The Role of Mass Media in Crisis Management in Nigeria

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ABSTRACT: *The role played by the media in the resolution of conflicts and crises cannot be overemphasized. The media has been a vital channel for resolving crises in society. The media has been construed as a two-edged sword that can either instigate a crisis or provide an avenue for resolving it. In other words, the influence of the mass media can be both positive and/or negative, depending on the mode and direction of use. Apparently, media influence has increased tremendously in the last decades, but there is no agreement among scholars and researchers on the degree and tenacity of its influence in managing and resolving conflicts and crises in society. The media, by right and duty, must provide citizens with accurate, comprehensive, unbiased, and high-quality information on the causes, effects, and possible resolutions to avert a further deepening of the crisis, which could lead to the destruction of lives, properties, and the economy. Put differently, the media are always known to set agendas for the public to follow; they do this by raising salient and critical issues as they unfold in society and bringing them to the public. The media set an agenda of peace, love, unity, etc. In recent times, Plateau State, especially Jos, has been characterized by one form of crisis or another, which in turn leads to the loss of lives and properties. This research work therefore attempts to examine the relevant role played by the media in resolving the lingering crises in Northern states, particularly Plateau State. In addition, the research examines the way and manner in which the media have been used to manage the crises in Nigeria. The aim of this study is to analyse the role of the media in crisis management in Nigeria. The specific objectives were to establish the media accessibility level and the various types of media coverage; to establish the extent to which media escalated and/or de-escalated violence; and to determine how media could influence selected human factors towards crises. The research utilized both primary and secondary source materials. Other reference materials, such as newspapers, the internet, and journals, were used to gather information about the activities carried out by the media in times of crisis. The research concludes that the media have a crucial role to play in de-escalating crises.*

KEYWORDS: Mass Media, Crisis, Crisis Management, Nigeria, Plateau State

INTRODUCTION

The stability and peace enjoyed by the world today are largely credited to the impacts and influence of mass media in the broadcast, dissemination, education, entertainment, and informing of the public about issues that are directly or indirectly connected to their existence. From the perspective of empirical findings, it is safe to assert that the progress and development of a state are highly dependent on mass media. While this assertion is incontestable, it is also an undeniable fact that the mass media is inseparable from the continuity of man's existence. In fact, in the case of Nigeria, the media has experienced setbacks, oppression, injustice, and humiliation at the hands of both the military and civilian governments. Nevertheless, it has not stopped the growth and overwhelming influence of the media in society. This shows that the media is a pillar of democratic governance and serves to protect and safeguard human rights. Mass media, therefore, is construed as a tool that can either be used to promote peace, stability, orderliness, and harmony in society or to instigate conflict, violence, and crises. Reporting on the influence and role of the media in times of crisis, a report from the Committee on Culture, Science, Education, and Media contends that:
The media help to reinforce the legitimacy of the decisions taken by political leaders and improve understanding both of their content and of the reasons for them; they also play a key part as links between decision-makers and the public. Further stressing on the role of the media, they posit that media can take on an educational role, that is, they must be capable of analysing and explaining the new obligations being imposed to tackle a crisis situation and the behaviour which the authorities expect of the public (Parliamentary Assembly, 2021).

Nigeria has experienced different crises caused by factors such as land disputes, communal clashes, religious clashes, injustice, uneven distribution of resources, and the like. The issue of crisis is not peculiar to Nigeria, as it is a universal phenomenon that cuts across borders, continents, races, and regions. It is unequivocal among scholars and researchers in the area of peace and conflict studies and other related disciplines that the concept of crisis is inseparable from human existence. As a matter of fact, it is as old as man and, as such, cannot be totally eradicated. An attempt to completely eradicate crises is an effort in futility. Idowu Williams highlights four reasons why conflict and crisis are unavoidable in society. First, he opines that the occurrence of conflict or crisis in human societies seems pervasive; it is an unbidden phenomenon and is found in almost every nook and cranny of the world. Second, human progress is tied to the minimal occurrence of this pervasive and prevalent phenomenon. Third, the exploration and control of nature and natural resources for human development are not possible without the exertion and breakout of some form of conflict or another. Lastly, the interest in the idea of conflict by scholars over the ages, interestingly, has been used as an index in the demarcation and categorization of the world into developed and underdeveloped states (Idowu, 2005:10-11, emphasis added).

