

# A NARRATIVE OF JOURNALISTS' EXPERIENCES REPORTING ETHNO-RELIGIOUS CONFLICT IN TARABA STATE, NIGERIA

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**Abstract.** This study examines the experiences of journalists reporting ethno-religious conflict in Taraba state, Nigeria. Due to its ability to affect the public's understanding and perception of conflict situations, the media is a crucial participant during times of conflict. The agenda set by the media, as well as how topics are framed, can influence the direction and outcome of conflict situations. The study's focus is ethno-religious conflict, which is a major resource-use conflict in Nigeria, mostly driven by the abuse of authority and rivalry for land and properties. This study's theoretical base is the social responsibility theory and conflict theory. In this study, in-depth interview was used as the research design. Respondents were chosen using a targeted sampling technique from three media organizations in the state. The study further found that journalists go to the extent of interviewing more than one source at the conflict zone in order to obtain an objective and balance story, it also found that journalist covering conflicts are expose to different challenges and dangers like dead threats, harassment, assault gender inequalities and poor remuneration. The study concludes that if journalists are properly given all the funding, insurance, protection and security at conflict zones, their reports will be objective, balance and socially responsible at all time and meeting the ethical standard of the media organization. The study recommends among others that the following measures should be put in place; provision of security and insurance for journalists, organizing of workshops and seminars to sensitize journalists on conflict, provision of adequate funding to enhance unbiased reporting and verifying statements from multiple resources before reporting.

**Keywords:** *ethno-religious, conflict, peace journalism, Nigeria*

## Introduction

In Nigeria, ethno-religious conflict has been the most prevalent resource use conflict. However, in many parts of Nigeria, competition between ethnic and religious groups has frequently devolved into significant hostilities and societal tensions. From everlasting (internal) state rivalry to outward ethnic conflict (societal wars and bloodshed), the origin and history of ethnic conflict (societal wars and violence) may be traced physically. And the core cause is not distant from power struggles and decisions over money resources, as well as other crucial human factors like status. To name a few, there is personal (internal) conflict, familial, community, and group, intellectual, state, national, and international conflict. Nigeria's multi-ethnic and multi-religious diversities coincide with the North and South divide with Muslims and Christians dominating each part respectively. These have created geo-religious identities; a situation where religion and its concomitant tension generation enthroned a threat to security of the country. However, with her three dominant religions; African traditional religion, Islam and Christianity, it may be necessary to observe that irrespective of the seeming divide; indigenous Christians are in large numbers all over the northern states (Joseph and Rothfuß, 2012). One would think that the presence of these religions would foster

peaceful co-existence and unity in a multi-ethnic and multilingual society like Nigeria but multi-religiosity has tended to impact negatively on the nation creating tension and unrest. Since Nigeria's independence in 1960, internal violence has been a recurrent theme. Religious and ethnic pretexts are commonly used to create conflict in the country.

Conflicts between Christians and Muslims are frequently founded in a struggle for dominance. Religious conflicts can be sparked by perceived mockery of a religion's fundamentals or teachings. Conflicts may arise as a result of laws or rules governing religious practices. According to Onah et al. (2017), religious intolerance was the major factor instigating violence in Nigeria. They cited cases ranging from the Maitatsine riots in 1980 to the Boko Haram uprising. The Maitatsine riots manifested because of the violent attacks from Mohammed Marwa's (the group leader) adherents on other religious groups. Onah et al. (2017) research reveals that the Kafanchan tumult of March 1987 started in the College of Education over a crusade being organized by Christian students and spread to Funtua, Kaduna Metropolis, Zaria and environs. Religious intolerance is also seen in the attacks of Boko Haram, which exhibit religious intolerance against the Christian group by killing Christians, destroying their churches and even raping their women, claiming that it is *jizya*, which means a tax paid by Christians under Islamic law. The lack of a genuine desire to tolerate people from a religious group one does not believe in or belong to has made it difficult for people from different ethnic and religious groups to understand each other's belief and culture (Omotosho, 2003). Hence, this leaves room for the wrong perspective and behavior towards each other.

The experience of these ethno-religious conflicts has affected Nigeria's stability. Some authors have attributed the cause of these conflicts to various factors ranging from marginalization and competition for economic and political spaces to sharing of land, economic and mineral resources (Onah et al., 2017; Çancı and Odukoya, 2016; Alegbeleye, 2014; Salawu, 2010; Omotosho, 2003). Alegbeleye (2014), posits that 'the high rate of unemployment in the country coupled with social injustice and inequality are also causes of these conflicts. Most jobless Nigerians have become tools in the hands of hoodlums, who pay them to carry out violent attacks. More so, the conflict between the Fulani herdsmen and their host community is attributed to the scarcity of resources such as land, water and pasture. This scarcity has led to competition for resources, which is the cause of the current ethnic conflict in Nigeria (Amnesty International Web Portal, 2018). This has led to repeated bloody clashes between the Fulani herdsmen and their host community. The failure of the social control institution in Nigeria can also be seen as a contributor to the various ethno-religious conflicts witnessed in Nigeria today. This is evidenced in the research by Çancı and Odukoya (2016), who posit that the absence of vehicles of social control that were characteristic of traditional African societies, such as kinship, religious and political systems concerned with the well-being of the community, has led to the escalation of ethno-religious conflicts.

