

NEWSPAPER COVERAGE OF RELIGIOUS CRISES AND SECURITY IN NIGERIA (A STUDY OF THE GUARDIAN AND THE PUNCH)

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Abstract

Religious crises is a very controversial issue that has been in the history of Nigeria for years. The study reviews the depth coverage of religious crises and their effects on the security of citizens. Prominence, slant, frequency and the media representation were analysed using content analysis. Relevant literatures on religion, media and crises were also reviewed. Specific theories were stated to make emphasis on the role of the media. This study employed the aid of a coding sheet in gathering data, the content of two major daily newspapers, The Guardian and The Punch were reviewed and they served as the sampling size. Most of the research questions were aimed at examining the attention these newspapers give to new stories, features and cartoons that address religious crises by investigating the prominence, slant and frequency of news reports. The findings of the research shows that the press reportage on religious crises are mostly in news stories category. Data was presented using tables and bar charts for comparison. The study concludes that the media have shown professionalism in the reportage of religious crises and these reports have promoted unity and security. The study recommends that the media should always abide with the journalistic code of ethics and make sure they report sensitive issues like religious crises consciously in other to avoid triggering unforeseen crises in the nearest future.

Keywords: Security, Crises, slant, Newspaper reportage

1. BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

Religion is a cultural phenomenon, and it has played a dominant role in the socio-political organisation of man throughout history. Nigeria is a country that is culturally diverse and has a number of religious groups which includes; Christianity, Islam, and Traditional religion. In a diverse environment such as Nigeria, religion has become very significant, as Christians and Muslims who mainly dominate the environment are strong about their beliefs and therefore passionately act and exercise such belief system care freely. Okebukola (2012), affirms that religion is, without doubt, a potent force to achieve political stability in the land, considering the role it can play in bringing about development in the light of corruption that pervades society. This is probably because according to Anyanwu (2010), religion is human interaction with the supernatural in

order to cope with life crises.

However, the process of using religion in coping with life issues has become detrimental to the world at large. Religious crises has led to loss of lives and properties, population displacement, instability in government, underdevelopment, and distortion in national unity, fear and lack of trust. Furthermore, the causes of religious crises can also be identified as lack of recognition; which exists when a religion do not have regard for the other, which breeds hatred and blackmail and a lack of understanding (Omotosho, 2012). Religion is often depicted as a contributing factor in many conflicts and a tool to mobilise people during conflicts (Tjaart 2012) especially with political conflict (Okorie, Loto, & Omojola, 2018).

Nigeria has experienced religious crises and it is most times between Christians and Muslims (the two major religions in Nigeria). Disagreements between these two dominant religions erupts because the religions desire to have dominant recognition of their beliefs, structure and culture in Nigeria. This has been the basis for religious crises in Nigeria since 1999. Some of these crises includes; the Kano revolt in 1980, the Bulunktu Bizarre in 1982, the Kastina crises in 1999, the Zamfara conflict, Kaduna revolt, Bauchi crises and Sokoto 1999. Recent examples are the Jos crises and the current conflict by Boko Haram against Christians and Muslims, which officially started in 2002.

The future impact of religious crises on the society is beyond imagination, because it has the capacity to destroy the unity of people, which would in turn affect negatively, the development of the nation. Nigerians would continue to disagree concerning issues, therefore making it difficult for them to work together and make progress for national development. This is already evident in the democratic system in Nigeria. This has caused many crises like the Biafra saga, Boko haram insurgency, the February 2000 crisis in Kaduna state between Christians and Muslims which was caused by the introduction of the Sharia law. Others are the November 2002 crisis in Kaduna, on the 22nd of November caused by a blasphemous article in a Christian newspaper, and the 2013 Tarasba crisis, which occurred due to the demolition of the mosques by Christian youths resulting in the loss of lives and properties.

Religious conflict has done more harm than good in the country. It has created a form of hatred and has weakened the spirit of patriotism among Nigerians. It has also caused loss of lives, property, and deaths. This is why the former president Obasanjo (2004) affirmed that, "violence has reached unprecedented levels and hundreds have been killed with much more wounded or displaced from their homes due to the nature of their ethnic or religious identification". In the light of this, religious crises in Nigeria is destroying the international relations reputation. Religious crises affect the security of Nigerians. It is always destructive because of its links to the aggressive behaviours of the people involved.