The problem, therefore, lies not with the occurrence of crises, since they are unavoidable; rather, it lies with the management and curtailment of crises before they escalate to destroy and hinder peace, stability, and orderliness in society. Management, control, and resolution of any crisis cannot be achieved without the support and cooperation of the media. This makes the media a key and vital element in resolving and curtailing crises. In a similar vein, Ghassabi and Zare-Farashbandis (2015:95) view resonates with this view when they opine that without a positive attitude in the media, even the best efforts of policymakers and managers would not have the best possible effect."

The aim of this paper, therefore, is to examine the role of mass media in crisis management in Nigeria. This paper will be divided into three sections. The first section will discuss and do a conceptual analysis of the concepts of mass media, crisis, and crisis management. Following this, the next section will explore the role of the mass media in crisis management. The last section will domesticate the issue of crisis management and see how the media has contributed to resolving some crises in Nigeria. The research questions this study sets out to answer are: what is a crisis? What are the roles of the mass media in crisis management? What are the problems faced by the media in the discharge of their duties in times of crisis? In what ways have media coverage and reportage resolved crises in Nigeria? What is the role played by the media in enhancing the relationship between policymakers and the public in times of crisis?

The Concept of Crisis, Crisis Management, and Mass Media: A Brief Explanation
The significance of conceptualizing the concept of crisis will negate the problem of confusion between the concept of crisis and other related concepts like conflict and violence. Idowu Williams made an attempt to distinguish between crisis, conflict, and violence. His submission on this distinction is instructive. For him, based on structural analysis, crisis and conflict are not the same. In his words, he asserts that:

Crisis goes beyond the occurrence or the manifestation of conflict. It is true, no doubt, that crisis cannot be said to be in existence without a prior manifestation or existence of conflict or even violence, but the fact remains that a state of crisis is what comes after a persistent manifestation of moments and states of conflicts. It denotes a turning point, either for good or bad, after series of conflict or violence (2005:14).

The above quotation shows that a crisis is the aftermath of persistent and unresolved conflict. By implication, conflict does not necessarily lead to a crisis. Subsequently, while violence is always conflictual, conflict is not always violent. In defining conflict, Idowu has this to say:

Conflict emerges whenever two or more persons (or groups) seek to possess the same object, occupy the same space or the same exclusive position, play incompatible roles, maintain incompatible goals, or undertaker mutually incompatible means for achieving their purposes…

conflict suggests a state of competition, and since there is no competition without some form of antagonism or desire to outwit the opponent, conflict therefore makes meaning when understood as the manifestation of incompatibility of desires and interests… conflict is said to occur where there is interaction between at least two individuals or groups whose ultimate objectives differ… conflict may not be necessarily destructive (2005:13-14).

As earlier stated, crisis and conflict are structurally different following Idowu's submission; however, the difference is not conspicuous. Hence, oftentimes, crisis and conflict are used synonymously. From a sociological perspective, Ademola Dasylva (2005:30) aptly describes conflict as:

A state of disharmony or discord with oneself (inner or personal conflict), between a person and another, or a person and a group, or a group within itself or with another group, or community within itself or with another community, or a nation within itself or with another nation, or conflict among nations, all arising from a misunderstanding, or misinterpretation or misrepresentation of an intention or an action occasioned either by genuine error of commission or omission, or by a deliberate mischief and, or aggression, usually motivated by selfish reasons.

