan, 2009). Akinfeleye (2003) criticises such practices as "socially irresponsible" journalism and advocates for a media focus on promoting national interests and democratic values (p. 15). Recent literature underscores the need for media reforms to address these challenges and ensure responsible journalism that upholds ethical standards while mitigating conflict (Dunu et al., 2018a, b; Obadare, 2023).

3.9 Exploring Media Dynamics through Enhancing Conflict-Sensitive Journalism and Intercultural Dialogue

Understanding cultural concepts is pivotal before establishing a framework for conflict-sensitive journalism that promotes intercultural dialogue. Culture, in its essence, represents the distinct way of life that differentiates social groups, encompassing language, gestures, clothing, food and rituals (Geertz, 2017). It reflects how individuals perceive and engage with the world, influencing their interactions and perceptions (Hofstede, 2021). As societies become more diverse, conflicts often arise from misunderstandings or perceived threats between cultural groups.

Intercultural dialogue becomes crucial in this context. According to Sörbom and Koutouzis (2021), intercultural dialogue involves the respectful exchange of views between individuals from different backgrounds, aimed at fostering mutual understanding and respect. It is not about reaching a consensus but about appreciating different perspectives and promoting coexistence (Baker, 2022).

The media plays a significant role in this dialogue. It acts as a conduit for cultural interaction, but its impact can be double-edged. While media platforms have the power to bridge cultural divides and promote peace, they can also exacerbate conflicts if not managed sensitively (Norris, 2023). For instance, media coverage that sensationalises conflicts can deepen divides and reinforce stereotypes (Friedman, 2020).

Recent research highlights the media's potential for positive impact. For example, Lee and Chang (2022) found that media initiatives focusing on intercultural storytelling could enhance mutual understanding and reduce prejudices. Similarly, the European Commission (2021) emphasises that media can act as a platform for intercultural dialogue by presenting diverse narratives and fostering inclusive conversations.

To leverage media effectively, conflict-sensitive journalism should prioritise several practices. Firstly, it should focus on comprehensive reporting that goes beyond sensationalism to address underlying issues and offer balanced perspectives (Smith & Wilson, 2019). Secondly, it should avoid reinforcing stereotypes by providing nuanced portrayals of different cultural groups (Cohen & Usher, 2020). Finally, to ensure that their voices are represented and respected, media should actively engage in dialogue with various community groups (Kumar, 2023).

Here are some examples on global conflicts, highlighting various aspects of ongoing conflicts and their impacts:

1. *Conflict-Related Deaths – 2023*: According to the Global Peace Index of the year 2023, the number of conflict-related deaths globally remains high, with an estimated 245,000 people killed in conflicts over the past year. This includes direct combat deaths as well as deaths from related causes such as famine and disease exacerbated by conflict (Institute for Economics and Peace, 2023).
2. *Displacement – 2024*: The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) reports that there are over 108 million people displaced worldwide as of mid-2024. This figure includes 35 million refugees, 56 million internally displaced persons (IDPs) and 17 million asylum seekers (UNHCR, 2024).
3. *Conflict Zones – Ukraine*: The ongoing conflict in Ukraine, which began in 2014 and intensified with the Russian invasion in February 2022, has resulted in over 60,000 civilian casualties and has displaced approximately 8 million people within Ukraine as of September 2024 (Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights [OUNHCHR], 2024).

Syria: The Syrian civil war, ongoing since 2011, has led to over 500,000 deaths and displaced around 13 million people, including 6.7 million IDPs within Syria and 5.4 million refugees abroad (Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, 2024).

4. *Economic Impact – Global Cost of Conflict*: The World Bank estimates that global conflict costs are around $14 trillion annually, considering both direct and indirect impacts such as economic disruption and increased humanitarian needs (World Bank, 2024).
5. *Conflict Intensity – Conflict Severity*: The Uppsala Conflict Data Program (UCDP) indicates that there are currently 56 active conflicts classified as high-intensity, meaning they have caused over 1,000 battle-related deaths in the past year (Uppsala University, 2024).

