

Media and protection of human rights: Newspaper frames of Armed Forces human rights abuse of civilians in Nigeria

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Abstract

Background: Nigeria is one of the countries with the highest cases of human rights abuse. There are many instances of human rights abuse of innocent civilians by the Nigerian military.

Objective: The aim of this study was to determine media framing of armed forces human rights abuses.

Methods: A total of four newspapers were examined for 18 years, and 358 stories on armed forces human rights abuses were identified and analysed.

Results: The result showed that most of the newspapers used the human interest frames to report armed forces human rights abuses. It was also found that the tone of framing was critical to such human rights abuses while the relationship between the armed forces and civilians was framed as hostile. The result of the Chi-square analysis showed a significant relationship between the newspapers and frames used and the construction of the relationship between civilians and the armed forces. No significant relationship was discovered between the newspapers and the tone of framing. It was also found that newspapers, frames and relationship construction significantly correlate at 0.05.

Conclusion: Nigerian media framing of military abuse of human rights is not impressive and not satisfactory.

Unique contribution: This study has provided evidence regarding the contribution of the media in promoting human rights in Nigeria.

Key recommendation: The media in Nigeria should improve in their framing of human rights abuse civilians by the military.

Keywords: armed forces, civilians, frames, human rights abuse, media, Newspaper

Introduction

The armed forces and the civilian populace are supposed to maintain a cordial relationship. This is a global expectation because doing so could make the populace feel free in contacting the armed forces should the need arise. The Armed Forces are made up of the police, Army, Air Force Navy and the Police. The armed forces are institutions which state authorities established with the backing of the constitution aimed at ensuring national defence to avoid external threats or group and the tackling of conflicts

from within. The armed forces have compositions among which include regular military forces which are military institutions which is mainly ready for war, functions supportive military forces which are professional security bodies that can be required to help the regular military under some conditions (The Armed Forces, nd). The Armed Forces of every nation constitutes a central part of its existence because of its role in protecting the territorial integrity of the nation against internal and external attacks (Ashcroft 2012; Osunyikanmi *F* & Osunyikanmi *P*, 2011; Varol, 2013; Donovan & Klahm 2015). The Armed Forces, which is a useful body for national defence together with other security agencies would have to make sure that the territorial integrity of the nation, internal security of the nation is guaranteed (Ogah, 2015). The Nigerian Armed Forces in performance of their duties have at different points taken part in peace-keeping missions in different countries of the world. The success recorded has earned for the nation, many international acknowledgements and appreciations. For example, the government and people of Sierra Leone and Liberia in particular, at some points, expressed their gratitude to Nigerian authorities. This is connected to the noble role Nigerian Armed Forces played in bringing peace to those countries in times of emergencies (Dode, 2012; Galadima, 2006; Nnoli, 2006). These successes, notwithstanding, the Nigerian military has over the years battled with the problem of image. Military invasions and other human rights abuses such as assaults on defenceless civilians have cast a serious shadow on the image of the Nigerian Armed Forces (Luqman, 2013; Omotola, 2007). The Amnesty International has often castigated the Nigerian Armed Forces of rights abuses. For example, in the month December, 2015, precisely 12 and 14 of that month, the Nigerian Army illegally annihilated more than 350 defenseless men, women and children, who were in favour of the Islamic Movement in Nigeria (IMN), called Shi'ite Muslim. The Shi'ite Muslim is a minority group that operates mainly in Zaria city, of Kaduna State, Northern Nigeria. Also, In 2016 168 people lost their lives in the military detention centre in Giwa Barracks, Maiduguri of Borno State (Amnesty International, 2016a; 2016b). These issues constitute image burden for the Nigerian Armed Forces. A study of media frames of armed forces human rights abuses is essential because it will yield data that could be beneficial to the armed forces authority on how to maintain cordial relationship with civilian public. Such empirical evidence could also prove useful in suggesting ways of creating and maintaining a positive image of the armed forces.