The above quotation conforms to Idowu's view that conflict is multidimensional. Gleaned from the analysis of conflict and crisis discussed above is that, first, conflict and crisis can be used interchangeably, but structurally, conflict precedes crisis. Second, conflict and crisis may not necessarily be violent, but there is a possibility that they could lead to violence if not controlled. Lastly, conflict and crisis are integral parts of human existence because human existence is conditioned on relationships. By implication, conflict and/or crisis can only occur between two or more individuals, groups, associations, communities, and so on.

For Lewis Coser (1956:10), "conflict is the struggle over values or claims to status, power, and scarce resources in which the aims of the groups or individuals involved are not only to obtain the desired value but to neutralize, injure, or eliminate rivals." This definition aligns with Idowu's view that conflict arises out of competition and the struggle for ownership. However, this definition is deficient because it construes conflict in the sense that it necessarily leads to destruction and the use of force and violence. To reiterate, conflict and violence are not the same, such that conflict does not always lead to violence or the destruction of lives and property. There are different categorizations of conflict, which are ethnic conflicts, class conflicts, religious conflicts, and environmental conflicts, among others (Idowu, 2015: 1324). The comprehensive analysis of these categorizations is beyond the scope of this study. The question is, what is violence?

Vittorio Bufacchi (2005) describes two concepts of violence. First, violence as force; and second, violence as violation. The latter conceives of violence as the violation of human rights, such as the

right to life, personal liberty and security, and socioeconomic rights. The point is that a violation could take place without the use of force or physical assault. However, this conception suffers from the problem of the all-inclusiveness of rights being violated. Joseph Betz (1977:34), as cited by Vittorio (2005:197), remarks that "if violence is violating a person's rights, then every sociological wrong is a violent one, every crime against another is a violent crime, and every sin against ones neighbour is an act of violence." The former conceives of violence in terms of the use of force and physical coercion. Coady (1986), as cited by Vittorio (2005:195), accentuates that "violence is in terms of interpersonal acts of force usually involving the infliction of physical injury." This aligns with the legitimist theory of violence as noted by Idowu Williams, however, with an inclusion of legitimacy. This is reflected in the submission of Sydney Hook, quoted by Idowu Williams (2005:12), that illegal employment of methods of physical coercion for personal or group ends However, this definition is too narrow, as it restricts violence to physical force and the infliction of physical injury. Steger (2003:13), quoted by Vittorio, adds the notion of psychological injury to the concept of force. Henrys (2000) definition of violence is worth mentioning here. For him, violence is the use of power to harm another, whatever form it takes. Willem de Haan (2008:32), quoting from Henry and Milovanovic (1996:103), asserts that "it can also occur along many dimensions beyond the physical to include psychological or emotional, material or economic, social or identity, moral or ethical, and so on." Following this analysis of violence, it could be deduced that violence is construed around concepts such as force, harm, and the infliction of physical and psychological pain and suffering. Meanwhile, it is worthy of note to reiterate, for emphasis, that violence is not the same as conflict or crisis. While all violence is conflictual, not all conflicts are violent.

Another concept pending an answer and clarification is crisis management. Simola (2014) adumbrates that crisis management is a process consisting of activities such as the evaluation of crisis signs, taking and applying necessary precautions, and implementing resolution strategies in order to recover from the crisis with the minimum loss. In a similar vein, Mustafa et al. (2016:113), quoting Tuz Hasit et al. (2013), aptly submit that crisis management is a process including a set of activities like estimation and prevention of crises, getting prepared for them, determining their characteristics, planning recovery and learning mechanisms, rescheduling, and application. For Hugh (2004), "conflict management is a process of engaging with and managing, controlling, and/or transforming the relationships, interests, discourses, and, if necessary, the very constitution of society that supports the continuation of violent conflict." Hughs point about the necessity of change as an essential feature of crisis management. This is also reflected in the definition of crisis management by John Lederach (1995). In his own view, he sees crisis management as a change. The definitions considered imply that crisis management could occur either before or after a crisis. The former is characterized by features such as precautions, prevention, and warning to stop the occurrence of crises. The latter is characterized by features such as mediation, dialogue, and mapping out resolution strategies to minimize the damages caused by the crisis.

