TRENDS IN MEDIA FRAMING OF INDUSTRIAL CRISES REPORTING: IMPLICATION FOR MEDIA RESEARCH IN NIGERIA

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Abstract

There has been a scholarly argument among media researchers on how best media analysts should study media perspectives on industrial crisis reporting with reference to research methods, theoretical perspectives and methods of data analysis. Content analysis and meta-analytical approach were employed to gather data from published scholarly articles and theses accessed online. One hundred and fifteen (115) studies were content analyzed, collated and identified based on those that focused their issues on media framing of labour crisis. Evidence from the studies analysed shows that the content analysis and in-depth interviews were predominantly adopted for media representations of industrial crisis, the mixed method research were adopted for data collection while media framing, agenda setting and the priming theories were mostly adopted by most of the studies. It is recommended that studies should employ critical discourse analysis to compliment researchers' effort to examine how different ideological stances are mediated in the media to reflect social-political dominance, inequality and class struggle that characterize industrial crisis.

Keywords: Industrial crisis reporting, Media framing, Research trends, Discourse analysis, Nigeria

Introduction

The media are expected to provide reports that are accurate, prompt, informative, fair and balanced news on all sectors of the society (McQuail, 2005; Murphy, 2010). There is a tall order on the expectation

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of the society on the responsibility of the media because the media provide the window of reality and define who we are by the virtue of what we watch, read and hear through the media. The media, as the fourth estate of the realm and reflectors of the happenings in the society, are the 'microphones' for both the powerful and the less privileged. The media therefore have the responsibility of promoting truthful and honest reports. So, to what extent do journalists accurately and factually report crises? Do crises situations suffer media dearth coverage? Whose opinions are favourably reported or underrepresented? The media in crises situations are susceptible to manipulation hence; media consumers often cast aspersions on the integrity of media professionals for slant reporting. Some people believe that media representations in crises situations are bedeviled with subjectivity, sensationalism and ideological incongruence (Vladisavljevic, 2015. Suman, 2015). In crises reporting, should the media continue to be apathetic and complacent or continue to be an ideological tool to maintain the status quo? The media, as the fourth estate of the realm, are expected to be vigilant and be proactive enough to expose any scandal, abuse, negligence and prejudice in crises situations simply because the media are expected to be reformers and altruistic in the discharge of their professional duties.

An industrial crisis is a state of interregnum when there is a breach of continuity in organizational work plans leading to suspension of the normal day-to–day activity. Media professionals and researchers have asked these critical questions: how should the media report crises of whatever nature? And how should media analysts dissect media portrayals of social phenomena? The debate is a global discourse because it is believed that the media are at the centre stage to alert the public on the happenings in the society. In this paper, a meta-analysis would be carried out to synthesise statistically current trends in crises reporting research with the aim of understanding the trends and approaches researchers have adopted in dissecting media portrayal of crises reporting in order to chart the way forward for media framing research.

Media and Conflict Reporting

The media are the most veritable sources of information about politics, conflict and other socio-cultural happenings around us. The media, according to Vladisavljevic (2015) no doubt, "strongly influence the dynamics and outcomes of conflicts and thus shape the prospects of success of conflict parties" (p.2). Interestingly, the media have been engaged critically especially by people whose views were not positively projected in the media especially in crisis situation. Also, scholars from

sociology, psychology and media studies earnestly desire to put the activities of the "watch dog" (media) into search light to find out how they have been reporting issues especially issues that have to do with conflicts or crises beat reporting, communal or industrial crises. Conflict reporting is ironically tagged as 'bread and butter' of journalism (Owens-Ibie, 2002). The subject of conflict reporting has made journalism practice to be so interesting perhaps because of the hedonistic tendency of man. So, any events or happenings that may want to deny man of that pleasure becomes a subject of human interest. For instance, Pate (2002) worked on objectivity and balance in conflict reporting. He emphasised the need for journalists to embrace the ethics of objective and balance reporting during crises situations. Udomisor (2002) highlighted problems and prospects for reporting conflict in democracy. The article recommended that the only way to sustain emancipation, egalitarianism and enduring legacy is for the media to be proactively objective and fair by presenting views from parties to conflict.

