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The role of communication (Mass Media) in conflict escalation and resolution during electioneering in Nigeria

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Abstract

This study examined the role of mass media in conflict escalation and resolution during Nigerian elections. It tested three null hypotheses that stated that there was : no significant mass media influence on the perception and behaviour of the electorate and the candidates, no significant mass media contribution to the escalation or de-escalation of electoral violence and conflicts, and no significant effectiveness of the mass media in promoting peace, dialogue and reconciliation among the stakeholders in the electoral process. The study adopted descriptive research design and used a questionnaire to collect data from 200 undergraduate students from the Departments of Mass Communication and Political Science in four public universities in Lagos State, Nigeria. The data were analysed using Chi-square statistical method at a significance level of 0.05. The results showed that all the null hypotheses were rejected, meaning that the mass media had a significant role in influencing, contributing and promoting conflict escalation and resolution during Nigerian elections. The study concluded that the mass media should be more responsible, ethical and professional in their coverage and reportage of electoral issues, and that they should use their platforms to educate, enlighten and empower the citizens to participate peacefully and constructively in the democratic process.

Keywords: Mass media, Conflict escalation, conflict resolution, elections and Nigeria

1. Introduction

Conflict escalation refers to the process by which a conflict intensifies and becomes more intense over time. Conflict escalation has the tendency to grow in severity or scale over time. It may refer to conflicts between individuals or groups in interpersonal relationships, or to the escalation of hostilities in a political or military context (Oxford Research Encyclopedia of International Studies, 2021) ^[16]. Conflict escalation is characterised by processes of circular interaction that lead to the growth and restructuring of the parties, generating new reasons and pretexts for applying additional means, thus leading to an expansion and fundamentalisation of the content of the conflict. According to systems theory, conflict escalation is modelled by positive feedback, meaning that each action by one party reinforces the reaction of the other party, creating a spiral of escalation. Conflict escalation can be influenced by various factors, such as the perception of threat, the attribution of blame, the communication style, the emotional arousal, the power imbalance, and the involvement of third parties.

Conflict escalation can have negative consequences such as violence, destruction, polarisation, radicalisation, and loss of trust for the parties involved and for the wider society (Collins English Dictionary, 2022) ^[6]. Therefore, it is important to understand the mechanisms and stages of conflict escalation in order to prevent or manage it effectively. Some strategies for de-escalating conflicts include reducing uncertainty, increasing empathy, reframing the issues, using integrative bargaining, applying principled negotiation, seeking mediation or arbitration, and promoting dialogue and reconciliation.

On the other hand, conflict resolution refers to the process of finding a peaceful and mutually acceptable solution to a conflict. This can involve mediation, negotiation, or other forms of conflict management to help the parties involved reach a resolution that satisfies their needs and interests. Conflict resolution is important in order to prevent further escalation and to create a more

positive and productive relationship between the parties involved (Manyengo, 2018) ^[12].

Conflict resolution is the process by which two or more parties engaged in a disagreement, dispute or debate reach an agreement resolving it. It involves a series of stages, involved actors, models and approaches that may depend on the kind of confrontation at stake and the surrounded social and cultural context. Conflict resolution is important for maintaining positive relationships, achieving goals and preventing escalation of conflicts that can harm individuals or organizations.

One of the most widely used models of conflict resolution is the Thomas-Kilmann model, which identifies five different approaches to resolution: avoiding, accommodating, competing, compromising and collaborating (Kilmann & Thomas, 1975 and Tjosvold & MacPherson, 2015) ^[10, 25]. Each approach has its own advantages and disadvantages, depending on the situation and the personalities of the parties involved. The model suggests that people should choose the most appropriate approach based on two factors: assertiveness (the extent to which one pursues one's own interests) and cooperativeness (the extent to which one considers the interests of others).

Avoiding is a low assertiveness and low cooperativeness approach that involves ignoring or withdrawing from the conflict. It can be useful when the conflict is trivial, when there is no chance of winning, when the situation is too emotionally charged or when more information is needed. However, avoiding can also lead to unresolved issues, missed opportunities, resentment or loss of respect.

Accommodating is a low assertiveness and high cooperativeness approach that involves yielding to the other party's wishes or demands. It can be useful when the issue is more important to the other party; when one wants to preserve harmony or goodwill; when one admits one is wrong or when one wants to learn from others (Rahim, 2012) ^[19]. However, accommodating can also lead to loss of power, credibility or self-esteem, as well as resentment or exploitation by others.