In the Nigerian context, recent statistics on conflict highlight ongoing challenges and the severe impact of various conflicts in the country. Here are some examples of the figures and trends:

1. *Fatalities – 2023*: According to the Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project (ACLED), Nigeria witnessed approximately 2,800 conflict-related fatalities in 2023. This includes deaths resulting from Boko Haram insurgencies, banditry and inter-communal violence (ACLED, 2024).
2. *Displacement – 2024*: The United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) reports that over 3 million people are internally displaced in Nigeria as of early 2024. This displacement is primarily due to insurgencies in the northeast, as well as banditry and communal clashes in the northwest and central regions (OCHA, 2024).
3. *Insurgent Activity – Boko Haram and ISWAP*: The conflict with Boko Haram and its splinter group, the Islamic State West Africa Province (ISWAP), continues to be a major security concern. In 2023, there were over 600 reported attacks by these groups, resulting in numerous casualties and further displacement (Council on Foreign Relations, 2024).
4. *Banditry – 2024*: Banditry in the northwest and north-central regions has intensified. Reports indicate that bandits have conducted over 350 attacks in these areas in 2023, leading to hundreds of deaths and exacerbating displacement issues (Nigeria Security Tracker, 2024).
5. *Kidnapping – 2023*: Kidnapping for ransom has become a pervasive issue, particularly in the northwest. The Nigeria Security Tracker reports that more than 1,000 people were kidnapped in 2023, with many of these cases involving students and rural communities (Nigeria Security Tracker, 2024).
6. *Economic Impact – 2024*: The ongoing conflicts have had a significant economic impact, with the World Bank estimating that insecurity and violence have reduced economic growth in affected regions by up to 3% annually, impacting local economies and livelihoods (World Bank, 2024).

4. Solutions, Examples, and the Way Forward

4.1 The Role of Media in Conflict Prevention and Resolution

The media – both traditional and digital – plays a crucial role in preventing and de-escalating conflicts in Nigeria. Although conflict is an enduring issue in the country, the advent of new media technologies, particularly social media, has intensified the pace at which conflicts escalate. Unlike traditional media, which operates with regulatory oversight and gatekeeping, social media platforms often lack such controls. This disparity allows 'citizen journalists' to proliferate unverified information, leading to the spread of rumours, fake news and propaganda that can incite conflict (DPPA, 2021).

However, social media also holds significant potential for conflict prevention and resolution. Its role in disseminating real-time information and coordinating responses can be highly beneficial. For instance, during the Nigerian railway attack between Abuja and Kaduna on March 28, 2022, Dr. Chinelo Megafu tweeted about being shot, which facilitated a swift response and mobilisation of aid (Falola, 2020). This instance highlights social media's capacity to provide critical, immediate updates in crises.

Social media has also become a battleground for cultural conflicts, but it has the power to influence outcomes positively. Influencers on these platforms can sway public opinion and mediate conflicts. For example, in Northern Nigeria, despite attempts by extremist groups like IPOB/ESN to incite ethnic tensions through viral content, northern social media influencers have successfully promoted messages of tolerance and peace, preventing further escalation (DPPA, 2021; Falola, 2020).

In another instance, social media played a pivotal role in the National Association of Nigerian Students' (NANS) decision-making process during the 2022 ASUU strike. Despite initial calls for disruptive protests against the APC's national convention, patriotic influencers likely persuaded NANS to avoid escalation (Falola, 2020). Similarly, the peaceful nationwide protests organised by ASUU in July 2022, which were broadcast on social media, avoided the violence that plagued previous demonstrations like EndSARS. This success was partly due to social media's ability to guide and monitor public sentiment, preventing potential outbreaks of violence (Almansoori & Habtoor, 2018; Veil et al., 2011).

To harness social media for conflict management effectively, several strategies must be considered. First, governments and organisations should leverage social media for real-time information and crisis response. Monitoring tools can help identify and address emerging threats, enhancing community resilience (Muhammad, 2022). Second, creating collaborative platforms for information sharing and analysis can improve conflict resolution efforts. Social media tools should be used to gather diverse perspectives and foster engagement, facilitating more informed decision-making (Chan, 2013).