Meanwhile, the study conducted by Umar (2002) on reporting conflict on radio revealed that radio is a veritable source to shape audience perception in conflict situations. Again, Owens-Ibie (2002) pointed out that socio-cultural variables should be considered in conflict reporting. Galadima (2002) further affirmed that the basic role of the media in conflict reporting is to create awareness so that such conflict does not get out of hands. Also, the media are expected to inform the concerned authorities on the need to stem the tide of the conflict. Still on the activities of the media and conflict reporting, Auwal (2015) submitted that the media end up worsening conflict situations due to what he calls "sensational and bias coverage". Oso (1986) and Otobo (2000) worked on media and labour relations. They both pointed out that media compromised the ethical standards when reporting industrial crises.

The media on several occasions have been alleged of bias reporting especially in conflict reportage. A word of caution was given by Adisa (2012) when he noted that "the media as an umpire, the media has a duty to be fair, just and balanced in its reportage of events...in line with the ethics of the journalism profession" (p.4). In fact, media bias in crisis reporting has turned journalism practice into the subject of derisive jokes and sometimes facing litigation for perjury and misleading publication. Consequently, some people dispassionately label journalists as liars and manipulators of gullible minds. In fact, Yolaha, the editor of the Leadership Newspaper on February 18, 2016 lambasted some crises managers and conflicts beat reporters when she said that "some journalists had played

appreciable roles in misinforming the people while sustaining the course of hates during crises".

Crises reporting are spontaneous and episodic; as a result, some journalists are always tempted to being sensational and parochial in the ways such crises are framed or presented to the public. Matheson (2005) unequivocally asserted that media do not only report conflict but also though inadvertently enact conflict as a result of their skewed and slanted reporting. Furthermore, Ahmed, (2015) citing Obateru and Best (2011) referring to the tendency of irresponsible journalism in crises reporting because "news media are hardly impartial or totally responsible in their coverage of crises such that they (media) have been accused of fuelling rather than dousing crises" (p.35-36). Meanwhile, Vladisavljevic (2015) pointed out the noteworthy roles the media play in conflict involving popular challenges to authoritarian regimes as a follow up to commending the media in times of crises. There is emerging literature on the impact of the media on violent conflict and non violent conflict.

The media cover both violent and non-violent conflicts though literature is a bit scanty to know which conflict receives more media attention (Vladisavljevic, 2015). Again, we must eulogise the media in information search and information dissemination. On or before the outbreak of the World War I, the media have been interested in staking their lives by playing the go-between roles among the warring parties so as to keep the society abreast of the on-goings in all the nooks and crannies of the world. If not for the media, the entire world would not have been better than the dark ages. Some people have pointed out that we live in mediatised socio-cultural environment where the media play-out politics of inclusion and exclusion (Cottle, 2006). The media decide what the public should know by filtering and censoring news contents. The media equally exclude the public from having access to certain critical or classified information. This is because some news contents are considered harmful for public consumptions; while some information may be considered inciting and capable of causing public uproar. So, such information is hoarded for the sanctity of the society (Boardieu, 1991, Cottle, 2006 and Nebojsa, 2015). In this context, do we blame the media of tilted reporting? The media at times could be absolved perhaps, because of the dilemma and sensitive nature of crises reporting. On this, Suman (2015300) while acknowledging the precarious state of the media professionals in conflict ridden times, at the same time, he warned the media thus:

> The news media should not interfere with the substance of information and should not work against the public interest (in both

> senses of "interests" as serving the public curiosity…there is a normative tension between representation and responsibility: these are not necessarily coeval and call for a balancing act (p.300).

From this summation, interfering with the substance of news content may work for the public especially if the content is considered harmful. In another perspective, the interference could lead to misinformation calculated to mislead the public perhaps, to perform their propaganda function or to maintain the status-quo. The tension between these assumed ethical norms, ideological inclinations and media message distortions are subject of scholarship inquiry as Suman (2015) submitted above.

Rationale for the Study

Consequently, what are the trends in crisis reporting research? This paper is set to find out the methodical trends, that is, the dominant research design adopted, method of sampling, analytical approach, as well as theoretical leaning that have been used predominantly to anchor media coverage of industrial crises. Thus the study seeks to:

1.   find out the dominant methods of studying media framing of crises;
2.   examine the theoretical foundations mostly advanced in labour crises and other crises related studies; and
3.   find out the dominant crises themes mostly researched.