Taraba State is one of the finest descriptions of ethno-religious strife. It has become a persistent hotspot of ethno-religious strife in one form or another. Genocidal attacks, the slaughtering and killing of multiple people, and the loss of commercial interests and properties worth billions of Naira define them (Madu and Ibrahim, 2013). In recent years, a surge of violent disputes has erupted in Taraba State, which is frightening. Despite the fact that the state has undergone varied degrees of violent conflict since its

founding in August 1991, the intensity of the conflicts has never reached the current level. Violent clashes have become commonplace in Taraba State today. Ethnic, religious, and occupational tensions all play a role in these violent confrontations. Whatever form they take, the loss of life and property is usually significant. As a result, stakeholders' most pressing aim in recent years has been to reduce the frequency of violent confrontations in the state.

It is vital to recognize that during times of conflict the journalists play a crucial role. Journalists are in charge of surveying society, obtaining and disseminating information that is important to the general public, as part of their surveillance job. In a more recent study, Shaw and Selvarajah (2019) examined how the media in Nigeria are covering and reporting human rights issues and abuses that are prevalent in conflict situations in Nigeria. The authors found that the Nigerian press often does not bring matters of human rights abuses, casualties and deaths of conflict situations high enough on their news agenda to sufficiently capture local and international attention to enhance the remediation of the situation. These results corroborate Nwankwo (2011) who found that the mass media in Nigeria, especially the traditional outlets (Television, radio, and newspapers), have often been criticized for failing to carry out their roles adequately. These criticisms become justified when one considers the high rate of occurrence of casualties and deaths which are reported on social media, but which the traditional media ignore in their reporting. Similar research reported that privately owned media outlets and social media platforms performed better than the state media in reporting and analyzing the cases of human rights violations, casualties, deaths, and humanitarian problems plaguing conflict environments in Nigeria (Nwankwo, 2011). When severe conflicts occur, the public is worried about the effects and stability of their neighborhood; therefore, they swiftly turn to the media to keep up with the newest developments.

According to past study, the Nigerian press, as the society's watchdog, has failed to adequately report the country's crises. Oso (2012) acknowledges the media's effectiveness in setting public agendas in conflict situations, but questions the extent to which such agendas have an impact on conflict resolution, given intervening forces such as declining professional standards, commercialization, and lack of objectivity that have significantly reduced the media's power. These are arguments that are being made in the mainstream media (Ojo, 2010). Mohammed and James (2017) raise concerns about the journalist's ability to objectively report on some disputes in the country. The level of media coverage has a significant impact on the public's perception of conflict situations. While certain disputes have received extensive notice as a result of media coverage, others have been pushed to the background as a result of media neglect. This assumes that the media's failure to cover or under-report some conflicts may be detrimental to their reduction and resolution. Therefore, this study is designed to critically evaluate journalists' experiences reporting ethno-religious conflicts in Nigeria, as well as the coverage's potential impact on the conflict. In specific, this study aims to (i) explore the extent to which journalists in Taraba State report ethno-religious conflict, (ii) determine the challenges journalists in Taraba State experience while reporting ethno-religious conflicts, and (iii) examine the specific areas that the reportage of ethno-religious conflicts could be improved in Nigeria.

### ***Literature review***

#### ***Ethno-religious conflicts in Nigeria: An overview***

The nonstop wars between farmers and herders in Nigeria started when differences of opinion arose due to the overlap of farmlands and cattle routes (Apuke, 2016). These conflicts, however, have lately accelerated and taken on ethnic and religious dimensions. In his research, John (2014) found that conflict coverage in the media and research articles has skewed to portray cases in which herders blame farmers while ignoring the other side of the story or emphasizing the farmers' losses (John, 2014). As one might expect, this worsened the issue and contributed to the rumors, as well as encouraged further claims towards farmers by herders. Farmers' encroachment on livestock pathways, on the other hand, is the fundamental source of confrontations, according to (Manu et al., 2014). These disparate study findings make determining who is to blame and the best method to settle disputes difficult. The dilemma associated with the farmers/herders conflicts in Nigeria is however not limited to the country as there are similar conflicts in Mali, Ghana and other sub-Saharan African countries. Studies have shown that "farmers and pastoralist in many localities and different countries make their livelihood within the same geographical, political, and socio-cultural conditions which may be characterized by resource scarcity (Braukämper, 2000). "These conflicts have been associated with dwindling land resource" (Blench and Dendo, 2004). Other research has linked the conflicts to "the notion of eco-violence" (Okoli and Atelhe, 2014), which states that "predisposing conditions and misuse of limited materials generate conflict and violence." In Nigeria, unfortunately, ethnic warmongers and leaders, especially in less educated regions, have escalated the disputes. Their most powerful instrument for achieving their divisive objectives is misleading statement.