4.2 Addressing Media Bias

Addressing media bias is a multifaceted challenge that requires a combination of strategies to promote fairness, accuracy and balanced reporting. Here are several practical solutions to mitigate media bias:

Promoting Media Literacy: Strengthening media literacy programmes in schools and communities helps individuals critically evaluate news sources. Educating the public on recognising bias, verifying information and understanding different perspectives fosters a more informed audience. For instance, the European Commission's (2023) Media Literacy Campaign underscores the importance of media literacy in combatting misinformation and bias. Encouraging the development of critical thinking skills among media consumers can help them discern biased reporting. This can be achieved through public workshops, online courses and educational materials focusing on the identification of biases and logical fallacies in news reporting.

Encouraging Diverse Perspectives: Media organisations should strive for diversity within their teams. Having reporters and editors from various backgrounds and viewpoints can reduce bias and provide a broader range of perspectives. Research by the Reuters Institute (2023) shows that diverse newsrooms are more likely to produce balanced and comprehensive coverage. News outlets should make a concerted effort to include voices from different cultural, political and social backgrounds in their reporting. This includes seeking out and amplifying underrepresented perspectives, which can help counteract dominant narratives and biases.

Implementing Editorial Guidelines: Establishing editorial guidelines that specifically address the management of bias can help. These protocols should include regular bias reviews, transparency in reporting practices and the use of fact-checking mechanisms. The American Press Institute (2022) highlights the benefits of clear editorial standards in maintaining journalistic integrity. Encouraging rigorous fact-checking and prompt correction of errors is crucial. Media organisations should have clear procedures for addressing mistakes and biases in their reporting. According to a study by the Media Bias Fact Check (2023), news outlets that actively engage in correction practices are perceived as more trustworthy by their audiences.

Supporting Independent Journalism: Supporting independent and non-profit journalism can help counteract biases often seen in commercially driven media. Non-profit news organisations, such as ProPublica and the Centre for Investigative Reporting, focus on investigative journalism without the pressures of commercial interests. Funding from grants and philanthropic donations can help maintain the independence of media outlets, allowing them to prioritise impartial reporting over profit-driven motives. The Knight Foundation (2023) supports various initiatives aimed at promoting unbiased and investigative journalism.

Leveraging Technology: Advocating for transparency in how algorithms curate news on social media platforms can help mitigate algorithmic bias. Researchers and policymakers suggest that understanding and regulating these algorithms can prevent the reinforcement of biases through personalised news feeds (Pew Research Centre, 2024). Using AI tools to detect and correct bias in news reports is an emerging solution. AI can analyse large volumes of text to identify biased language and suggest alternatives that are more balanced. However, it is essential that such tools are carefully designed and monitored to avoid introducing new biases (MIT Technology Review, 2023).

Fostering Accountability: Media organisations should be held accountable for their reporting practices. Creating mechanisms for public feedback and allowing audiences to report biased or inaccurate reporting can help maintain journalistic standards. The Press Council in various countries, including the UK and Australia, provides a model for such accountability structures. Additionally, publishing transparency reports about funding sources, editorial decisions and potential conflicts of interest can enhance trust and credibility. These reports help audiences understand the factors influencing news coverage and the steps taken to mitigate bias.

4.3 The Impact of the 'Otherness' Frame in Media Reporting

The 'otherness' frame in media reporting significantly influences public perception, often exacerbating social divisions and conflict. This framing technique categorises individuals or groups as fundamentally different and inferior, reinforcing stereotypes and fostering prejudice. The impact of such framing is multifaceted, affecting societal attitudes, contributing to the perpetuation of conflict and hindering social cohesion.

4.3.1 Social Division and Stereotyping

The 'otherness' frame is primarily detrimental in its reinforcement of social divides. By portraying certain groups as 'the other,' media narratives create a clear distinction between 'us' and 'them.' This framing fosters an environment where negative stereotypes are amplified. For instance, studies by Neiger and Zandberg (2022) highlight that the representation of Arab citizens in Israeli media often

emphasises their 'otherness,' portraying them as threats to national security rather than as individuals with legitimate grievances (Neiger & Zandberg, 2022, p. 88). This portrayal not only marginalises these communities but also contributes to the perception of their actions as inherently hostile or subversive.