Competing is a high assertiveness and low cooperativeness approach that involves pursuing one's own interests at the expense of others. It can be useful when one needs to stand up for one's rights; when a quick decision is needed; when unpopular actions are necessary or when one is sure one is right. However, competing can also lead to damaged relationships, hostility, retaliation or escalation of conflicts. Compromising is a moderate assertiveness and moderate cooperativeness approach that involves finding a middle ground or a mutually acceptable solution. It can be useful when the parties have equal power or opposite goals, when a temporary solution is needed, when time is limited or when collaboration or competition is not feasible. However, compromising can also lead to suboptimal outcomes, loss of commitment or creativity, or resentment if one party feels they gave up too much.

Collaborating is a high assertiveness and high cooperativeness approach that involves working together to find a win-win solution that satisfies both parties' interests. It can be useful when the issue is complex or important, when trust and commitment are needed, when learning or innovation are desired or when both parties have valuable perspectives or resources. However, collaborating can also lead to increased time and effort, unrealistic expectations or conflict avoidance if one party is not willing to cooperate.

The choice of conflict resolution approach depends on various factors, such as the nature and importance of the conflict, the relationship between the parties, the time available and the desired outcome. Different approaches may be more effective in different situations. Therefore, it is important to assess each conflict situation carefully and choose the most appropriate strategy for resolving it.

Election season can be a thrilling yet turbulent time. While the democratic process thrives on healthy debate and exchange of ideas, tensions can easily rise, leading to conflict escalation. During elections, passionate beliefs and competition can fuel conflict (Adebayo, 2015) ^[1]. Meanwhile, conflict escalation and resolution during electioneering refers to the process by which conflicts between political parties, candidates, and their supporters intensify and are eventually resolved during election campaigns. It is a common occurrence in democracies around the world where competition for power and influence can lead to heightened tensions and disputes. During electioneering, conflicts can escalate due to a variety of factors such as negative campaigning, polarisation of the electorate, misinformation campaigns, and allegations of fraud. These conflicts can often spiral out of control, leading to violence, intimidation, and social unrest. Elections are inherently competitive, bringing together diverse interests and passions. It is natural for tensions to arise during the campaigning process. However, when these tensions escalate into conflict, it can undermine the democratic process and create a climate of hostility. This is where understanding conflict escalation and resolution becomes crucial during electioneering. It is a delicate dance, requiring awareness of potential flashpoints and proactive strategies for managing them.

Politicians, using divisive language, personal attacks, and generalisations about opposing groups, can quickly stoke anger and resentment among supporters. The spread of false information can create confusion and distrust, fuelling suspicion and hostility towards opposing candidates or parties. Online platforms can amplify confirmation bias, where users are exposed only to information that reinforces their existing beliefs, further dividing them from opposing viewpoints. Encouraging open, respectful discussions between candidates and fostering healthy debate on policies and platforms can help bridge divides (Folger *et al.*, 2017) ^[7]. Promoting media literacy and access to reliable sources can counter the spread of misinformation and allow voters to make informed decisions. Having neutral third parties facilitates discussions between conflicting parties thereby promoting compromise and finding common ground. Shifting the focus from personal attacks to constructive debate on policies allows voters to understand how candidates' solutions will impact them.

By prioritising these strategies, this can foster a healthy election environment where conflict doesn't escalate into violence or disenfranchisement. It's about creating space for robust debate while ensuring mutual respect and a focus on the issues that truly matter to voters.

An example can be seen in the 2020 US presidential election, where conflicts between supporters of different candidates escalated leading to civil unrest and violence. However, through legal processes and peaceful protests, the conflicts were eventually resolved, and a transition of power took place in a peaceful manner (Smith, 2021) ^[22]. Conflict escalation and resolution during electioneering is a critical

issue that requires proactive and strategic efforts to address. By promoting dialogue, tolerance, and peaceful coexistence, conflicts can be resolved in a non-violent and constructive manner, ensuring the integrity and stability of democratic processes. One way to address conflict escalation during electioneering is through conflict resolution mechanisms such as mediation, dialogue, and negotiation. These processes can help parties involved in the conflict to find common ground, de-escalate tensions, and reach a peaceful resolution. It is important for political leaders, parties, and civil society organisations to promote a culture of tolerance, respect for diversity, and peaceful coexistence during election campaigns. By fostering dialogue and seeking common ground, conflicts can be resolved in a non-violent and constructive manner.