### ***The political economy of the Nigerian media and the coverage of conflict***

In Nigeria, there are primarily two types of media ownership: public and private. The media that is completely funded and regulated by the government are known as government media. The Federal Radio Cooperation of Nigeria (FRCN) and the Nigerian Television Authority (NTA) are two examples of such media (Apuke, 2016). Government ownership and control of the media in Nigeria, according to Tobechukwu (2007), reflects a political agenda. This argues that the government and the ruling party's interests are served by the media's coverage of them. The private media, on the other hand, are owned, financed, and managed by private individuals, groups of individuals, or organizations (Apuke, 2016). Channels TV, TVC News, Vanguard Newspapers, Tribune Newspapers, Daily Trust Newspapers, etc. are a few examples of this type of media in Nigeria. As a result, the definition of media independence is limited by the owners' interests (Gever et al., 2018). In this regards Tobechukwu (2007) stated that the Nigerian media has failed in this aspect because of its close ties to partisan politics. Politicians manipulate the media to further their agendas at the detriment of objective reporting and agenda-setting. As a result, editorial independence is frequently predicated on ownership influence with little involvement from the general public. In light of the fact that the majority of media companies in the nation are controlled by state (sub-national) governments and people, their main function is to advance the interests of their owners. Nigerian media are fundamentally characterized by manipulation and distortion to fit the nation's philosophy or political goal, as well as the media outlet or notable figures (Awobamise and Aderibigbe, 2015). This, in turn, could affect the actual stories of conflict as they may not be adequately covered and disseminated and are usually lost in statistics and reports of humanitarian responses (Jacob et al., 2016).

The government owned mainstream media are mostly skeptical when it comes to criticism of the government in power (Apuke, 2017). Also, the private press, which relies primarily on profit through various funders, advertisers, and special interest groups, would not be far from unbiased reporting (Cissel, 2012). Furthermore, the sources of funding media stations in Nigeria also affect their reportage of stories. 'He who pays the piper dictates the tune' comes to play here as most media organizations do not produce content that might offend advertisers. Another factor that affects the presentation of conflict stories in Nigerian media most especially the government media is the source of stories. Be it private or government, the owners' interest influences media operation.

### ***Peace journalism as a substitute to war reporting***

Johan Galtung, a Norwegian Peace Studies scholar, coined the term "peace journalism" in the 1970s. While some communication scholars have worked to expand and popularize the concept since then, others have questioned its viability. Peace journalism, according to an expert, does not simply imply "reporting peace." According to them, peace journalism "involves applying ideas from Peace and Conflict Studies—the sum of what is known and seen about conflict, its dynamic, and the possibility for transition the day-to-day tasks of reviewing and reporting the news". Peace journalism arose from the decisions journalists make in their conflict coverage and reporting, which have a significant impact on the public's understanding of the conflict and what they believe is the answer (Ahlsen, 2013). In essence, the goal of peace journalism is for stories concerning conflict situations to be picked and publicized in the media in order to draw attention to the possibilities of nonviolent conflict settlement. According to Shinar (2007), peace journalism instills a sense of accountability and social competence in the media's portrayal of conflict. It aspires to contribute to peace building, reconciliation, and influencing the mindsets of media owners, marketers, experts, and consumers regarding conflict. Peace journalism, in comparison to war journalism, is oriented toward a holistic contextualization of conflict (rather than violence), seeking and reporting the truth (rather than propaganda), widening news outlets to include ordinary victims and survivors or eyewitness testimony of conflict (rather than just the elites or so-called official sources), and pursuing a win-win solution as a conflict resolution goal (not victory for one party). The basic concepts of peace journalism are summarized by Shinar (2007) as includes (i) investigating the origins and settings of conflict, (ii) providing a platform for all opposing viewpoints, (iii) inventive conflict resolution, peacemaking, and peacekeeping initiatives, (iv) revealing falsehoods injustices and misery imposed on people on all sides, (v) focusing on peace tales and post-war achievements rather than constant warfare coverage.

### ***Challenges and experiences of reporting ethno-religious conflict***

Violent conflicts are a major global concern, and their causes and consequences have inevitably spawned a slew of research investigations. Researchers in communication, in particular, have attempted to assess the function of the media in the context of various conflict situations in various regions of the world. For instance, a study investigate safety as the key difficulty for journalists covering war and conflict in both local and international contexts through interviews with 100 journalists and editors in seven nations. Fahmy and Eakin (2014) examined the media's framing of a conflict-related

incident from the standpoint of peace versus war journalism. The study focuses on the Mavi Marmara event in 2010, which was a result of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Between May 10, 2010 and January 11, 2011, the researchers picked 156 online pieces from three newspapers-Haaretz, an Israeli newspaper, The Guardian, a British newspaper, and The New York Times, a US newspaper-from three time periods to reflect distinct stages of the occurrence. The researchers adapted indicators of peace journalism framing and war journalism framing from existing literature to analyze the coverage of the three newspapers. In terms of war journalism framing, the study found that an emphasis on the here and now, a concentration on elite oriented sourcing, the visible repercussions of conflict, and the usage of dichotomizing coverage were the four most salient signs in the three newspapers. Since independence, Nigeria has been beleaguered with a series of religious, ethnic, and socio-political conflicts and insurgencies. Nigerian media coverage of conflict has been a persistent research topic for communication researchers in the country as an example (Ahlsen, 2013).