According to Ali (2013), national security means the protection of the lives, rights, dignity and property of citizens. It also means the protection of resources, cultural integrity, territory, sovereignty and lawful institutions of a country. Her stand in the matter of national security influences the state of a countries economic, social, political and international well-being. Generally, the security of Nigerians is important to enable peace, mental stability and harmonious existence of law, order and well-being in all relationships. This is because it brings development and prosperity to humanity (Lokko, 2012). The issue of national security has taken a new form. In the past years, there had been records of bombings. Such cases of bomb attack includes ; attack on churches, media house, resource centre, army barracks, commercial structures and so on and the citizens don't see the government treating the uprising as a matter of urgency.

Media reports on crises, conflicts, war has a hand in promoting or increasing violence. Asemah (2011) notes that the mass media in Nigeria set agenda for national discuss. They can exploit vision and get people addicted to their content giving relevance to media agenda. The issues they give prominence, are the issues people focus on. According to Sambe (2008), "the press is a product of mass opinion". Neuman (n.d) says "to a large extent, it is the media that creates opinions". The media affect people's thinking and perceptions on issues of national interest through their "agenda setting" power. However, Ali (2013) argues that it is obvious that the concentration of the media is in the hands of few individuals in the society. That is known as "monopoly of the media," it limits the role media ought to play in national security". Supporting Ali's argument, Akpan (2013), writes that, "National security is threatened by mass media, as the media are increasingly internationalised in content". This has further lead to media imperialism, which occurs when the media fails to disseminate information according to the culture, beliefs, values of its own country but focuses on foreign content.

The media is a powerful tool of communication and it serves as the fourth estate of the realm. Section 22 of the Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, 1999 (as amended), Chapter II on Fundamental objectives and directive principles of state policy explains the obligation of the mass media thus:

“The press, radio, television and other agencies of the mass media shall at all times be free to uphold the fundamental objectives contained in this Chapter and uphold the responsibility and accountability of the Government to the people”. (Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria 1999).

Christenson, (1959), said “the mass media are most effective in shaping opinions”. The media aid in enlightening, influencing and entertaining members of the public to participate actively in developmental activities. Information provided by the mass media goes a long way in influencing societal change in all aspects of life thereby enhancing the quality of lives either positively or negatively.

Nwabueze and Ebeze (2013, p.867-868) highlights common practices by the media which contributes negatively to crises situations. They include, coverage of stereotype among category of people, sentimental coverage of stories based on journalist’s culture, shallow and one-sided coverage of events, frequent use of sentimental headlines to boost sales and inflammatory statements against people inability to support facts and so on. The mass media need to become aware of some of these intentional acts to avoid implications that come with insecurity in Nigeria. These are activities, which the media need to desist from to make meaningful impact in combating insecurity in Nigeria; otherwise, the mass media will continue to be seen as a major factor promoting insecurity.

Furthermore, Onuegbu E (2015) examined the extent to which media reports could worsen religious crises in Nigeria. This research looked at newspaper coverage of religious crises and the consequential effects of such crisis in the socio-economic and political fortunes of Nigeria. The evaluative analysis for the research showed that between 2010 and 2011, the Nigerian press used sufficient space in their publications in the reportage of religious crises. The researcher recommended that the Nigerian press must continue to understand that it owes everybody the duty to be socially responsible at all times. Furthermore, they should continue to be balanced and non-sensational in their reportages.

In addition, Akinola (2014) investigated the pattern and mapping of Muslims, Christians and religious violence in Nigeria: (June 2006 – May 2014). The study revealed a higher frequency of violent death among Islamic groups against Islamic groups than incidents involving Islamic groups against Christian groups. The western media believes that these conflicts are inter-religious, while incidents involving Islamic groups against Islamic groups were not frequently reported. The research of this paper establishes that global media frame violence in Nigeria as religious conflicts between these two major religions rather reporting in a balanced way.

Considering that there are limited studies that have investigated the implication of these media reportage on the security of Nigerians, this research will examine the role the reportage of religious crisis on the security on Nigerians.

1.1 Statement of the Problem

Nigeria is known for conflicts, which emanates from culture and religious differences. It has posed security issues and disunity amongst Nigerians therefore hindering the development of Nigeria as a nation. However, scholars like Craig and Nuralanga, (2006); Entman, (1994) affirm that “the way and manner in which the media report events in terms of conflicts, affects the prolongation or early resolution of such conflicts”. They argued that media report could be a strong factor to religious crises and security in Nigeria.

Generally, the role of the media is to shape events, as well as disseminate information relating to conflicts, disorders, wars and so on. Media representation of these conflicts, constitute an important subject in contemporary debate. This explains that the narrative strategies in which the media employ at times in relation with conflicts and war have triggered outcomes of conflicts resulting in insecurity with more conflicts (Ayansola, 2017). This study investigates the role of the media in the reportage of religious crises and implications on security in Nigerians using content analysis, a form of qualitative method (Omojola, O., Odiboh, & Amodu, 2018).