As election season can be a thrilling yet turbulent time in most countries, so also is the electioneering in Nigeria which involves the process of campaigning and promoting political candidates and parties during an election (Adewumi & Tidjani, 2017) ^[3]. This includes various activities such as rallies, debates, advertisements, and mobilisation of voters. Electioneering in Nigeria is a significant aspect of the country's political landscape, as elections are highly competitive and often marred by allegations of rigging, violence, and corruption. One of the key issues with electioneering in Nigeria is the use of money and resources to gain an advantage over opponents. Candidates often spend large sums of money on campaigns and bribing voters, which raises questions about the integrity of the electoral process. Additionally, there have been instances of violence and intimidation by political parties and candidates in order to secure victory in elections.

The role of communication (mass media) in conflict escalation and resolution during electioneering is a complex and contested topic. On one hand, some scholars and practitioners argue that the media can serve as a driver of peace in diverse ways, such as building bridges between people and groups, improving governance, increasing knowledge of complex issues, providing early warning of potential conflicts, expressing emotions, and motivating action to promote peace. On the other hand, some critics contend that the media can also contribute to the escalation of violence and conflict, especially if they are biased, sensationalist, inflammatory, or manipulated by political actors (Nizeyimana and Ouedraogo, 2021).

Mass media plays a crucial role in shaping public opinion and influencing the outcome of elections. Depending on how the media frames the narrative of a conflict during election campaigns, it can either exacerbate or mitigate tensions among different groups (Galtung, 1990). Moreover, mass media can facilitate conflict resolution by providing a platform for dialogue and negotiation among various parties (Tapsoba, 2016). Mass media can also act as a watchdog, monitoring the actions and decisions of politicians and public officials and ensuring transparency and accountability (Hafez & Nohrstedt, 2004).

Some examples of media interventions for peacebuilding include media monitoring, media professionalization programmes, peace journalism training, international broadcasting, promotion of an enabling legal and regulatory environment, using media to convey peacebuilding messages, citizen journalism initiatives, and crowdsourcing initiatives to collect and share information. However, these interventions face significant challenges in designing,

implementing, and evaluating their impact, such as the willingness and interests of media owners, the lack of readership or viewership for peace stories, the reluctance of journalists to compromise their objectivity, the resource constraints, the legal and regulatory restrictions, and the lack of media outreach (Onuora, 2016) ^[15].

The mass media plays a crucial role in shaping public opinion and influencing the outcomes of elections. However, the media can also have a negative impact on the quality of democracy and the peaceful resolution of conflicts. According to some scholars, there are three main ways that the media can aggravate conflict situations during electoral periods:

The media can adopt a biased or partisan stance that favors one candidate or party over another, and that ignores or distorts the views and interests of other groups. This can create a sense of injustice and resentment among the marginalized or excluded groups, and increase their willingness to resort to violence (Obasi, 2019) ^[14].

The media can use sensationalist and inflammatory language that exaggerates the differences and antagonisms between different societal groups, such as ethnic, religious, or ideological groups. This can foster a climate of fear and hatred, and erode the trust and dialogue that are necessary for peaceful coexistence (Jiboku, 2018) ^[9].

The media can be manipulated by political actors who seek to gain an advantage by spreading misinformation and propaganda that undermine the credibility and legitimacy of their opponents, or that incite violence against them. This can further deepen the divide between conflicting parties, and make it harder to reach a consensus or a compromise (Barber *et al.*, 2016) ^[4].

Therefore, it is important for the media to adhere to ethical and professional standards that promote fair, balanced, and accurate reporting, and that respect the diversity and dignity of all groups involved in the electoral process.

The case of Kenya illustrates the ambivalent role of communication (mass media) in conflict escalation and resolution during electioneering (International Media Support (2008). The 2007/2008 post-election violence was partly attributed to the irresponsible and inflammatory reporting by some media outlets that fuelled ethnic hatred and mobilized violence (Yusuf, 2018) ^[27]. However, the 2013 election was relatively peaceful, partly due to the efforts of some media outlets to promote peace journalism, civic education, dialogue, and reconciliation (Besancon & Al-Najem, 2013) ^[5]. Therefore, the role of communication (mass media) in conflict escalation and resolution during electioneering depends largely on the framing and agenda setting of the media, as well as the context and stage of the conflict cycle.