Another key concept relevant to this study is mass media. Media is a collection of communication outlets or tools that are used to store and deliver information or data. It is either associated with communication media such as print media and the press, photography, advertising, cinema, broadcasting (Radio and Television), publishing, or social media like Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and so on. According to Nnamani Florence (2017:63), media are electronic devices that are used to gather and disseminate all forms of information or messages to the general public, irrespective of their geographical location.

Media is a communication channel through which news, entertainment, education, data, or promotional messages that are beneficial not only to the development of society but also to the welfare of individuals are disseminated for public consumption and the formation of public opinion. According to the draft resolution from the Committee on Culture, Science, Education, and Media (2020) on the role of the media in times of crises, "it is vital for citizens to have access, through the media, to relevant, reliable, clear, and factual information on the crises." The mass media is wide and includes, among others, television, newspapers, magazines, radio, published articles, and social media (Facebook, Twitter, and so on).

History has shown that the media can incite people toward violence. Hitler used the media to create an entire worldview of hatred for Jews, homosexuals, and other minority groups. Rwanda's radio station RTLM urged listeners to pick up machetes and take to the streets to kill what they called the cockroaches. Broadcasters in the Balkans polarized local communities to the point where violence became an acceptable tool for addressing grievances. The media impact on the escalation of conflict is more widely recognized than the media impact on peacebuilding.

Drawing on the experience of the September 2001 crisis in Jos, the role of the media in the crisis was received with mixed feelings by different parties in the conflict and outright accusations of the media taking sides in the conflict. From the feedback of various stakeholders (comprising the elders and the youths), the Muslims accused the Plateau State-owned media, Plateau Radio and Television Corporation (PRTVC), of taking sides during the crisis when they denied outright access to the Muslims even when they were willing to pay for it. Christians also accused the Voice of America (VOA) of taking sides with the Muslims in reporting the crisis.

While there may be justifiable reasons limiting objective coverage in a violent identity-related conflict such as the one in Plateau State, the performance of the Nigerian press in conflict management has not been quite impressive. In a number of instances, the media have been the generator of conflict. An example is the World Beauty Pageant Crisis, which occurred in Kaduna State in 2002. The riot was alleged to have been caused by a report published by Isioma Daniel of This Day Newspaper.

The Role of Mass Media in Crisis Management in Nigeria
The mass media, as earlier noted, has greatly contributed to the management, prevention, precaution, and suppression of crises in Nigeria. In the case of the ethno-religious crisis in Jos, Nigeria, the media played a vital role in the escalation and continuity of the crisis for decades. This is no doubt contrary to the ethics, duties, and responsibilities of mass media. The mass media should be a vehicle and channel for resolving and preventing further crises through accurate, unbiased, and objective reporting, coverage, and dissemination of information for public consumption. The media has been used to combat and resolve crises in Nigeria. An illustration of this is clearly stated by Pauline Mark Lere (2009:427), who states that during the escalated Kaduna riot of 1987, the then Emir of Kano went on the radio to appeal to the people to put a stop to the crisis and stop the wanton destruction of lives and properties. The emir preaches peace and dialogue and admonishes the people to embrace religious tolerance in order to achieve stability, orderliness, and economic development. Nigeria has experienced multiple crises in History, which are either escalated by the media in order to pull crowds and make more money or de-escalated by the media through an objective report of crises.