Research Questions

The general sort to find out the following:

What is the influence of media report of religious crises on the security in Nigeria?

1. What is the implications of the media reportage of religious crisis in Nigeria?
2. What is the prominence given to religious crises in reporting news stories and media representation of religious crisis within the period of study in Nigeria?

3. What is the security threat in the media reportage of religious crisis in Nigeria?

2. METHOD

A sample size of 768 was used for this study. Four issues were systematically selected per week. There are seven days in week and Monday, Wednesday, Friday and Saturday were purposively selected. Monday was chosen, based on the observation that most news gathered from Sundays are reported on Mondays, Wednesdays because it is the middle of the week, Fridays because it the end of the working week and Saturday to represent a weekend daily, and then multiplied by four weeks to arrive at sixteen issues per month. Sixteen issues per month now multiplied by the twenty-four months within the two years of study gives a total of 384 issues per newspaper. The 384 issues was multiplied by two newspapers under the study to arrive at a sample size of 768. The unit of analysis include; news stories, cartoons and feature stories. The total number of population (n) is dependent on the number of stories on religious crises. A total number of 116 items were found with religious crises.

3. DATA PRESENTATION, ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

This study analyses how newspapers report religious crisis through news stories. The analysis is to help the researcher know if these media messages promote unity, security and conflict through their daily report. The study analysed the Nigerian press coverage of religious crisis, focusing on the prominence given to the religious crisis, the slant or tone of the reportage of religious crisis and so on. The data gathered for this study, covered all the editions of *punch* and *guardian* from January to December, from 2016 to 2017.

This section focused on the presentation of finding from the field with the use of tables and bar chart. The use of charts is to help give a graphical illustration that will make it easy for the reader to understand at first glance. The study of the newspapers showed that religious crisis was reported within 2016 to 2017 and each newspaper reported the event in different ways. Below is a table that shows the frequency distribution of the event by the two newspapers. (*The punch and the guardian*).

Table 1

Frequency Distribution of Religious Crisis in Selected Newspapers

NEWSPAPER	FREQUENCY	PERCENTAGE
<i>THE GUARDIAN</i>	51	43.9%
<i>THE PUNCH</i>	65	53.4%
TOTAL	116	100%

The result shows that the punch newspaper reported more news stories on religious crises than the guardian newspaper. 65 news items resulting to 53.4% as compared to The Guardian newspaper with a percentage of 43.9% coverage of religious related contents in the print media.

Table 2

Religious Crisis Stories According To Prominence of Coverage

	<i>THE PUNCH</i>	<i>THE GUARDIAN</i>	PERCENTAGE
FRONT PAGE	16.9%	17.6%	17.2%
INSIDE PAGE	70.8%	72.5%	71.6%
CENTER PAGE	12.3%	9.8%	11.2%
BACK PAGE	0%	0 %	0%
TOTAL			100% n=116

From the table above, the study sought to find the prominence given to the religious crisis stories by the two newspapers. From the table, it is noted that most of the stories were placed on the inside pages 71.6%. The front page and back page of both newspapers carry less stories on religious crises in Nigeria. The front page carried about 17.2% and the centre page with 11.2%. The result means that *the punch* and *The guardian* newspaper don't give prominence to religious crises since most of the crisis related media contents are reported in the centre pages of these newspapers.

Table 3
Religious Crisis Stories According to the Slant of Coverage

	<i>THE PUNCH</i>	<i>THE GUARDIAN</i>	PERCENTAGE
ETHICAL	69.2%	68.6%	68.9%
NON ETHICAL	30.8%	31.4%	31.0%
TOTAL			100%
			n= 116

From the table above, the result shows that *Punch* newspaper reported stories that are ethical with 69.2% while guardian had 68.6%. 68.9% of the content examined reveal that reporters are ethical in reporting religious crises for both newspapers. This means that majority of print reporters consider ethics in performing their social responsibilities.

Table 4
Religious Crisis Stories According To Story Types Of Coverage

STORY TYPES	<i>THE PUNCH</i>	<i>THE GUARDIAN</i>	PERCENTAGE
FEATURE ARTICLE	1.5%	0	0.9%
EDITORIAL	12.3%	13.7%	12.9%
NEWS STORY	86.2%	86.3%	86.2%
CARTOON	0	0	0
PICTURES	0	0	0
TOTAL			100%
			n=116

From the table 4.4 above, it is clear that most of were report about the religious crisis, in the punch and the guardian newspapers were news stories (86.2%). Editorials (12.9%) and feature (0.9%) have the lowest representation of religious stories in punch and guardian. Stories relating to pictures and cartoon where not reported in the newspapers within the period of study.