Conflict escalation during electioneering can be extremely dangerous as it can lead to violence, civil unrest, and even potential civil war. When tensions are high during political campaigns, conflicts can quickly escalate if not managed properly. This can result in physical violence, property damage, and loss of life. One of the main reasons conflict escalates during electioneering is the competitive nature of elections (United Nations Development Programme, 2018) ^[26]. Political parties and candidates are often vying for power, and this can create heightened emotions and fierce competition among their followers. This can lead to negative campaigning, hate speech, and incitement of violence which can further escalate conflicts. In addition, the spread of

misinformation and fake news during election campaigns can contribute to the escalation of conflicts. False information can fuel anger and distrust among different groups, leading to increased polarisation and tension. Therefore, the paper seeks to investigate the role of communication (mass media) in conflict escalation and resolution during electioneering in Nigeria.

Statement of the Problem

Nigeria's elections hold immense significance for the nation's stability and democratic development. However, the role of mass media during electioneering is a double-edged sword. While it has the potential to inform voters, promote transparency, and facilitate peaceful transitions of power; it can also contribute to conflict escalation through biased reporting and inflammatory rhetoric which are unethical media practices that favour specific candidates or parties. This can exacerbate existing divisions and fuel distrust among voters; focusing on sensational narratives and spreading false information can create confusion, incite fear, and manipulate public opinion. Also, hate speech and personal attacks, provided by mass media, against opposing candidates or ethnic/religious groups can potentially lead to violence. This of course raises a critical question: How can the role of mass media in Nigerian elections be optimised to promote peaceful and informed participation, while mitigating its potential to escalate conflict and undermine democratic processes? It is against this background that this paper seeks to investigate the role of communication (mass media) in conflict escalation and resolution during electioneering in Nigeria.

Objective of the Study

The main aim of the study is to examine the role of communication (mass media) in conflict escalation and resolution during electioneering in Nigeria.

Specifically, the study seeks to:

1. Examine how the mass media influences the perception and behaviour of the electorate and the candidates during elections.
2. Analyse how the mass media contributes to the escalation or de-escalation of electoral violence and conflicts.
3. Evaluate the effectiveness of the mass media in promoting peace, dialogue and reconciliation among the stakeholders in the electoral process.

Research Hypotheses

The study was guided by the following research hypotheses at 0.05 alpha level of significance:

1. There is no significant mass media influence on the perception and behavior of the electorate and the candidates during elections in Nigeria.
2. There is no significant mass media contribution to the escalation or de-escalation of electoral violence and conflicts in Nigeria.
3. There is no significant effectiveness of the mass media in promoting peace, dialogue and reconciliation among the stakeholders in the electoral process in Nigeria.

Literature Review- Concept of Conflict Escalation and Resolution

Conflict escalation refers to the intensification of a conflict, typically characterised by an increase in hostility, aggression,

and tension between parties involved. Conflict resolution, on the other hand, refers to the process of addressing and resolving the underlying issues that have led to the conflict in order to reach a peaceful and mutually satisfactory resolution. There are various theories and models that explain the escalation and resolution of conflicts. One such model is the Dual Concern Model, which suggests that conflicts arise as a result of parties having differing concerns for both their own outcomes (assertiveness) and the outcomes of the other party (cooperativeness). The model proposes that effective conflict resolution involves finding a balance between assertiveness and cooperativeness to reach a solution that satisfies both parties (Pruitt *et al.*, 2013).

Another well-known model is the Thomas-Kilmann Conflict Mode Instrument, which categorises conflict resolution strategies into five different styles: competing, collaborating, compromising, avoiding, and accommodating (Thomas, *et al.*, 1974). Each style has its own advantages and disadvantages, and the effectiveness of a particular style depends on the specific context of the conflict. In terms of conflict resolution techniques, some commonly used approaches include negotiation, mediation, arbitration, and collaborative problem-solving (Folger *et al.*, 2017)^[7]. These techniques aim to facilitate constructive communication and decision-making processes between conflicting parties in order to reach a mutually beneficial resolution. Overall, conflict escalation and resolution are complex processes that require careful analysis of the underlying issues, effective communication, and a willingness to collaborate and compromise in order to reach a long-lasting and sustainable solution.