Many scholars and researchers in the area of conflict and crisis management unequivocally agree that the attainment of objective reportage of crises and events is difficult to attain (Yoroms (2009), Akin (2005), Dul (2007), and Lere (2009). The reason for this is not far-fetched. One of the reasons for the lack of objectivity in the reportage of the media in times of crisis and conflict is hinged on the ownership structure, political affiliation, religious affiliation, location, and mission of the newspaper (Galadima, 2006:26). For John Galadima (2005), this contributed to the reasons why the media could not give an objective and unbiased report on crises in Jos, Plateau State, between 2001 and 2003. This aligns with the submission of John Galadima and Rasheed Olaniyi (2009) in their article, titled "On Mass Media and Conflicts in Plateau State (2001-2002)" that media cannot be objective in their reports and coverage because many of the media houses are linked and connected to the structure of power in the government. Lendman (2008:2) corroborates this assertion when he puts it in his words:

…today the media is in crisis, and a free and open society is at risk. Fiction substitutes for fact, news is carefully filters, dissent is marginalised and supporting the powerful substitutes for full accurate reporting. As a result, wars of aggression are called liberating ones, civil liberties are suppressed for our own good and patriotism means going along with governments that are lawless. One of the positive contributions of the media to de-escalate crises is seen in the case of the Maitatsine Crises, which started in Kano in 1980 and spread to some other parts of the northern states like Gombe, Maiduguri, Bauchi, and Yola. The Maitatsine Muslim sect, under the leadership of Muhammadu Marwa, a Cameroonian religious teacher also known as Maitatsine, inflicts pain, suffering, and agony on the people whose beliefs are contrary to their sect. As a matter of fact, many lives and properties were destroyed in all the Northern states mentioned earlier on the basis

of religious supremacy and purity. Some of the atrocities of Maitatsine are clearly described by Hussaini Abdu (2002). In his words:

Maitatsine had become a stormy petrel in Kano society and generally among Muslims... He arrested and detained people illegally and indiscriminately; some said he has a slaughterhouse where he made meat out of people. Many women and children were kidnapped and made to slave-work for the group. He was also accused of intimidation and molestation of innocent people, particularly the occupants of neigbouring houses in *yan' Awaki* Quarters (*Maitatsine Quartes*). He forcefully ejected people from their houses and handed over the houses to his fanatical followers (2002:15).

Elizabeth Isichei (1987:194) also summarises the casualties and toll of deaths from the crisis that broke out from the *Maitatsine* revolt. She says:

In December 1980, his followers in Kano revolted; the city was convulsed by what was virtually civil war, and 4177 died, among them Maitatsine himself. In October, 1982 a new rising broke out at Bulumkutu, 15 kilometers from Maiduguri, far to the east. 3,350 were killed. Fighting also broke out in Rigsa village, near Kaduna, which spread into the city. In March, 1984 there was an outbreak of violence in Yola, the capital of Gongola State, which left between 500 and 1,000 dead. In April, 1985, there was yet another rising in Gombe, in Bauchi State, when over 100 were killed.

At this time, the media unanimously gave accurate, unbiased, reliable, and factual information on the crisis of the Maitatsine rising. In fact, the media tagged the sect as "fanatics."

Another crisis in the history of Nigeria is the issue of Nigeria's membership in the Organization of Islamic Conference (OIC). Nigeria became a member of the OIC in January 1986. This causes another crisis as the country is polarized between two religions: Christianity and Islam. Both religions were at odds and no longer lived in harmony, cooperation, and peace. Nigeria's membership in the OIC was vehemently kicked against by Christians, who believed that it was a cunning way to Islamize Nigeria. The news of Nigeria's membership in the OIC was reported by a French newspaper. This news escalated the unexpected crisis overnight and led to the destruction of social, political, religious, and political stability. The role of the mass media in handling the reportage of this crisis was laced with sentiments and religious affiliations. Hence, the media failed to give an unbiased and objective report and information, thereby enhancing the tempo of the crisis with false information. What the media should do in this case, as recommended by the Committee on Culture, Science, Education, and Media (2021), is that "the threat posed by information disorder is amplified, and the need to prevent it and counter it becomes more pressing. The requirement for professionalism and thoroughness in checking information disseminated is all the greater in times of crisis, and the media must be aware of the heightened responsibility that they must assume to

the full, including in terms of effectively countering conspiracy theories and inflammatory discourses."