Table 5
Religious Crisis Stories According To the Media Representation of Religious Crisis

THEMES	<i>THE PUNCH</i>	<i>THE GUARDIAN</i>	PERCENTAGE
PROMOTES SECURITY	24.6%	23.5%	24.1%
PROMOTES CONFLICTS	44.6%	49.0%	46.6%
PROMOTES UNITY	30.8%	27.5%	29.3%
TOTAL			n=116

The above table reveals that, religious crisis stories reported by the *Punch* promoted security with 24.6% while the *Guardian* reports promoted security with 23.5%. The difference between the two newspapers relating to the promotion of security is not high. The *Guardian* newspaper had a high percentage for promotion of conflict with 49.0% while the *Punch* had a 44.6%. The *Punch* newspaper had 30.8% for promotion of unity while the *Guardian* had 27.5%. However, the religious stories reported by the *Punch* and the guardian newspaper had a high percentage 46.6% for promoting conflict, followed by promotion of unity which had 29.3% and promotion of security which is the least.

4.2 Discussions of results

The coverage of the 2016 to 2017 religious crises shows that the press averagely reported religious crisis, which is a major issue in Nigeria. This shows that the press did not focus on their social responsibility. The *Guardian* and the *Punch* newspapers did not give adequate report on religious crises between the years studied.

In this regards to this, the Nigerian media failed in their social responsibility. Religious crises have resulted in the loss of lives and properties, displacement of individuals, yet the media gave little or no relevance to these stories. This study however reveals that the Nigeria media did not improve in their reportage of religious crises between the year 2016 and 2017. However the low reportage might have been to ensure peace or was as result of little or no records of major religious crises within the period studied. However, from the analysis, the *Punch* newspaper had the highest number of reports (65) when compared to the guardian newspaper which had (51) reports of religious crises within the period examined. This implies that the *Punch* newspaper reported more of religious crises stories.

The media has the power to change the perception of every citizen in a country. According to this research, they failed to represent their stories in different story types.

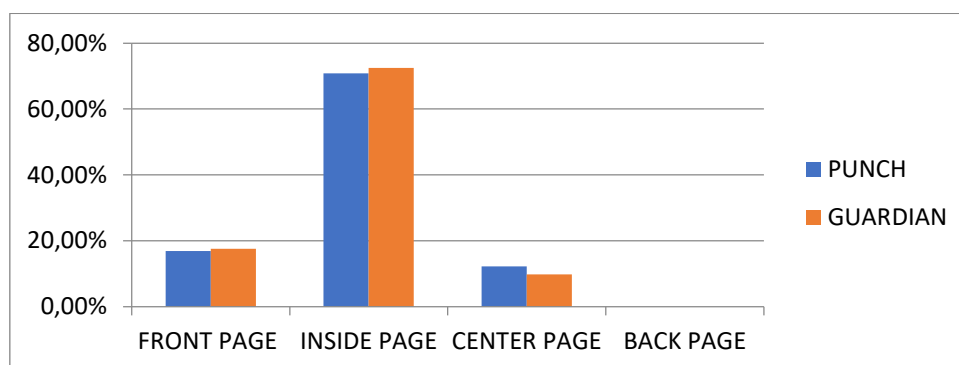
According to the analysis provided, *they had a high number of stories under news stories. Also, conducting interviews and getting opinions from people would have gone a long way in order for people to connect with each other. According to the analysis news stories had 86.2% and 86.3%, editorials had 12.3% and 13.7%. Feature articles had 1.5% and nothing was reported under cartoon and pictures.

Prominence shows through the placement of stories according to the importance of events. The front page, inside page, centre and back page, portrays the scale of importance amongst stories. However, as an event of national relevance, the religious crises were given very low prominence with a total of 16.9% and 17.6% for the front page, while nothing was reported at the back page. For the centre page, 12.3% and 9.8% was recorded. Most of the stories were placed on the inside pages. This shows that there was a high level of imbalance between the two newspapers. Three research questions were posed to guide the direction of the study, and these were the answers;

Research Question 1: What Is The Prominence Given To Media Report of Religious Crises?