### ***Social responsibility theory and conflict theory***

The Hutchins commission report provided the basis for the social responsibility theory, the aim was to ensure that the media balance unbalanced news in the free market place of ideas and opinion. This is necessitated by the need for the media to accept that freedom has responsibility and their own freedom requires certain functions which they must perform. However, press freedom, carries with it some responsibility. A responsible press must of necessity be credible, truthful and objective at all times. It must always remember that its first responsibility is to humanity, the public, and not to its sponsors to keep them informed on government actions, inactions and policies thereby promoting good governance in a democratic setting. According to McQuail (2010), reference by Baran (2006), the key postulates of the social responsibility theory includes (i) media must embrace and fulfill certain societal commitments, (ii) professional standards of formativeness, truth, correctness, objectivity, and balance are primarily required to meet these commitments, (iii) self-regulate within the framework of law and established organizations in recognizing and carrying out these commitments, and (iv) should avoid anything that could lead to crime, violence, or civil unrest, or offend minority groups. Journalists, considering the social responsibility role, have the vital role of “watchdog” over the activities of the society, covering and reporting conflict (Cobley and Schulz, 2013).

The postulate of the theory that demands the media to report information truthfully, objectively, and accurately is relevant to this study because the method in which the Nigerian press presents information regarding the country's ethnic and religious conflicts could impact the conflict's trajectory. While sensational and inaccurate reporting can escalate a conflict into violence, objective and balanced reporting by journalists can serve as a springboard for conflict resolution or management, not least because conflict is brought to the level of discussion, which, according to Folarin (1998), is the media's primary responsibility under the social responsibility theory. Conflict theory is concerned with power imbalances between people or social groupings. This theory is based on Niccolo Machiavelli's, Thomas Hobbes', and Karl Marx's intellectual perspectives, and promotes the premise that humans are fundamentally argumentative when vying for resources and power. Conflict Theory argues that social contact leads to conflict, and conflict is an unavoidable aspect of human life. Conflict occurs because people disagree. Controlling land, financial

interests (such as natural resources), faith, tradition, and philosophy are all areas where they dispute. Disagreements can lead to unpleasant confrontations, which can escalate into military conflicts of varying sizes. Armed confrontations involving communities, states, insurgencies, guerrilla groups, and terrorist organizations have occurred throughout history. In this context, conflict theory is concerned with the unequal distribution of scarce resources and power. Although each theorist's resources may differ, conflict theorists typically work with Weber's three systems of stratification: class, status, and power. Instead of thinking of society as kept together by common agreement on a cohesive set of cultural values, as functionalists do, conflict theorists consider power as the essential component of society. The location of power and who wields it (and who does not) are thus central to conflict theory. Power, in this view, is not inherently a bad thing: it is a major force that controls society and social connections.

## **Materials and Methods**

This study focuses on the experiences of journalist covering ethno-religious conflict in Taraba state, Nigeria from 2012-2019. This implies that although the state has been experiencing violent conflicts since 1991, the present study is concerned with the recent crises. Despite the fact that ethnic and religious disputes occur in other African countries, the instances that are important to this study are just those that occurred in Nigeria. The phenomenology research design is used in this study. The phenomenological technique is utilized to examine how participants create meaning of the event being investigated Astalin (2013). For example, the experiences of journalists reporting ethno-religious conflict. In-depth interview is useful in investigating a small number of subjects-in this example, 15 participants-to discover the essence of their experiences with the phenomenon (Creswell and Creswell, 2017). Using purposive sampling, only 15 journalists who have experiences writing about ethno-religious conflict were selected as samples. All respondents were labelled as J1 up to J15. The researcher's fieldwork entails examining how journalists dealt with diverse conflict contexts during the ethno-religious conflict, specifically how journalists communicated and interacted with various members of the community. In-depth interviews were also chosen since they allowed the researcher to spend time alone with the journalist and learn about their unique perspectives on ethno-religious tensions. The data from the interviews were transcribed and double-checked the transcribed responses to make sure they matched the audio recordings. The data was analyzed thematically in respect to the study's goals.

## **Results and Discussion**

### ***To what extent do journalist Taraba state report ethno-religious conflict?***

Majority of journalists stated that the use of certified and credentialed sources is a cornerstone of objective journalism that has been emphasized in various codes of ethics. Objectivity, in fact, is part of the set of professional criteria that reporters must meet and sustain. Objectivity for journalists does not imply that they are objective viewers of events, but rather that they seek out facts and present them in a fair and balanced manner. Reporters can please more members of the audience by presenting a fair

presentation of facts than if they cover the news in an openly political manner. Using balanced facts from multiple sources rather than a single source is one technique to receive balanced news according to some participants. Reporters will be able to collect multiple opinions from a variety of angles in a single narrative, specifically top news, by using multiple sources. Despite the fact that news providers and journalists in war zones have an essential connection, reporters will have nominal veto authority over incoming material responsible journalists would only report on reputable sources, as stated by various media ethics guidelines some participants said. A participant confirms that:

*"...Using balanced facts from multiple sources rather than one source is one technique to receive unbiased news. Reporters will be able to collect different viewpoints from a variety of angles in a single narrative, specifically a top headline, by using multidimensional sources (J1)."*

Another participant (J5) remarks that they do not rely solely on the sources. They also create their own news sources. Creating their own new sources here means at certain situations, journalists would have to find alternative sources to produce balanced reporting, such as international agency and independent sources that are not on any side of the conflict. Two journalists from a radio and television stations stated that:

*"Typically, the sources chosen will be determined by the type of news the reporters are attempting to generate. Most news stories require credible sources, and many times a single news story will include multiple sources. This is one of the ways we can deliver a balanced news narrative. There were moments when we integrated material from several foreign agencies in order to provide our viewers a balanced conflict story (J9)."*

### ***Adhering to professional ethical standards***

Evidence in this study indicates that regardless of political and economic circumstances, journalists around the world share a common goal: to gather and disseminate information responsibly and with integrity while adhering to a code of ethics. Some interviewees from this study also stated that covering conflict events and violent scenarios is subject to the same professional ethical standards that apply to media activity in general. Some participants stated that when a journalist is delegated to write and report conflicts, particularly armed conflicts and violent scenarios, the positional aspects of conflict surroundings, regardless of whether violent or non-violent, mostly put more stress on journalists' standards of ethics and demands, requiring them to perform over and above regular ethical expectations. This is because to the fact that covering such an event might either rescue lives or contributes to the conflict's damage. The journalist is required to show his awareness of social responsibility and his anticipated role in assisting to the de-escalation of the crisis he is reporting in this section. Reporters generally have a strong drive to obtain information according to some participants; they claim that their job is to not only deliver information to the public, but also to convey input from society at large to the powers-that-be. As a result, reporters who collect and arrange material for the media are more likely to take their societal obligations effectively. They believe they have a sacred societal responsibility to act as the populace's eyes and ears, as well as watchdogs on government institutions. They

regard their role as uncovering the truth, bringing it into context, and disseminating it so that people can go about their daily lives with ease. A participant said that:

*“Journalists have a responsibility to stay on top of events as they evolve and to provide timely information to the public. Most importantly, journalists are required to report events in an ethical, responsible, and professional manner, particularly during times of war, when citizens' lives and security are at risk (J4).”*

Another participant has a contrary view that:

*“It is not just the reporters who are to blame when news reports are deemed to be prejudiced, stereotypical, negative, misinterpreted, unethical, and irresponsible; news sources, notably the official spokesperson, are also to blame (J5).”*

However, an editor is of the opinion that:

*“A journalist who imbibes professional ethics tends to gain public approval and avoids public uproar, which in turn helps to maintain the public's trust in the media (J7).”*

#### ***What challenges do journalist in Taraba state experience while reporting ethno-religious conflict and how do they handle it?***

Four major themes emerged from this research question: harassment and assault of journalists, safety assurance and funding, issue of gender and social media and dateline.

*Harassment and assaults of journalists:* Most participants lamented that building of a peaceful and safe media world continues to be hampered by assault, harassment and attacks directed at reporters and media employees. Reporters operating in crisis areas and unstable political countries are faced with harassments, assaults, dead threats, risk of being attacked and it is one of the major challenge journalists reporting ethno-religious conflict are passing through. According to some editors, security personnel harassing reporters has been a distinct concern in Nigeria since the days of military dictatorship, the trend has decreased dramatically. Some journalist on the other hand said security personnel, continue to threaten and harass journalists in the course of their rightful roles. In the face of bullying and abuse, and in the absence of reporting procedures, journalists are forced to devise coping strategies, which are frequently ineffective. Whenever these reports are made public, media organizations may choose to (i) request assistance for the reporters affected, (ii) relocate the reporters entangled to a new office or region, or (iii) retire from the post according to some editors. A participant also noted that:

*“In crisis zones, the most prevalent dangers experienced by reporters include intimidation by security officers, stalking by random persons, and death texts (through SMS calls or e-mails) (J3).”*

This view is consistent with two participants from a television station who remarked that:

*“Media organizations frequently lack the resources to respond in a fast and efficient manner when it is considered needed (J6).”*

*“Media organizations are incompetent in securing lives and properties of reporters in conflict zones (J3).”*

*Safety Assurance and Funding:* Journalists in this study voiced out their dissatisfaction towards their safety assurance and funding by media organizations and the government, stating that the press particularly reporters, must be secured in order to fulfill the role of satisfying the citizenry's right to be informed. The entire participants remarked that reporters are seldom compensated when they experience difficulty as a result of insecurity while performing their duties, and when they are, the reimbursement only covers medical expenditures, based on the severity of the damages. Nevertheless, the standard benefits associated with the loss of a member of staff apply. When journalists report threats, media organizations are more likely to allow displacement from an area or beat than life insurance or compensation by some journalists. Editors acknowledged that it is still not common practice in media organizations to contemplate an insurance package or a special arrangement for reimbursement for journalists operating in warzones in the event of injury or another occurrence. Attacks from reporters and other news personnel operating in crisis zones are rarely reported to editors or managers of media outlets. A participant with a television station stated that:

*“As the media plays the role of watchdog in the society so do Security agencies and personnel have a duty to play in safeguarding the safety of reporters (J8).”*

Similarly, two participants opine that:

*“There is need for collaboration between safety personnel and media organizations, with reporters receiving frequent advice briefings on possible threats (J1).”*

*“Efforts must be taken to safeguard reporters and editors in crisis areas and to ensure that they are not prevented from performing their duties (J3).”*