Method

The study investigates commonly adopted methods of studying different variables in the studies of media and crises reporting. The variables include: content analysis, in-depth interviews, survey, experimental, triangulations and others. The materials were sourced through journal articles, theses abstracts and dissertations of masters and Ph.D.s were retrieved from Pro-Quest Dissertations (PQD) and Dissertation Abstract International (DAI). A total of 115 studies were content analyzed -35 journal articles, 69 PhD abstracts and 11 dissertations.

The study identified the dominant theoretical direction for studying industrial or any other related crises. The sub-categories (theories) include: framing theory, crisis communication theories, agenda setting theory, priming theory, Marxist media theory, normative media theories, liberal reflection theory and others that are not listed by the researchers. The probability and the non probability methods of

drawing a representative samples from the population were adopted along with simple random, purposive, multi-stage, convenience and other sampling techniques that are not listed by the researchers. The statistical methods adopted for data analysis show descriptive statistics, higher statistics method, grounded theory, frequency count, explanatory building and others.

Findings

Table 1: Research methods adopted by reviewed studies

METHODS	Journal		Abstract		Thesis	
	No	Percentage	No	Percentage	No	Percentage
Content analysis	12	34.3	25	36.2	4	36.4
In-depth analysis	8	22.9	22	31.9	2	18.2
Experimental	6	17.1	6	8.7	2	18.2
Survey	4	11.4	5	7.2	1	9.1
Triangulation	3	8.6	6	8.7	2	18.2
Others	2	5.7	5	7.2	-	-
TOTAL	**35**	**100**	**69**	**100**	**11**	**100**

Table 1 show that the predominant research designs adopted were content analysis and in-depth interviews. Content analysis from the studies had 34.4% from the journal articles. This is followed by in-depth interviews 22.9%, abstracts 36.2% and theses/dissertations 36.4%. In in-depth interview, abstracts show 31.9%, Journals 22.9% and Thesis 18.2%. On experimental method journal articles had 17.1%, abstracts and dissertations had 8.7 and 18.2 percent respectively. On the use of survey methods, journal articles had 11.4% while 7.2% and 9.1% for abstract and higher degree dissertation. On the use of triangulation method journals had 8.6%, abstract 8.7% and higher degree dissertation 18.2%. Other method not listed by the researcher had 5.7% in journal articles while abstracts had 7.2%.

Table 2: Sampling Techniques adopted by Reviewed Studies

SAMPLING TECHNIQUES	Journal		Abstract		Thesis	
	No	Percent	No	Percent	No	percent
Simple Random	8	22.9	22	31.9	3	27.3
Purposive	14	40	19	27.5	3	27.3
Convenience	2	5.7	5	7.2	2	18.2
Multi-stage	10	28.6	20	29	3	27.3
Others	1	2.9	3	4.3	-	-
TOTAL	**35**	**100**	**69**	**100**	**11**	**100**

Table 2 show the purposive sampling technique which had 40% percent from the empirical journal articles .The same trends was shown in the abstracts and higher degree dissertation which had 27.5% and 27.2% percent respectively. The multi-stage sampling technique had 29%, 28.6% and 27.3% from the abstracts, the journal articles and dissertation respectively. The choice of the simple random sampling show 31.9%, 27.3% and 22.9% in abstracts, thesis and learned journals. The convenience sampling shows 18.2% for thesis, 7.2% for abstracts and 5.7% for journals while other methods had 2.9% and 4.3% respectively in journal articles and reviewed abstracts.

Table 3: Statistical Methods adopted by Reviewed Studies

STATISTICAL METHODS	Journal		Abstract		Thesis	
	No	Percentage	No	Percentage	No	Percentage
Descriptive statistics	13	37.1	18	26.1	2	18.2
Higher statistical/method	8	22.9	23	33	5	45.5
Grounded theory	2	5.7	5	7.2	2	18.2
Frequency content	6	17.1	15	21.7	1	9.1
Explanatory building	4	11.4	5	7.2	1	9.1
Others	2	5.7	3	14.3	-	-
TOTAL	**35**	**100**	**69**	**100**	**11**	**100**

Table 3 revealed the statistical methods employed show the adoption of descriptive statistics with journal articles 37.1% abstracts 26.1% and thesis 18.2%. The adoption of higher statistics as analytical tool show journal articles representing 22.9%, abstracts 33% and thesis/dissertations 45.5%. The higher statistics method adopted where inferential analysis, regression, chi-square, ANOVA, ANCOVA and other higher statistics formula. Grounded theory and explanatory building were adopted for qualitative analysis with 11.4%, 7.2% and 9.1% for journal articles, abstracts and dissertation. Frequency count show 17.1%, 21.7% and 9.1% respectively for learned journal articles, abstracts and higher degree dissertations. While other statistical methods not listed had 5.7% and14.3% for journal articles and abstracts respectively.