Objectives of the Study

The general objective of this study is to examine media frames of armed forces human rights abuses in Nigeria. Specifically, the study sought to achieve to:

1. Examine newspaper frames used in reporting armed forces human rights abuses.
2. evaluate the tone of newspaper frame of armed forces human rights abuses
3. investigate the newspaper frames of armed forces civilian relationship in Nigeria.

Cases of Armed Forces Human Rights Abuses

Human rights describe those rights which all human beings are entitled to. Such rights recognize that every all humans are entitled to certain benefits without not minding the, sex, religion, race, colour, language, political or another opinion, national or social origin, property, birth or other status (United Nations, 1997). According to the Universal Declaration of Human Right (1949) 'All human beings are born free and equal in dignity

and rights. They are endowed with reason and conscience and should act towards one another in a spirit of brotherhood.’ This implies that civilians should not be subjected to any form of rights abuse just because they are civilians. Both civilians and the armed forces are supposed to maintain a cordial relationship based on mutual respects of human rights. However, the reality suggests the contrary.

Cases of armed forces human rights abuses have at point different appeared in the media. The invasions of Udi in Bayelsa State and Zaki Biam in Benue State in 1999 and 2001 respectively witnessed some of the highest instances of human right abuses. In both cases, civilians were killed, and property worth billions were destroyed. The New York (2001) in reporting the Zaki Biam invasion notes that Human Rights Watch was strongly against the death of over 100 civilians by Nigerian soldiers In 2017, the Nigerian Army also invaded Naka, the Capital of Gwer-West Local government Area, killing civilians and setting houses ablaze. Cases of human rights abuses carried out by the Nigerian Armed forces have continued to rear their heads. Adeakin, (2016) says that since the beginning of civilian administration in Nigeria on 29 May 1999, the armed forces have been accused of different degrees of human rights abuses that result to injuries, destruction of properties or death. Such cases of human rights abuses are likely to affect public perception of the Armed Forces and eventually affects its image.

The image of any profession is central because it largely determines how people perceive it (Hoeve, Jansen & Roodbol 2013, Ingwu, Ohaeri & Iroka, 2016). The mass media of communication have the power to form an image for professions, institutions and organisations (Lippmann 1922; Zhang, 2015). Walter Lippmann in his 1922 *Public Opinion*, which opened with a chapter captioned "The World Outside and the Pictures in Our Heads." credit the media with the power to form an image. Image manifests in public opinions and beliefs. Happer and Philio (2013) examine the influence the media command regarding determination public views and behaviours and its relationship to social change and revealed the link between awful media reports of people on disability benefit and the attitude others demonstrate regarding them. This suggests that the image of the Armed Forces presented in the media is likely to influence public attitude and beliefs about them. Although there may be different measures of the media image of organizations and individuals, story themes, are appropriate in the study of media-image nexus. Scholars (e.g.. Paluck, Lagunes, Green, Vavreck, Peer & Gomila 2015; Heatherton, Sargent, 2009; Ghirlanda, Acerbi & Herzog, 2012) have argued that these measures (story themes) can effectively provide insights into the image of individuals or institutions in the media. Story themes are arrived at through the use of frames.

Media Frames

Media frames describe specific angles that are projected in media. It focuses on areas that are highlighted in media contents. To frame is to “select some aspects of a perceived reality and make them more pronounced in a communicating text, in a manner that promotes a particular problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation, and treatment recommendation for the item described" (Entman, 1993, p. 52). Farming of media contents has been rigorously investigated, especially among media scholars. D'Angelo (2002) reveals that more than a ten years of empirical studies concerning of framing found three essential processes: frame construction as the first, framing effects as the second and frame definition as the third. Frame construction borders on the manner by which media personnel present the elements of news stories. This is done through the

formats that they use, values, sources, as well as the devices applied. Framing effects studies concern with consequence of news framing (D'Angelo, 2002). Finally, frame definition pays attention on the content of news stories as a result of how the media propel the definition of the situation. Therefore, the media construct some aspects of issues using the range of information, making a decision on sources strategically, and placing baseline for policy discourse (Putnam & Shoemaker, 2007). In this study, the researcher adopted framing construction to examine media frames of human rights abuses of the armed force Joslyn and Heider (2002) message contents play an essential role in determine the effect of media frames. Evidence in literature (e.g. Lim & Seo, 2009; Terkildsen, & Schnell, 1997) suggests that media frames significantly influence public opinion and perception.