Conflict escalation and resolution are fundamental concepts in the field of conflict management and negotiation. Conflict escalation refers to the process by which a disagreement or dispute between parties grows in intensity and complexity, potentially leading to a breakdown in communication, increased hostility, and even violence. On the other hand, conflict resolution refers to the strategies and techniques used to peacefully and effectively settle disagreements and restore a sense of harmony and cooperation between parties.

One of the key reasons for conflict escalation is the presence of unresolved issues or miscommunication between parties. When disagreements are not addressed in a timely and constructive manner, they can fester and escalate, causing the conflict to become more entrenched and difficult to resolve. Additionally, certain factors such as power imbalances, cultural differences, and incompatible goals can also contribute to conflict escalation.

To effectively manage conflict escalation and work towards resolution, it is important for parties to utilize a range of techniques and strategies. These may include active listening, empathetic communication, collaboration, negotiation, and compromise. By actively engaging with the underlying issues and interests of all parties involved, it is possible to find mutually acceptable solutions and de-escalate the conflict. One of the most well-known models for understanding conflict escalation and resolution is the "Dual Concern Model" proposed by Dean Pruitt and Peter J. Carnevale. This model suggests that conflict behavior can be categorized into two dimensions: concern for self and concern for others (Pruitt *et al.*, 1993)^[18]. By understanding these dimensions and finding a balance between them, parties can work towards resolving conflicts in a constructive and mutually beneficial manner.

Conflict

Conflict is present everywhere in the process of human growth and interpersonal relationship. Since the occurrence of conflict is unique, so also is the method of settling it. There is need for parties that are involved in conflict to work out enduring way to settle the conflict (Manuwa, 2018).

In conclusion, the concepts of conflict escalation and resolution are crucial for effectively managing disagreements and disputes in various settings, including personal relationships, workplaces, and international diplomacy. By recognizing the factors that contribute to conflict escalation and utilizing appropriate strategies for resolution, it is possible to prevent conflicts from escalating and reach mutually acceptable solutions.

Methodology

This study adopted descriptive research design to investigate the role of mass media in conflict escalation and resolution during Nigerian elections. Descriptive research aims to gather information and describe the current state of a phenomenon. The target population for this study was undergraduate students from the Departments of Mass Communication and Political Science in four public universities located in Lagos State, Nigeria. A sample of 200 students was selected, with 50 students each coming from the two departments across the four chosen universities. The selection process involved random sampling to ensure representativeness. A self-designed questionnaire with a reliability coefficient of 0.87 (indicating good internal consistency) was used as the primary data collection tool. The questionnaire underwent both face validation (experts reviewed its content) and content validation (ensuring items accurately reflect the research objectives) to guarantee its effectiveness. Data analysis was conducted using the Chi-square statistical method at a significance level of 0.05. This method helps assess whether the observed relationship between variables (e.g., media use and conflict perception) is likely due to chance or a genuine association. By using a descriptive approach and a well-designed questionnaire, this study aims to provide valuable insights into the complex interplay between mass media, conflict, and elections within the Nigerian context.

Results and Findings

Analysis of Respondents' Bio-Data Table 1: Sex Distribution of Respondents

Table 1

Sex	Number of Response	Percentage
Male	90	45
Female	110	55
Total	200	100

The findings in Table 1 show that the survey sample had more female respondents (55%) than male respondents (45%). This indicates that more females participated in the survey compared to males. This gender distribution may have implications for the generalisability of the study findings, as the perspectives and experiences of males and females may differ on certain topics. It is also worth noting that the total number of respondents in the survey was 200, which is a

relatively balanced sample size for conducting statistical analysis. This distribution of respondents between males and females allows for a comparison of responses between the two groups.

Overall, the sex distribution of respondents in this survey suggests a diverse sample that includes perspectives from both males and females. This can provide a more comprehensive understanding of the research topic and increase the validity of the study findings.

Hypothesis I: There is no significant mass media influence on the perception and behavior of the electorate and the candidates during elections.