Fig 1

Distribution of Religious Crisis Stories According to Prominence of Coverage

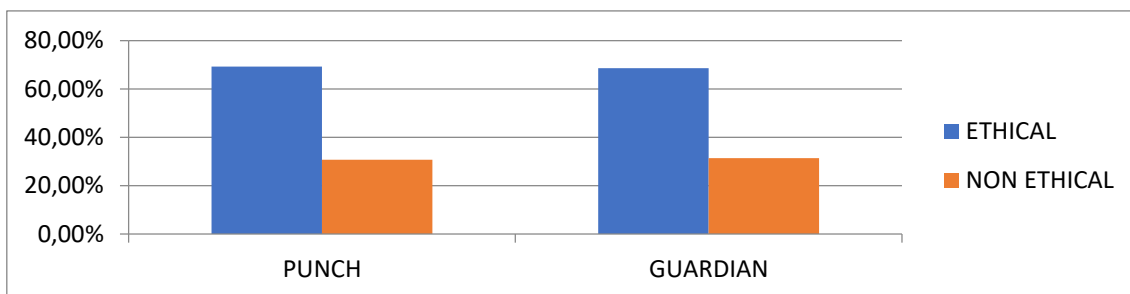


From the two newspapers analysed, the result show in the chart, reflects the level of importance given to religious crisis stories. According to the chart, few stories occupied the front page of both newspapers with a percentage of 16.9% and 17.6%, this shows that religious crisis stories was not given a high level of prominence. However, majority of the stories were placed at the inside page with 70.8% and 72.5%, while 2.3% and 9.8% appeared in the centre page and nothing was reported at the back pages of both newspapers.

Research Question 2: What Is The Slant of the Media Report of Religious Crisis?

Fig 2

Distribution of Religious Crisis Stories According to the Slant of Coverage

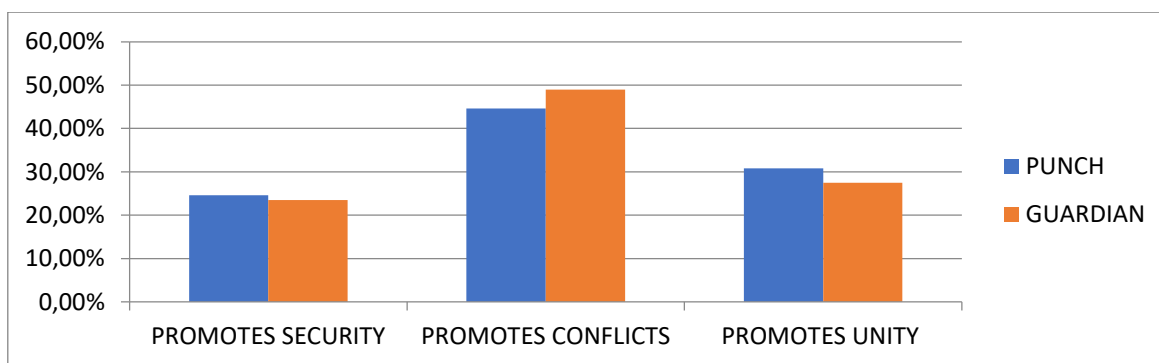


The analysis of the Nigerian newspaper coverage shows that majority of the religious crisis report were ethical. The punch newspaper had 69.2% ethical stories while the guardian had 68.6% ethical stories. The chart also showed that the punch reported 30.8% stories that were unethical, while guardian had 31.4%. However, these show that both newspapers tried to be professional, so as not to report unethical stories that could increase conflicts in Nigeria.

Research Question 3: What Is The Frequency In The Reportage Of Religious Crises Stories Within The Period Of Study?

Fig 3

Religious Crisis According to the Media Representation of Religious Crisis



Regarding the frequency of reportage, religious crisis was poorly reported. Out of 1460 news items reported by the newspapers, 116 news items were reported for both years. Punch reported 65 news items while the guardian had a total of 51 news items on religious crises.

From the result (Fig 3) of the analysis using the categories of promotion of unity, promotion of security and promotion of conflicts, fig 4 depicts that majority of the religious crises stories promoted conflict with 44.6% and 49.0% , while promotion of unity had 30.8% and 27.5% and promotion of security had 24.6% and 23.5%.

4. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Generally, the results show that the Guardian and Punch newspaper ensure ethical conduct when reporting these sensitive stories (religious crises). Although the frequency of reports are limited, the reports covered by the newspaper establishments are likely to promote conflict among the members of the society who read these contents, instead of promoting security or unity among Nigerians.

In this vein, the media regulatory body should be more sensitive to media reports and representation, by further regulating media actions especially in reporting stories surrounding sensitive issues such as religious, terrorism and tribal stories. The ability of the regulatory bodies to ensure this, will assure Nigerians of peace, notwithstanding any form of conflict. On the other hand, it is necessary for Federal government to continually invest in security agents in order to promote positive attitude towards security matters, rather than take sides (Amodu, Alege, Oluwatobi, & Ekanem 2017).

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