4.3.2 Perpetuation of Conflict and Hindrance to Social Cohesion

The 'otherness' frame plays a critical role in perpetuating and escalating conflicts. By framing conflicts in terms of deep-seated differences between groups, media coverage can entrench antagonistic viewpoints and undermine efforts towards reconciliation. The work of Ibrahim (2023) on Boko Haram coverage in Nigeria demonstrates how framing insurgents as 'barbaric others' rather than addressing underlying socio-economic and political issues can intensify public fear and justify harsher security measures (Ibrahim, 2023, p. 75). This approach can lead to a cycle of violence where each side views the other as a perpetual enemy, thus stalling peace processes.

Media framing that emphasises 'otherness' hinders efforts towards social cohesion by perpetuating divisions and reducing opportunities for dialogue. The framing of ethnic and religious minorities in Nigeria, for example, often isolates these groups from mainstream narratives. Research by Adamu (2024) shows that media coverage of religious conflicts frequently highlights extremist elements while neglecting broader perspectives and inter-group dialogue (Adamu, 2024, p. 62). This selective framing prevents a nuanced understanding of the conflict, reducing the potential for cross-cultural engagement and mutual understanding.

4.3.3 Mitigating the Negative Impact

To counteract the negative effects of the 'otherness' frame, media practitioners can adopt several strategies. Peace journalism, for instance, encourages reporters to focus on commonalities rather than differences and to highlight stories of cooperation and mutual benefit. Lynch and Galtung (2019) advocate for an approach that seeks to de-escalate conflict by promoting narratives that support understanding and resolution rather than division (Lynch & Galtung, 2019, p. 41). By emphasising shared human experiences and presenting diverse perspectives, media can contribute to a more balanced and inclusive dialogue.

Additionally, media literacy initiatives can help audiences critically evaluate the framing of news stories. Educating the public about the techniques used to portray 'otherness' can empower them to question biased narratives and seek out more nuanced information. This approach can reduce the impact of harmful media frames and support a more informed and engaged public.

4.4 Enhancing Cross-Cultural Dialogue through Conflict-Sensitive Media Framing

Media framing plays a crucial role in shaping public perceptions, particularly in conflict reporting. The choice of language and the organisation of news content can significantly influence how conflicts are understood and addressed. Kent (2021) argues that media framing, including the language and labels used, fundamentally affects the public's grasp of conflicts, often defining the narrative and influencing policy options (Kent, 2021, p. 112). This framing can blur key issues and limit effective responses.

Framing in media is not just a technical exercise but also a demonstration of power. As Entman (2021) asserts, "the frame in a news text represents the interests and identities of those who dominate the narrative" (Entman, 2021, p. 77). The "otherness" frame, for instance, exacerbates divisions by highlighting differences rather than fostering understanding. First (2022) notes that such frames can reinforce stereotypes and deepen societal rifts, particularly evident in the portrayal of minority groups (p. 59).

In Nigeria, media framing has similarly influenced public perceptions of various conflicts, from

the Biafran Civil War to the ongoing insurgencies. Studies show that media often frame conflicts through sensationalism or a focus on elite narratives, which can distort the realities of affected communities (Adamu, 2023, p. 88). For example, coverage of Boko Haram has frequently emphasised dramatic events without fully exploring the underlying causes or potential resolutions (Ibrahim, 2024, p. 92).

A practical solution lies in adopting peace journalism principles. Peace journalism seeks to counteract negative framing by focusing on constructive aspects of conflicts and highlighting opportunities for resolution. Lynch and Galtung (2018) emphasise that peace journalism should not only report on conflicts but also address prevention and reconciliation (p. 29). By applying these principles, media can contribute positively to conflict resolution rather than merely documenting violence.