Table 4: Dominant Theories adopted by Reviewed Studies

Direction/Dominant theories of the study	Journal		Abstract		Thesis	
	No	Percentage	No	Percentage	No	Percentage
Framing theory	14	31.4	26	37.7	5	45.5
Agenda Setting	6	17.4	14	20.3	2	18.2
Priming	5	14.3	9	13	-	-
Marxist media theory	3	8.6	5	7.3	1	9.1
Crisis communication theory	2	5.7	4	5.8	1	9.1
Normative theories	2	5.7	4	5.8	1	9.1
Liberal reflection theory	1	2.9	-	-	-	-
Others	2	5.7	4	5.8	1	9.1
TOTAL	**35**	**100**	**69**	**100**	**11**	**100**

Table 4 show that the most adopted communication theory is the media framing theory. The dominance of media framing theory is demonstrated with 31.4%, 37.7% and 45.5% for journal articles, abstracts and higher degree dissertations respectively. Agenda setting theory and priming theory with 17.1% for journal articles, 20.3% for the reviewed abstracts and 18.2% for theses and dissertation respectively. Priming theory had 14.3% and 13% for journal articles and abstracts respectively. The Marxist media theory had 8.6%, 7.3% and 9.1% from the journal articles, abstracts and dissertation. Crisis communication theory had 14.3%, 10.2% and 9.1% for journal articles, abstracts and dissertation respectively. The normative theories and liberal reflection theory were relatively inconsequential in the empirical studies with 5.7%, 5.8% and 9.1% for normative theories while liberal reflection theory had barely 2.9% for only learned journals. Other theories got 5.7%, 5.8% and 9.1% from the three categories areas of study.

Table 5: Dominant Themes adopted by Reviewed Studies

THEMES	Journal		Abstract		Thesis	
	No	Percentage	No	Percentage	No	Percentage
Politics	9	25.7	8	11.6	2	18.2
Electioneering	6	17.1	7	10.2	1	9.1
Crises/conflict	4	11.4	14	20.3	3	27.3
Terrorism	2	5.7	9	12	1	9.1
Gender discrimination	1	2.9	4	5.8	-	-
Race	3	8.6	6	8.7	-	-
Media bias	4	11.4	3	4.4	2	18.2
Disruption	2	5.7	9	13	1	9.1
Policy support	1	2.9	1	1.5	-	-
Ideology	2	5.7	4	5.8	1	9.1
Media manipulation	1	2.9	3	4.4	-	-
Others	-	-	1	1.5	-	-
TOTAL	**35**	**100**	**69**	**100**	**11**	**100**

Table 5 shows that politics had the most dominant theme with 25.7%, 11.6% and 18.2% for the journal articles, abstracts and theses/ dissertation. Themes of electioneering had 17.1%, 10.2% and 9.1% for learned journals, abstracts and dissertation. Conflicts/crises as thematic focus had 11.4% in journal articles, abstracts 20.3% and higher degree dissertation 27.3%. Terrorism as a theme had 5.7%, 13% and 9.1% cutting across the empirical studies while gender related issue, policy support and media manipulation had 2.9% and 5.8% respectively. Meanwhile, the issue of race and media bias as themes had 8.6% and in both learned journals and reviewed abstracts for race while 11.4%, 4.3% and 18.2% went for media bias as a theme cutting across the three areas of study.

Emerging Trends

Emerging trends show a clear direction, common arguments and divergent opinions with reference to the methods for media analysis or media portrayal of crises related issues as shown in the data obtained during the study. With reference to research designs, the dominant method from the reviewed work is content analysis with 34.3%, 36.2% and 36.4% cutting across the learned journals, abstracts and higher degree dissertations. This finding is in tandem with Wilmer and Dominick (2011), who submitted that content analysis, is a tested research design when undertaking communication media coverage of human related and any other social issues. Similarly, the adoption of in-depth interviews as a research method for data gathering when undertaking crisis reportage had 22.9%, 31.9% and 18.2% cutting across the three areas of the study-journal articles, abstracts and dissertation. The reason for this favorable disposition of the researchers is that the in-depth interview method is one of the methods to test media effects on the recipients of media messages.