Another participant (J6) notes that:

*“We do not have the necessary equipment and resources to cover other people's wars; therefore, it's a big challenge (J6).”*

*Issues of Gender:* Findings revealed that both male and female participants lamented their worries and dissatisfaction towards gender inequalities when it comes to conflict reporting and other beats. Findings also revealed that as a result of the unpredictability and possible hazard, some news agencies have been forced to transfer or remove female reporters from conflict areas. The protracted effects of war, which stems from the socio-cultural peculiarities of conflict environments, would be that female reporters are hampered in their ability to express themselves in their professional life, while future generations of female reporters are easily demoralized and bewildered according to some participants. A participant stated that:

*“Female journalists face additional challenges as a result of their gender during times of disaster and conflict (J4).”*

In the same vein another participant revealed that:

*“Female reporters seem to be more exposed than male reporters, despite the fact that both are in danger. Under the pretense of disruption and severe instability, female reporters are subjected to excessive harassment and assault as a result of their gender (J2).”*

*Social media and Dateline:* Journalists in this study remarked that social media is a positive and desirable trend but independent reporting has put expertise and ethics in journalism at danger. According to some participants, social media has done more harm than good to lives and property because of its uncensored nature and information posted most times are not verifiable. Currently, any significant war incident would have been a global issue within minutes of its occurrence, with all stories and visuals on the internet, particularly on social media which is detrimental to most media organizations as revealed by some participants. Some journalists also stated that journalists are given datelines to submit news reports and this affects their objectivity in reporting the conflict situation according to some participants. A participant is of the opinion that:

*“Social media wreak more havoc on the ethical, racial, and cultural structure of the societies affected by the shocking news story (J9).”*

Also, two other participants opine:

*“That the rapid spread of digital networking and the expansion of blogging activities are the first big challenges to ethical and conflict reporting (J1).”*

*“Social media has been a big challenge with the tendency that its creation and posting of the images and texts uploaded on the website are primarily by unskilled writers and independent journalists who record such occurrences receives little professional or ethical attention (J6).”*

### ***How could the reportage of ethno-religious conflict be improved?***

Finding shows that it provides security and insurance for journalist in the conflict zone. Participants in this study stated that reporters in conflict areas, including those working on critical assignments that potentially exposes them to threats, are paid and compensated inequitably. According to some participants, insurance coverage for both life and properties are thought to be a crucial inducement for journalists in areas of conflict and as well as synergy between reporters and security operatives will help curb the rate of casualties among journalists. A participant stated that:

*“The authorities must ensure that particular administrative controls are taken within the intelligence and defense authorities to prioritize journalist security and safety in crisis zones (J5).”*

Another participant pleaded that:

*“Reporters and editors in crisis zones should be informed about potential threats. The suggested regulations must guarantee that soldiers in conflict zones protect the dignity of journalists as stated by a participant (J3).”*

Additionally, another participant suggested that:

*“Actions must be implemented organizations and the government to safeguard reporters in crisis zones and to ensure that they are not prevented from performing their duties (J8).”*

Yet another participant agrees by stating that:

*“Personal security groups should be involved to equip reporters with security suggestions on self-defense and buffering tactics in war zones, in addition to other career workshops and institutional strengthening (J9).”*

Also, organizing seminars and workshops to sensitize journalists about safety rules and guidelines. According to some editors there is a need for media organizations to present extra benefits to reporters in the manner of sponsorship/scholarships for safety and conflict-related expertise. Findings also revealed that reporters' occupational competence will be enhanced by sufficient frequent workshops, as well as the supply of proper apparatus, rewards, and reimbursements. Some participants also said safety suggestions for urgent action as well as coping techniques for challenging conditions are among the recommended capacity-building activities. A participant with a television station suggested that:

*“Professional security groups could be enlisted to educate reporters with security suggestions on self-defense and survival tactics in war zones, as well as specialized workshops and workforce development (TVJ6).”*

However, another participant also suggested that: Provision of adequate funding to enhance conflict reporting. Some participants in this research are of the opinion that proper funding by media organizations and government will enable journalist to equip themselves properly before stepping into conflict zones. Some participants also suggested that reporters and media practitioners who are vulnerable to violent conflicts should be provided with suitable equipment, especially communication devices, as well as good health insurers. According to some participants, if journalists in conflict zones are not well funded, to make ends meet, he might be tempted to collect brown envelopes, free gifts, and even moonlighting. Some journalist also agreed that adequate funding will enable easy logistics for Journalists and proper investigation regarding the conflict situation will be conducted. A participant (RD3) with a radio station stated that:

*“A low-paid reporter is more prone to be irresponsible (RD3).”*

Relating to the above another participant mentioned that:

*“It is proposed that adequate funding will be used for journalists to receive adequate periodic training, as well as appropriate equipment, remunerations, and compensations, in order to improve their professional capacities (J2).”*

*“Another participant suggested that adequate funding will improve the investigation process (J8).”*