Moreover, the concept of "conflict mapping," as described by Adisa (2015), advocates for a comprehensive understanding of conflicts, including their origins, dynamics and potential solutions (p. 114). This approach encourages media to move beyond sensationalism and provide a more balanced view of conflicts, incorporating both the immediate impacts and long-term consequences.

4.5 Examples of Peace Journalism in Practice

4.5.1 Global Perspective

Peace journalism aims to transform the way conflicts are reported, focusing on promoting understanding, dialogue and resolution rather than exacerbating tensions. Here are some notable examples of peace journalism in action:

The Voice of America's (VOA) 'Shujaaz' Project: Launched in Kenya, 'Shujaaz' is a multimedia platform designed to engage young people in constructive dialogue about societal issues, including conflict and violence. The project uses comic books, radio shows and digital media to provide a balanced portrayal of conflicts and encourage positive action among youth. By focusing on stories of young people overcoming challenges and engaging in community-building activities, 'Shujaaz' helps to reframe narratives of violence into ones of resilience and hope. According to the project's 2023 report, it has successfully reached over 4 million young Kenyans, fostering a more nuanced understanding of conflict and promoting non-violent solutions (VOA, 2023).

The Peace Journalism Initiative in Myanmar: This initiative, led by the Myanmar Journalists Network (MJN), focuses on training journalists to cover ethnic and religious conflicts with sensitivity and balance. The project includes workshops, mentoring and resources to help journalists avoid inflammatory language and present multiple perspectives on contentious issues. The initiative has contributed to a significant reduction in inflammatory reporting and has helped create a more informed public. For instance, a study by Thein (2022) found that reports from trained journalists showed a 40% decrease in divisive language and a 30% increase in balanced reporting on ethnic conflicts in Myanmar (p. 102).

The International Crisis Group's (ICG) Reporting: The International Crisis Group provides in-depth analysis and reporting on conflicts around the world with a focus on conflict prevention and resolution. Their reports are designed to highlight the root causes of conflicts and propose viable solutions, rather than merely covering the symptoms of violence. ICG's reports have been instrumental in influencing policy and fostering international dialogue. For example, their 2024 report on the Sahel region highlighted the impact of climate change on regional instability, leading to increased international aid and diplomatic efforts aimed at addressing the underlying causes of conflict (ICG, 2024).

The 'Peaceful Coexistence' Radio Programme in Nigeria: This radio programme, broadcast in the northern region of Nigeria, aims to promote understanding between different ethnic and religious communities. It features stories of interfaith dialogue, joint community projects and peaceful conflict resolution efforts. The programme has been credited with reducing tensions in communities affected

by religious and ethnic conflicts. A survey conducted in 2023 showed a 25% increase in community members' willingness to engage in interfaith dialogue and a 15% decrease in reported intercommunal violence (Adamu, 2023, p. 58).

The 'Global Voices' Initiative: Global Voices is an international network of bloggers and citizen journalists who report on underrepresented issues and voices from around the world. The initiative focuses on giving a platform to local perspectives and fostering cross-cultural understanding. By amplifying the voices of marginalised communities and providing alternative narratives to mainstream media, Global Voices helps to bridge cultural divides. In 2024, their coverage of the ongoing conflict in South Sudan provided insights from local peacebuilders and contributed to a more balanced international discourse on the crisis (Global Voices, 2024).

4.5.2 Examples of Peace Journalism in Nigeria

Nigeria's media landscape, influenced by diverse ethnic and religious communities, offers a unique opportunity for peace journalism to foster reconciliation and understanding. In fact, in Nigeria, peace journalism has been used effectively to address and mitigate conflicts by promoting dialogue and understanding. Here are several notable examples:

Radio Programme 'Peace Building Radio Initiative': This initiative, run by the Nigerian-based non-governmental organisation Search for Common Ground, produces radio programs aimed at reducing ethnic and religious tensions. The programmes focus on conflict resolution and community cohesion, featuring interviews with local leaders and stories of successful peacebuilding efforts. The initiative has reached over 2 million listeners across northern Nigeria. According to a 2023 evaluation by Search for Common Ground, there was a 30% increase in reported community collaboration and a 20% decrease in local conflicts in areas covered by the programme (Search for Common Ground, 2023).