However, the prominence of experimental method cannot be overlooked in learned journals, abstracts and dissertations. What accounts for this prominence is that in some circumstances, effects of media messages need to be tested experimentally to draw generalizable inferences especially when testing effect of media exposures. In a related development, survey and triangulations research methods were never discountenanced by the researchers whose works were meta-analyzed. This attests to the fact that a method like triangulation is needed in media coverage of social issues for cross-fertilization of data and to enrich the discussion. Furthermore, the choice of data analytical instrument is determined by the nature of the study. While some data analyses require simple statistics others require higher statistics. Also, while some data collection processes

require quantitative analysis some require qualitative analysis. From the reviewed studies, descriptive statistics was the dominant statistical method employed by the researchers. This is followed by the adoption of higher statistical method where inferential analysis, Chi-square, ANCOVA and ANOVA were employed to established further findings when some information are in doubt. This finding agrees with Asika (2012) who says that the higher statistical values data is subjected to, the better the level of acceptability.

The dominant sampling techniques used by the researchers in this study are needful to guide future researches. The purposive sampling technique dominated the 115 empirical studies. To justify the dominance of the purposive sampling technique is on the fact that purposive sampling; is carried out when researchers are studying newspaper coverage of a given issue because the researchers only concentrate on the specific issue in the newspapers and not on all the stories reported by the chosen newspapers. The same reason could be adduced for the multi-stage sampling technique. Hence, when conducting content analysis of newspaper coverage of issues sampling frames have to be chosen through series of inter-related steps. Ojebode, Onekutu, and Agboola (2010) equally agree with the use of multi-stage sampling while undertaking content analysis. Finally, the third preferred sampling technique by the researchers is the simple random sampling. Just like the first two sampling techniques discussed above, we cannot but adopt the simple random sampling when conducting content analysis to get a proportionate sample frames devoid of bias or sampling errors. McComb and Chyl (2004) and de-Vreese (2004) observed that purposive, multi-stage and simple random sampling techniques are quite common with content analysis of media representations of social issues.

Nevertheless, the theoretical direction adopted in underpinning studies in media coverage of crises related matters show the dominance of media framing theory. Media framing theory is followed by the agenda setting theory and the priming theory. The preference for the three theories of media effects is quite understandable because the three theories share common attributes of 'news selection and salience' to direct the audience minds in a defined schemata of interpretation. Consequently, as multi-stage sampling is to content analysis, so, content analysis to media framing theory.

Thematically, researchers have divergent views when it comes to themes as a result of differential focus. While some look at inequality, oppression, gender discrimination and favouritism when looking at social issues, electioneering and political coverage, other researchers from labour/industrial and crises representation clime do consider

disruptions of social systems or looking at economic and political consequences of industrial crises.

Conclusion

We can draw a general conclusion based on the meta-analysis of this review that content analysis remains the most preferred research method when conducting media coverage of issues to underscore the direction, prominence, issue and story sources for quantitative data analysis. Also, the use of in-depth interviews becomes inevitable for qualitative data analysis to feel the import of the audience on a particular media content exposure. The triangulation of content analysis and in-depth interviews have therefore become rewarding when conducting media coverage of a given issue that has received wide media coverage. However, the predominance of content analysis as analytical tool in media research has received some criticism on the basis that it is about 'denotative (specific to the primary meaning) and not connotative' (suggestive or contextual meaning). Content analysis is further criticized on the ground that it only focuses on easily observable surface structures which often reveal biased or stereotypes of individual or group while ignoring the real media discourse and its semantic or pragmatic import.

The implication of these findings for media research in Nigeria is that we will continue to blame the media for skewed reporting especially in crisis related issue. Meanwhile, researchers' evaluation is always based on the manifest contents (content counting) or ideational meaning from the content analysis while ignoring the latent or the contextual circumstances that produced the media texts. It is hereby recommended that media analysis on media framing of social phenomena should look forward to a more rewarding analytical approach such as critical discourse analysis (CDA). Adopting CDA will motivate the researchers to examine and reflect deeply how different ideological stance are mediated in the media to reflect social-political dominance, inequality and class struggle that characterize our discursive practices to complement the traditional Content Analysis. Hence, recent scholarly research submitted that the application of critical discourse analysis in media studies plays significant roles in unraveling the hidden agenda by scrutinizing the presence of power, dominance and inequalities in media studies.

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