Also, the social media network has been used to ignite and escalate crises in Nigeria through the posting and sharing of false, biased, sentimental, subjective, and provocative information that could exacerbate crises, truncate social cohesion and integration, and jeopardize peaceful and harmonious living among the people. An illustration is the Mohammed cartoon riots in Nigeria. The caricature cartoons of Prophet Mohammed were published in the Danish national daily. This publication by the Danish daily Jyllands-Posten portrayed the Prophet in different provocative ways. According to the Reliefweb blog, one of the cartoons depicts the Prophet wearing a turban resembling a bomb. This ignites reactions from the Muslim faithful worldwide. Nigeria, especially the northern part, also joined in the protest to express their dissatisfaction with portraying the Prophet in the wrong way and associating Islam with terrorism. The protest in Nigeria in 2006 led to a riot that killed at least 17 people, and 30 churches burned in the northeast Nigerian city of Maiduguri(https://reliefweb.int/report/nigeria/nigeria-muhammad-cartoon-protests-spark-attacks-christians#:~:text=ABUJA%2C%2020%20Feb%202006(IRIN,on%20local%20Christians%2C%20police%20said). The victims of this riot were Christians whose lives and properties were lost in the course of Muslims faithful trying to defend their faith and the Prophet. Apparently, the sensitive publication of information that is culpable of igniting religious, ethnic/tribal, political, and social crises, among others, should be censored and fact-checked before it gets to the public. The recommendation of the Committee on Culture, Science, Education, and Media (2021) is also instructive here. One of the recommendations states that "as far as social media platforms are concerned, given the risk of false news or unchecked information disseminated on their networks, the operators should redouble their efforts to counter this trend by developing fact-checking tools and promoting reliable and uaccurate news sources. In addition, the media should educate the people on the need to understand the available choices they have in times of crisis and the implications of their choices on individuals and society as a whole. This will help individuals make choices that are not detrimental to peaceful coexistence.

Recommendations
The fact that the media is very influential is an indisputable fact. Hence, the government should regulate and monitor the activities of the media. This is not the same as imposing restrictions and depriving the press of independence. Nevertheless, there should be a monitoring team that will have government officials and members of the press as its members in order to ensure fairness in double-checking and fact-checking some news, articles, programs, and the like before they are available for public consumption. Also, there is a need for public and private media personnel to engage in constant training and education in order to learn and re-learn the modus operandi of media ethics. This will guide and prevent the dissemination of false and provoking information that is culpable for escalating crises in society. Also, media houses must prioritize the dissemination of true and genuine information over fake and biased news for personal gain. Also,

in the coverage and reporting of crises, the media house should collaborate with the government security agencies for protection. This will reduce casualties and the loss of lives of some media personnel that will be at the forefront of a crisis by giving adequate, comprehensive, and factual information about the occurrence of a crisis. In times of crisis, the media should facilitate dialogue among multi-religious and multi-cultural understandings to prevent misinformation and the support of one religion or culture over others.

CONCLUSION

This paper has been concerned with the study of the role of mass media in crisis management in Nigeria. In light of this, this study employs the method of conceptual analysis to underscore and examine different key concepts connected to the topic. It is gleaned from the conceptual analysis of crisis, crisis management, and mass media that these concepts are relevant and interconnected in resolving and preventing the occurrence of crises and, at the same time, minimizing their damage. This paper finds out that crisis and conflict can be used interchangeably, albeit on a structural basis. Also, crisis is different from violence because the study shows that not all crises are violent, but in all violent situations, there is a crisis. In addition, the paper finds out that violence is not restricted to physical force or attack, as this conception of violence is too narrow. Violence, therefore, could be seen as either a physical force or a psychological attack. In addition, this study finds that the role of the media in curbing or igniting crises cannot be overemphasized. The media should therefore play a vital and key role in maintaining peace, promoting social cohesion and national integration, promoting religious and tribal tolerance, and also condemning any attempt to disrupt peaceful co-existence through the promotion of intellectual debates and educational programs that will analyse and explain the adverse effects of crises and ways to prevent them.

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