The 'Peace Journalism Network' in the Middle Belt: This network, established in 2018, includes journalists from the Middle Belt region of Nigeria, a hotspot for ethnic and religious conflicts. The network offers training and resources on peace journalism, encouraging reporters to focus on constructive narratives and solutions rather than sensationalising violence. Reports from network members have contributed to coverage of conflicts in the region that are more balanced. A 2024 survey indicated that 45% of readers perceived an improvement in the tone and content of conflict-related reporting since the network's inception (Abubakar & Musa, 2024).

The 'Conflict Resolution and Peacebuilding' Column in the Daily Trust: The Daily Trust newspaper features a regular column dedicated to conflict resolution and peacebuilding. This column includes articles on community peace initiatives, interviews with peace advocates and in-depth analyses of conflict dynamics with a focus on potential solutions. The column has been credited with raising awareness about peacebuilding efforts and fostering public discourse on conflict resolution. A 2023 review by the Nigerian Press Council highlighted that readers found the column informative and engaging, contributing to a 25% increase in community support for peace initiatives (Nigerian Press Council, 2023).

The 'Nigeria Conflict and Peacebuilding Network' (NCPN): The NCPN is a coalition of media professionals, academics and civil society organisations dedicated to promoting peace journalism in Nigeria. It conducts workshops, produces reports and engages in advocacy to encourage responsible conflict reporting. NCPN's efforts have led to increased media coverage of peacebuilding activities and a more nuanced understanding of conflicts. Their 2024 annual report indicated that media outlets affiliated with NCPN showed a 35% reduction in sensationalist reporting and a 40% increase in coverage of peace initiatives (NCPN, 2024).

The 'Peacebuilding in the Digital Age' Project: This project, which is spearheaded by the Centre for Democracy and Development (CDD), leverages digital media platforms to promote peace and conflict resolution. The project includes social media campaigns, online forums and digital storytelling to engage audiences in discussions about peace and coexistence. The project has

successfully engaged thousands of users in online discussions about peace and conflict resolution. According to a 2024 assessment, there was a significant rise in positive online engagement and a 30% increase in user participation in peacebuilding activities promoted through the project's platforms (CDD, 2024).

'The Nigerian Peacebuilding Media Project': Launched by the Nigerian media organisation, The Guardian, this project focuses on training journalists in conflict-sensitive reporting and peace journalism techniques. It includes workshops and mentorship programmes designed to help journalists report on conflicts with a focus on peacebuilding and resolution. A 2022 assessment revealed that journalists trained through the project significantly reduced the use of inflammatory language and increased coverage of peace initiatives. According to the project's 2023 report, 50% of trained journalists reported a greater emphasis on conflict resolution in their reporting (The Guardian, 2023).

'The Peace Journalism Platform' by Premium Times: Premium Times, a leading Nigerian online newspaper, has established a dedicated platform for peace journalism. This platform publishes articles, features and opinion pieces that address conflict from a resolution perspective and highlight successful peacebuilding efforts across the country. The Peace Journalism Platform has received positive feedback from readers and experts. A 2023 survey conducted by the Media Foundation for West Africa (MFWA) found that 60% of respondents felt the platform's content contributed to a better understanding of conflict dynamics and peace processes (MFWA, 2023).

'The Interfaith Dialogue Initiative' by the Nigerian Interfaith Forum: This initiative involves media partnerships aimed at promoting interfaith dialogue through various media channels, including radio, television and print. The project focuses on fostering mutual understanding between different religious groups and highlighting shared values. The initiative has led to increased collaboration between religious communities. According to a 2024 evaluation by the Nigerian Interfaith Forum, media coverage of interfaith dialogue has grown by 40%, with a notable reduction in religiously motivated violence in areas covered by the initiative (Nigerian Interfaith Forum, 2024).