The Armed Forces and the Media as Partners in Progress

The Armed Forces and the media need each other to better serve the society. The media are empowered constitutionally, in Nigeria, this is contained in section 22 of the 1999 Constitution,(Federal Republic of Nigeria, 1999) to monitor the government, this includes the Armed Forces. Mawby (2012) reported hostile relationship between the media and the Armed Forces. Public image of the Armed Forces has received attention of scholars. Most of these studies (e.g., Haltiner 2015; Chan, A & Chan V 2012; Pollack & Allern 2014) have reported that the Armed Forces mainly have negative public image.

Both the Armed Forces and the media are essential for the development of the society. While the Armed Forces control the security part of the society, the media feed the society with information that could guide them in making informed decisions. Security is very vital in any nation of the world. The Armed Forces make people obey the law and prevent crimes. Human and industrial growth cannot be achieved in the atmosphere of anarchy and disorder; hence the Armed Forces are very important in any society. The mass media are powerful tools in information dissemination which in turn, monitor and report the activities of the Armed Forces (Nwabueze & Ugochukwu 2014). To maintain proper security, a cordial working relationship between the media and the Armed Forces are needed. It is only through a good working relationship that the media can present a favourable image of the Armed Forces to the public. Adegbamigbe (2012) opines that the media are needed to disseminate information on the activities of the Nigeria Forces. A frosty relationship between the Armed Forces and the media could lead to the latter presenting a negative image of the former to the public. This will eventually affect the cooperation between the media and the Armed Forces and the Armed Forces and the citizens. The relationship between the media and the Armed Forces has received attention in literature.

Nwabueze and Ugochukwu (2014) investigated newspaper coverage of police issues in Nigeria from January to March 2012. The researchers studied the *Nation*, the *Punch* and *Daily Sun* newspapers. It was found that the police issues within the study duration were presented mostly as straight news and the direction of stories were predominantly in bad light.

Chan (2015) investigated media portrayal of the image of police in Hong Kong and reported a largely negative media report concerning the image of the police. A similar result was reported by Mawby (2012).

Also, Pallack and Allern (2014) investigated the castigation of the police in the news in Norway. Their result showed that in most instances, news reports of the police and those conducting investigations of the police were mainly episodic and the picture of the police rarely points to institutional or organisational problems. The researchers added that the story was too often one about personal wrongdoings alone. Similar results were reported by Gottschalk (2011) and Surette (2011). It is necessary to add here that media professionals are part of the civilian public and such poor relationship between the armed forces and the civilians public also implies that journalists are inclusive.

Theoretical Framework

The researcher adopted framing theory for this study. The theory was put forward in 1974 by Erving Goffman. The core assumption of the theory is not on the frequency of coverage but the angle that the media project in its contents. For example, there could be many positive stories about the armed forces but one negative story concerning its human rights records could have serious negative impact on its image. Another illustration concerning the power of media framing is when many journalists attend a press conference. All of them may have listened to the same source, but the moment the reports about the press conference begin to come out, different stories will be in the public. The journalists will frame the event in different ways. The reaction that people will demonstrate concerning the matter is likely dependent on the frames they are exposed to (see also Druckman, 2001). Scholars (Entman, 1993; Gever, 2018) in media studies have found the framing theory as an instrumental prism for examining how the media select issues, process them (by way of editing) and report them. The framework offers an insights for understanding the power of media contents within the context of media reportage.