Findings in this study revealed that the use of certified and credentialed sources is a cornerstone of objective journalism that has been emphasized in various codes of ethics. Objectivity is one of the professional characteristics that journalists must satisfy and maintain in order to cover an event free of bias according to Apuke and Omar (2021). According to past study, ownership influence, media sources, media, and funding sources affect media operation. The development and organization of news articles depend on the use of news sources indeed, news reports would be impossible to write without using current sources. Gans (2004) argues that news sources-including those who are quoted, those who merely provide background information, and those who offer story suggestions-are actors that journalists see or speak with. According to a research, sources are viewed as the lifeblood of journalists. And also a study states that; sources are used in the articles due to their authority and reliability in the news. The aforementioned highlights the importance of the source-journalist connection as the foundation of journalism. In terms of funding and media sources, the entire media practitioners interviewed acknowledged its impact on their coverage of conflicts. In line with this, the study found that the government media used more positive accredited sources and government support sources because contrary stories were not accepted. Reporters' neutrality does not mean they are objective observers of occurrences; instead, it means they seek out evidence and portray them in a totally unbiased manner, and one approach for receiving balanced news is to use balanced facts from numerous sources rather than a single source. By combining multiple sources, reporters will be able to gather multiple perspectives from a variety of perspectives in a single narrative, particularly top news. Given the reality that news sources and reporters in combat zones are inextricably linked; reporters will have nominal veto power over content received. As stated in many media ethics guidelines, competent reporters would only report on credible sources. Gans (2004) distinguished between two sorts of sources of news: known and unknowns.

Findings from this study also revealed that covering conflict events and violent scenarios is subject to the same professional ethical standards that apply to media activity in general. This study argues that the efforts of Nigerian media in the coverage of conflict are not adequate considering the social responsibility that media have to the society as agenda setters. The above finding validates the view of a research who pointed out that media must give adequate coverage of conflicts with a view to solving them. This goes to show that when a journalist is delegated to write and report conflicts, particularly armed conflicts and violent scenarios, the positional aspects of conflict surroundings, regardless of whether violent or non-violent, mostly put more stress on journalists' standards of ethics and demands, requiring them to perform over and above regular ethical expectations. The major objective of media is to be socially responsible; they must set an agenda for solving the conflict that have inflicted the country for decades (Asemah, 2011). This study oblige journalist not to keep knowledge hidden from the audiences concerning conflict because this same audience will have access to

the headlines regardless thanks to the advent of modern communication technologies which has provided alternate sources of news. It is also the obligation of reporters to stay on top of current affairs and provide timely news to the audience.

Findings reveal that some Journalists operating in warzones and unstable political and economic countries like Nigeria are at risk of being attacked. Poor compensation and information denial are two more techniques the military uses to restrict information, as mentioned by Abubakar (2017), who also noted that intimidation of journalists who dare to enter military-controlled areas is another difficulty. This is demonstrated by the Army's detention of Al-Jazeera journalists who traveled to Maiduguri in March 2015 to report on the insurgency prior to the 2015 general elections. Security concerns for the safety of the journalists are frequent justifications offered by the military when denying access to particular regions. Death threats, harassment by security forces, arrests, and intimidation are some other challenges that prevent journalist from effectively reporting on conflicts. This is in line with a research study who found that with the development of social media and mobile Internet technology, insurgent groups and the governments they are fighting have both grown more aware of and perhaps more sensitive to how they are depicted. As a result, journalists are in greater danger since they must balance the pressure of censorship or legal action on one side with the possibility of violent attack on the other. Findings also reveal that reporters are seldom compensated when they experience difficulty as a result of insecurity while performing their duties, and when they are, the reimbursement only covers medical expenditures, based on the severity of the damages. This finding correlate with research that highlighted on journalists covering crises have a variety of difficulties, including a lack of health insurance, a bad transportation system, a weak communication network, a language barrier, and a lack of proper training in effective operation. Some of them received threats from both the authorities and the militants, while others were killed, injured, or both. Along with this, pressure from the general population, insurgents, and the security establishment for reporting is frequently applied to journalists and media organizations. When journalists report threats, media organizations are more likely to allow displacement from an area or beat than life insurance or compensation. Furthermore, we found that competition/deadline syndrome also affected the reportage of conflicts. This support the postulation, which suggests that in the contemporary digital news environment, journalists are under pressure to deliver content quickly.

In view of previous study that while this is a positive and desirable trend; independent reporting has put expertise and ethics in journalism at danger. Currently, any significant war incident would have been a global issue within minutes of its occurrence, with all stories and visuals on the internet, particularly on social media. Besides physical harm, journalists also face the prospects of psychological challenges resulting from the effects of the war. Reports have indicated that psychological stress is one of the leading challenges in war reporting. The challenge with this tendency is that the creation and posting of the images and texts uploaded on the website by the primarily unskilled writers and independent journalists who record such occurrences receives little professional or ethical attention as revealed in this study. Sometimes, these stories wreak havoc on the ethical, racial, and cultural structure of the societies affected by the shocking news story. Since there is unrestricted access to the internet and no restrictions on what a citizen journalist can do online, how to ensure competence and ethics in internet media activity is another challenge now according to other participants. As this investigation by Asemah (2011) has demonstrated, reporters

encounter significant hurdles in delivering their ethical responsibilities to public. These kinds of issues are caused by societal and administrative attitudes, while others are caused by policy instruments. The findings show that journalists must adhere to the profession's ethics in order to be fair and truthfulness at all times. Journalists should resist the temptation to use their line of work as a tool or violent act to coerce or target a presumed adversary. Reporters must be security sensitive and understand that credibility is critical to their safety at work. Asemah (2011) opines that reporters must be aware of the necessity to disguise their identity under certain situations and exercise social restraint. Journalists must seek insurance benefits from their media organizations if they are serious about their personal safety. Surveillance hints for rapid reaction and also coping mechanisms for challenging moments are among the recommended volume actions. It's also a good idea to get some coaching in war punditry and tracking.