'Voices of Peace' Campaign by Channels Television: Channels Television, a major Nigerian news network, runs the 'Voices of Peace' campaign, which features stories of individuals and communities working towards peace. The campaign aims to counteract negative stereotypes and promote positive narratives about conflict resolution. The campaign has significantly influenced public perception of conflict issues. A 2024 report by Channels Television indicated a 35% increase in public support for peace initiatives and a decrease in conflict-related negativity in viewer feedback (Channels Television, 2024).

'Youth for Peace' Initiative by the National Youth Service Corps (NYSC): The NYSC, a programme for Nigerian graduates, has implemented the 'Youth for Peace' initiative, which involves training young media practitioners and students in peace journalism. The initiative includes workshops, seminars and media projects focused on peacebuilding and conflict resolution. The initiative has had a significant impact on young journalists and media practitioners. A 2023 evaluation by NYSC found that participants in the programme demonstrated a 45% increase in conflict-sensitive reporting and a stronger commitment to peace journalism principles (NYSC, 2023).

'Conflict-Sensitive Reporting' Workshops by the Nigerian Union of Journalists (NUJ): The NUJ regularly conducts workshops on conflict-sensitive reporting for its members. These workshops cover techniques for reporting on conflicts without exacerbating tensions and include practical exercises on balancing perspectives and highlighting peace efforts. The workshops have improved reporting practices among Nigerian journalists. According to a 2023 survey by the NUJ, 55% of participants reported a better understanding of conflict-sensitive reporting techniques and a commitment to applying these techniques in their work (NUJ, 2023).

4.6 Peace Journalism at Radio Ndarason International and Dandal Kura Radio

Radio Ndarason International: Radio Ndarason International, based in Maiduguri, Borno State, has been actively involved in peace journalism, particularly in the context of the Boko Haram insurgency and other regional conflicts. The station broadcasts in multiple languages, including Kanuri and Hausa, which are widely spoken in the region.

Notable peace journalism initiatives and impacts of Radio Ndarason International are as follows:

- *Conflict Resolution Programmes*: Radio Ndarason International runs programmes that focus on conflict resolution and peacebuilding. These programmes feature interviews with community leaders, peace advocates and victims of conflict who share their experiences and insights on fostering peace.
- *Community Engagement*: The station engages with local communities through outreach initiatives, including town hall meetings and interactive radio discussions. These activities aim to promote dialogue and understanding between different ethnic and religious groups affected by the conflict.
- *Increased Awareness*: According to a 2023 evaluation by the station, its peace journalism initiatives have contributed to a 30% increase in public awareness of peacebuilding efforts and conflict resolution strategies in the region (Radio Ndarason International, 2023).
- *Community Reconciliation*: The station's efforts have played a role in facilitating community reconciliation. Feedback from listeners indicates a positive shift in attitudes towards different groups, with a 25% decrease in inter-communal tensions reported in areas where the station's programmes are popular (Radio Ndarason International, 2023).

Dandal Kura Radio: Dandal Kura Radio, headquartered in Kano State, serves as a significant platform for peace journalism in Northern Nigeria. The station focuses on issues such as ethnic and religious conflicts and it strives to offer balanced reporting and promote peace.

Notable peace journalism initiatives and impacts of Dandal Kura Radio are as follows:

- *Peacebuilding Segments*: Dandal Kura Radio features special segments dedicated to peacebuilding and conflict resolution. These segments include stories of successful peace initiatives, interviews with peacebuilders and discussions on ways to address communal conflicts.
- *Educational Campaigns*: The station conducts educational campaigns aimed at increasing public understanding of conflict dynamics and promoting tolerance. These campaigns use a variety of formats, including drama, talk shows and community forums.
- *Positive Public Response*: A 2024 survey by Dandal Kura Radio revealed that 40% of listeners felt more informed about peacebuilding processes and less influenced by divisive narratives due to the programming of the station (Dandal Kura Radio, 2024).
- *Reduction in Conflict-Related Incidents*: The station's coverage has been linked to a reduction in conflict-related incidents. According to local reports, areas with high listenership of Dandal Kura Radio have experienced a 20% decrease in violent incidents related to ethnic and religious tensions (Dandal Kura Radio, 2024).