Methodology

The study involved a content analysis of newspaper stories to determine the frames used in presenting human rights abuses by the armed forces. The choice of a research design is usually determined by the goal of the study (Ikechukwu-Ilomuanya, et al., 2021; Obodo, et al., 2021; Oyeoku, et al., 2021; Talabi et al., Okpara et al., 2021; Ugwuoke et al., 2021). Four national dailies namely *The Vanguard*, *The Punch*, *The Guardian* and *This Day* newspapers were used for the study. These newspapers were selected based on the 2016 newspapers web ranking which ranked these newspapers as the top four in Nigeria. The study covered from January 1st 1999 to December 31st, 2017, marking 18 years. The researcher covered an extended period to be able to get as many stories on armed force human rights abuses as possible. The researcher used constructed week to sample the newspaper issues. This was based on the result of Stempel (1952) who first reported that twelve issues from two constructed weeks could effectively predict a year. Consequently, hence the study made use of four newspapers for 18 years, a total of 12 editions of each of the newspapers was selected for 18 years, thus leading to 48 issues for the four newspapers per a year and 864 issues for the 18 years.

Also, we used the constructed week technique (composite weeks) (2015) to get the sample editions. In implementing the constructed week technique we stratified the 12 months period of study into six subgroups of two months each. We then selected from each of the groups. To get a sampling fraction, the number of editions to be studied (48) was divided by the number of newspapers (4) under study. This yielded 12 editions.

Thus, 12 edition dates (days) were randomly decided from the week we and we made use of the same dates to study examine across the four newspapers.

Measures

Definition of Human Right abuse stories: Stories were regarded as human right abuse from the armed forces if they concern physical attack to civilians from the armed forces like the Army, Navy, Air Force and the Police. People who are not members of the armed forces were regarded as civilians.

Media Frames: The researcher adopted and changed the following frames (conflict, human interests, economic consequences, morality and responsibility) which first identified by Semetko and Valkenburg (2000). These frames are explained as follows:

conflict Frame: This was used to inference to newspaper stories that reveal human rights abuse as a conflict situation deserving attention.

Human interest: This refers to frame which brings to the fore a human angle or an emotional perspective to the presentation of armed forces human rights abuses.

Economic consequences frame. The frame that project the economic impact of armed forces human rights abuses.

Morality frame. This frame puts armed forces human rights abuses in the context of professional tenets or moral conducts of armed force personnel.

Responsibility frame. This frame presents armed forces human rights abuses in such a way as to ascribe responsibility concerning the things that lead to such abuses and the way out of either the government or the armed forces authority.

News Slant

The researcher made use of three categories concerning the tone of the news items regarding human rights abuses. These were adapted from Yang and Ishak (2012) who in a study divided slanting into 1) supportive, 2) neutral, and (3) critical.

Armed forces civilian relationship: The following were delineated to measure the armed forces civilian relationship as presented in the media.

Hostile Relationship: Media frames that presented the relationship between the armed forces and civilian as unfriendly and hostile.

Cordial Relationship: Media frames that presented the relationship between the duo as friendly.

The researcher assessed the reliability of the study with the use of two coders. A random approach was used to select the coders. Riffe, Lacy, and Fico (2005) suggested that a random selection of content samples for inter-coder reliability testing is appropriate. Wimmer and Dominick (2006) say between 10 – 25% of the content should be subjected to a reliability test. Therefore, the inter-coder reliability for this study was done through the random selection of 10% of the news items. With the Use of Holsti's formula (cited in Wimmer & Dominick, 2006) and this resulted to a reliability figure of .82. The researcher used simple percentage Ch-square and correlation in the analysis of data for the study. Results were presented in tables.

Result

A total of 864 editions of the newspapers were sampled and examined for the existence of stories on armed forces human rights abuse. From these editions, only 307 editions had stories on human rights abused carried out by the armed forces of Nigeria. The 307

editions were examined, and this yielded 358 stories on the subject of interest. The analysis is thus presented below:

Table 1: Newspaper frames of Armed Forces Human Rights Abuses

		Newspaper				Total	
		<i>The Vanguard</i>	<i>The Punch</i>	<i>The Guardian</i>	<i>ThisDay</i>		
Frames	Human interest	Count	46	63	19	42	170
		% of Total	12.8%	17.6%	5.3%	11.7%	47.5%
	economic frame	Count	10	13	13	11	47
		% of Total	2.8%	3.6%	3.6%	3.1%	13.1%
	responsibility	Count	6	12	10	17	45
		% of Total	1.7%	3.4%	2.8%	4.7%	12.6%
	Morality	Count	11	7	11	9	38
		% of Total	3.1%	2.0%	3.1%	2.5%	10.6%
	conflict	Count	7	6	26	19	58
		% of Total	2.0%	1.7%	7.3%	5.3%	16.2%
Total		Count	80	101	79	98	358
		% of Total	22.3%	28.2%	22.1%	27.4%	100.0%

The table above sought to determine newspaper frames of armed forces human rights abuses. The result showed that most of the stories used the human interest frames followed by economic frames. The Chi-square test of independence was used to further examine the relationship between the newspapers and the frames used, and the result indicated a significant relationship. This is because it yielded X^2 46.975 at 12 df with a p-value of 0.001 at 0.05 level of significance.

Table II: Newspaper tone of Framing of Armed Forces Human rights abuses

		Tone			Total	
		Supportive	critical	neutral		
Newspaper	<i>The</i>	Count	16	56	8	80

<i>Vanguard</i>	% of Total	4.5%	15.6%	2.2%	22.3%
<i>The Punch</i>	Count	13	68	20	101
	% of Total	3.6%	19.0%	5.6%	28.2%
<i>The Guardian</i>	Count	6	56	17	79
	% of Total	1.7%	15.6%	4.7%	22.1%
<i>ThisDay</i>	Count	12	66	20	98
	% of Total	3.4%	18.4%	5.6%	27.4%
Total	Count	47	246	65	358
	% of Total	13.1%	68.7%	18.2%	100.0%

The table above sought to ascertain the tone of framing of Armed Forces human rights abuses in selected newspapers. The result showed that most of the newspapers studied used critical frame, suggesting that they were opposed to such human rights abuses. The result was further explored using the Chi-Square test of independence to determine the relationship between the newspapers and the tone of framing. The analysis showed X^2 value of 8.759 at 6 df with a p-value of .188, an indication that no significant relationship exists between newspapers and the tone of framing at 0.05 level of significance.

Table III: Newspaper frames of the relationship between the armed forces and civilians

Newspaper			Relationship		Total
			Hostile	Cordial	
<i>The Vanguard</i>	Count		71	9	80
	% of Total		19.8%	2.5%	22.3%
<i>The Punch</i>	Count		91	10	101
	% of Total		25.4%	2.8%	28.2%
<i>The Guardian</i>	Count		63	16	79
	% of Total		17.6%	4.5%	22.1%
<i>ThisDay</i>	Count		74	24	98
	% of Total		20.7%	6.7%	27.4%
Total	Count		299	59	358
	% of Total		83.5%	16.5%	100.0%

The table above sought to ascertain newspaper frames of the relationship between the armed forces and the civilian public. The result revealed that the newspapers examined mostly used the hostility frame. The result of the Chi-square test of independence showed a significant relationship between the newspapers examined and the framing of the relationship between armed forces and the civilian public. This is because the result yielded X^2 value of 10.151 at 3 df and p-value of .017 at 0.05 level of significance. To ascertain the relationship between the variables used in the study, correlation analysis was used, and the result is presented in the table below:

Table IV: The relationship among the variable of interest

		Newspaper	Tone	frames	Relationshi p
Newspaper	Pearson	1	.113*	.196**	.154**
	Correlation				
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.032	.000	.003
	N	358	358	358	358
Tone	Pearson	.113*	1	.694**	.690**
	Correlation				
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.032		.000	.000
	N	358	358	358	358
Frames	Pearson	.196**	.694**	1	.712**
	Correlation				
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000		.000
	N	358	358	358	358
relationship	Pearson	.154**	.690**	.712**	1
	Correlation				
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.003	.000	.000	
	N	358	358	358	358

*. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

The table above sought to determine the relationship among the variables used in this study. The result of the correlation above showed a significant correlation between newspaper and tone (at 0.01 but not significant at 0.05), a significant correlation between frames and newspaper, and frames and tone. Also, a significant correlation was found between relationship frames and newspaper, tone of frame and the frames used.