This study also revealed that reporters in conflict areas, including those working on critical assignments that potentially exposes them to threats, are paid and compensated inequitably. According to Asemah (2011), insurance coverage for both life and properties are thought to be a crucial inducement for journalists in areas of conflict and as well as synergy between reporters and security operatives will help curb the rate of casualties among journalists. In the same view, some editors said there is a need for media organizations to present extra benefits to reporters in the manner of sponsorship/scholarships for safety and conflict-related expertise. Findings also revealed that reporters' occupational competence will be enhanced by sufficient frequent workshops, as well as the supply of proper apparatus, rewards, and reimbursements. Safety suggestions for urgent action as well as coping techniques for challenging conditions are among the recommended capacity-building activities as stated from previous studies. The study further reveals that proper funding by media organizations and government will enable journalist to equip themselves properly before stepping into conflict zones. Some participants also suggested that reporters and media practitioners who are vulnerable to violent conflicts should be provided with suitable equipment, especially communication devices, as well as good health insurers. According Asemah (2011), if journalists in conflict zones are not well funded, to make ends meet, he might be tempted to collect brown envelopes, free gifts, and even moonlighting. Some journalist also agreed that adequate funding will enable easy logistics for Journalists and proper investigation regarding the conflict situation will be conducted.

### ***Implication of social responsibility and conflict theory***

This study uses social responsibility and conflict theory as a guide in explaining the experiences of journalist reporting ethno-religious conflict in Taraba State Nigeria. The theories suggest that when there is an unequal distribution of resource and power conflict erupts, the media cannot afford to shirk its responsibilities to the public during times of conflict, which often represent grave threats to individual members' livelihoods as well as a society's collective life. Rather than getting carried away by the potential for profit that the news value of conflict provides, it is critical for journalists to prioritize public interest. Based on the findings of the research, three assumptions have been drowned: (1) the journalists when reporting conflict go to the extent of interviewing the known and unknown sources in other to present a balance story to the public. (2) The journalists experience a lot of challenges while reporting conflict, challenges like dead threats, lack of property and life insurance, social media, lack of corporation from security and government officials and poor remuneration. (3) The reportage of ethno-

religious conflict in Nigeria can be improved through the training of journalists on safety measures and adherence to ethical and professional rules by journalists during conflicts. According to social responsibility and conflict theory, conflict may arise as a result of poor distributions of resources and power inequality but the media is expected to be balance and objective when reporting such incident. In this study therefore, the key idea of social responsibility theory is that the media should have a professional standard of formativeness, truth; correctness, objectivity, and balance are primarily required to meet these commitments as identified by Baran (2006). This study therefore revealed how journalists who report conflict pass through a lot of challenges and still reports balance, fair, correct and objective stories despite the risk of assaults, dead threats, poor remuneration and lack of cooperation from security and government personnel. Journalist also interview more than one sources for a credible and balance story and for this to be sustained and improved, the journalist needs to adhere to professional ethics and well equip to withstand conflict pressure.

## **Conclusion**

Ethno-religious crises, like other conflicts, attract media notice since violence is a key component of the news cycle. There is no news outlet that can overlook ethno-religious conflicts until the dispute has been brought to the notice of the media. Because of the severity and breadth of certain crises, the media has been forced to report them first as news and then as analysis and commentary in order to put the conflict in context. The press is critical tools for delivering ethno-religious crises to varied consumers divided by time and geography, allowing them to learn how and why they occurred. Based on the findings, the study concludes that in terms of conflict reporting, Journalists have a number of advantages and are crucial in the procedure of resolving conflicts, establishing harmony, and repairing bonds. The reporter's abilities such as fairness, impartiality, and socially responsible competencies can be employed successfully or integrated in the different dispute resolution procedures such as bargaining, settlement, counseling, and forgiveness. Journalists are especially important because they promote the smooth flow of ideas, which is essential for dispute resolution and successful rehabilitation. This study suggests that when a journalist reports conflict objectively, fairly, and responsibly, there will be a beneficial consequence in conflict resolution. In order to prevent being perceived as prejudiced by disputing parties, reporters should eschew breaching moral and code of ethics precepts while documenting dispute as well as other challenges. Reporters operating in or covering from crisis regions should be eligible to specific safety plans as a result of the increased danger of assaults, disasters, casualties, and possibly death. Security personnel must take the responsibility of protecting and safeguarding of reporters and editors in or covering from war zones. Security forces and media professional bodies and associations should hold quarterly panel discussions to address concerns in crises and the difficulty of safeguarding reporter; such a conference would also allow them to establish strategies for eliminating mutual loathing and misunderstanding.

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## Conflict of interest

The authors confirm that there is no conflict of interest with any parties involved with the study.

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