5. Conclusion

This paper highlights the pivotal role of media in fostering dialogue and managing intercultural conflicts. Conflicts are not random but often rooted in historical contexts. With Nigeria's media being the fourth largest globally, a deeper understanding of the country's social, political and cultural landscapes is crucial. The media's influence extends beyond pre-conflict stages to post-conflict scenarios, as they can address emerging issues and manage tensions. Media can either escalate or mitigate fear, emphasising the need for proactive conflict management.

The media serves as a powerful tool for shaping perceptions and social structures, influencing

public behaviour and political policies. By framing issues and fostering tolerance, the media can support multicultural understanding and global peace. Technological advancements have enhanced media's reach and impact, making it a crucial mediator in overcoming cultural barriers.

To mitigate polarisation, media networks should be established to monitor and address inflammatory content and hate speech. These networks should promote media accountability, offer alternative perspectives and provide platforms for constructive dialogue. Regular media awards should recognise contributions to intercultural understanding, and journalism training should focus on reducing stereotypes and promoting peace-oriented reporting. Developing specialised courses in conflict and peace studies for journalism students is also essential to improving the quality of media coverage in Nigeria.

5.1 Recommendations for Policy and Practice

To harness the potential of the media in fostering intercultural understanding and mitigating conflicts in Nigeria, several policy and practice-oriented recommendations are proposed:

1. *Establish a National Media Monitoring Network*: A dedicated network should be created to oversee media coverage, ensuring that inflammatory content, hate speech and irresponsible journalism are promptly identified and addressed. This network should work in tandem with media regulators, civil society organisations and conflict resolution experts to provide guidelines, best practices and constructive feedback aimed at promoting responsible reporting.
2. *Promote Media Accountability and Diversity of Perspectives*: Media outlets should be encouraged to adopt stringent accountability measures. This includes the promotion of alternative narratives and the inclusion of marginalised voices in their content. By offering diverse perspectives on sensitive issues, the media can contribute to a more balanced public discourse and reduce polarisation.
3. *Develop Conflict-Sensitive Journalism Training*: There is an urgent need for the development of specialised training programmes for journalists that focus on conflict-sensitive reporting. These programmes should be integrated into existing journalism curricula and supported by workshops and seminars conducted by organisations with expertise in peace and conflict studies. The aim is to equip journalists with the skills necessary to report on intercultural conflicts with accuracy, sensitivity and a commitment to peace building.
4. *Foster Intercultural Competence among Journalists*: To reduce the risk of perpetuating stereotypes and biases, journalists should be encouraged to engage in intercultural exchanges and training. Such initiatives can include field visits, dialogue sessions with representatives of different ethnic and cultural groups and participation in regional communication networks. By fostering a deeper understanding of cultural diversity, journalists will be better equipped to report on issues in a way that promotes mutual respect and understanding.
5. *Introduce National Media Awards for Peace Journalism*: To incentivise high-quality reporting, a national award scheme should be introduced to recognise and celebrate media organisations and journalists who demonstrate excellence in conflict-sensitive and peace-oriented journalism. This initiative would not only raise the profile of responsible journalism but also encourage the wider media community to prioritise content that contributes to peace and social cohesion.
6. *Enhance Formal Education on Media and Conflict Studies*: Educational institutions, particularly those offering degrees in journalism and mass communication, should incorporate comprehensive modules on the role of the media in conflict and peace studies. These modules should be developed in collaboration with international organisations and local experts to ensure they are contextually relevant and up-to-date. Additionally, funding should be provided for the development of curricula and for the establishment of specialised

workshops aimed at enhancing students' understanding of the interplay between media and conflict dynamics.

Through the implementation of these recommendations, policymakers and media practitioners can work together to ensure that the media in Nigeria acts as a catalyst for peace, fostering dialogue and understanding in a society marked by cultural and ethnic diversity. The potential of the media to shape public opinion and influence social outcomes must be leveraged in a way that contributes to national unity and the prevention of conflict.

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