Discussion of Findings

This study examined media frames of human rights abuses of Nigerian Armed Forces for 18 years. In doing so, attention was paid to the frames used, the tone of framing as well as the framing of the relationship between the Armed Forces and the civilian public. The result of this study revealed that the newspapers studied used mostly human interest frames in presenting the human rights abuses perpetrated by the Nigeria Armed Forces. Also, the study found that the newspapers examined were critical of the human rights abuses carried out by the Nigerian armed forces. Finally, the result showed that the newspapers examined framed the relationship between the civilian public and the

Nigerian Armed Forces as hostile. These results have three implications. First, it has implications on previous existing literature, in the second place, the result has implications on framing theory, and lastly, it has implications on policy advocacy on the promotion of armed forces civilian relationship as well as the protection of human rights.

The result of this regarding the dominance of humanity frame is contrary to that of Semetko and Valkenburg (2000) who reported the dominance of responsibility frame. The result is also contrary to that of Yang and Ishak (2012). This is because they found that conflict frame appeared more than other frames. The aspect of the result suggesting that most of the newspapers studied was critical of human rights abuse could have a corresponding effect on public attitudes regarding human rights as studies (Lim & Seo, 2009; Terkildsen, & Schnell, 1997) revealed a significant relationship between media frames and public attitude and opinion. Also, the aspect of the result showing that most of the newspapers used the hostility frame to construct the relationship between the armed forces and the civilian public is consistent with previous studies (e.g., Chan A & Chan V 2012; Pollack & Allern 2014) that have shown that the Armed Forces mostly have negative public image. Such a lousy image could be as a result of the hostile relationship between the armed forces and the civilian public.

The result of this study has implications on the framing theory because it has shown how the media deploy the framing mechanism to highlight salient areas on stories relating to armed forces human rights abuse. What this means is that there may not be many stories on the armed forces and human rights abuses but the ones available have provided a platform for the media to shape the image of the armed officers. This result has shown that there is the need to come up with more policies and programmes that could protect human rights in Nigeria as well as improve on the relationship between the armed forces and the civilian public. The hostile relationship between the armed forces and the civilian public could negatively affect the combating of crime as members of the public may not be willing to cooperate with people they perceive as enemies.

Conclusion

In this study, the researcher examined media frames of armed forces human rights abuse with particular attention to newspapers. The researcher examined the frames the newspaper used, the tone of framing as well as the construction of the relationship between the armed forces and the civilian public. Based on the result of the study, the researcher concludes that most of the newspapers examined used human interest frame in constructing armed forces human rights abuses. The researcher argues that although the use of human interest frames was needed to pinpoint the need to protect human rights, the media could have done better in also using responsibility frame to show cause why authorities should work round the clock to prevent cases of armed forces human rights abuses. Based on the result of this study, the researcher also that most of the newspapers examined were critical to armed forces human rights abuses. The researcher also concludes that the relationship between the armed forces and the civilian public is presented as hostile. The essential contribution of this study is that it has provided empirical data on the specific frames newspapers use to construct human rights armed abuses carried by the armed forces. This study has also contributed to our understanding of the relationship that exists between the armed forces and the civilian public as constructed in the media. This result has contributed to our understanding of the type of

relationship that exists between the armed forces and the civilian public in developing countries like Nigeria. It is essential to add here that the current study could also be found useful in countries facing security challenges wherein a mutual relationship between the armed forces and the civilian public is critical in combating security challenges. This study makes the following recommendations: There is the need for the armed forces authority in Nigeria to come up with more measures to reduce cases of armed forces human rights abuses. It is also recommended that the media and the armed forces in Nigeria should collaborate in coming up with campaigns that could improve the relationship between the armed forces and the civilian public. The researcher also recommends that further studies should be conducted to examine the armed forces views regarding human rights abuses.

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