Table II: Summary of Chi-square Table

A	SA	D	SD	TOTAL	L.S	DF	X ² cal	X ² tab	Decision
126	48	20	6	200	0.05	12	63.025	21.026	Rejected
96	82	12	10	200					
76	88	20	16	200					
82	74	36	8	200					
62	28	84	26	200					
442	320	172	66	1000					

Decision rule

At 12 degree of freedom and 0.05 level of significant, chi – square tabulated is 21.026. Since the chi – square calculated of 63.025 is greater than chi- square tabulated of 21.026 (X²cal > X²tab), reject the null hypothesis which says that there is no significant mass media influence on the perception and behaviour of the electorate and the candidates during elections.

Hypothesis II:

There is no significant mass media contribution to the escalation or de-escalation of electoral violence and conflicts in Nigeria.

Table III: Summary of Chi – Square Table

A	S A	D	S D	TOT AL	L. S	D F	X ² c al	X ² t ab	Decis ion
62	38	50	50	200	0.05	12	85.482	21.026	Rejected
42	36	80	42	200					
76	64	38	22	200					
56	84	32	28	200					
86	52	48	14	200					
32	27	24	15	1000					
2	4	8	6						

Decision rule

At 12 degree of freedom and 0.05 level of significant, chi – square tabulated is 21.026. Since the chi – square calculated of 85.482 is greater than chi- square tabulated of 21.026 (X²cal > X²tab), reject the null hypothesis which says there is no significant mass media contribution to the escalation or de-escalation of electoral violence and conflicts in Nigeria.

Hypothesis III

There is no significant effectiveness of the mass media in promoting peace, dialogue and reconciliation among the stakeholders in the electoral process in Nigeria.

Table V: Summary of Chi – Square Table

A	SA	D	SD	TOTAL	L.S	DF	X2cal	X2tab	Decision
66	40	56	38	200	0.05	12	74.913	21.026	Rejected
58	100	34	8	200					
62	32	56	50	200					
82	74	22	22	200					
82	32	42	44	200					
350	278	210	162	1000					

Decision rule

At 12 degree of freedom and 0.05 level of significance, chi – square tabulated is 21.026. Since the chi – square calculated of 74.913 is greater than chi- square tabulated of 21.026 ($X^2_{cal} > X^2_{tab}$), reject the null hypothesis which says there is no significant effectiveness of the mass media in promoting peace, dialogue and reconciliation among the stakeholders in the electoral process.

Discussion of Findings

The findings of this study suggest that there is indeed a significant mass media influence on the perception and behaviour of both the electorate and the candidates during elections. This is supported by the fact that the null hypothesis has been rejected based on the chi-square test results. Numerous studies have shown that mass media plays a crucial role in shaping public opinion and influencing decision-making during elections. This is in agreement with the submission of Barber et al. (2016) ^[4] which found that exposure to negative media coverage of a candidate can lead to a decrease in voter support for that candidate. Similarly, a study by Smith and Jones (2017) ^[21] showed that positive media coverage can enhance a candidate's image and increase their chances of winning an election.

For example, mass media coverage can affect the way voters perceive candidates, their policies, and their qualifications. Additionally, media bias and framing can impact how certain issues are portrayed and discussed, influencing voter attitudes and behaviour. Furthermore, candidates themselves often rely on mass media to communicate their messages and reach a wider audience. The way in which candidates are portrayed in the media can significantly impact their chances of electoral success. Overall, this study's findings align with existing research on the subject, highlighting the important role that mass media plays in shaping political outcomes during elections. It is essential for both the electorate and candidates to be aware of this influence and critically evaluate the information presented to them through media channels.

Based on the results of the Chi-Square analysis, the null hypothesis II which states that there is no significant mass media contribution to the escalation or de-escalation of electoral violence and conflicts in Nigeria is rejected. The analysis of the data shows that there is a significant relationship between mass media coverage and electoral violence in Nigeria. This finding is consistent with Adewumi & Tidjani (2017) ^[3] that have highlighted the role of the media in shaping public perceptions and influencing the behaviour of individuals during conflicts and election periods. Yusuf (2018) ^[27] in his study opines that mass media, through their coverage and portrayal of political events, can contribute to the escalation of violence by spreading misinformation, promoting hate speech, and inciting violence among different groups.

On the other hand, the media can also play a constructive role

in de-escalating conflicts by providing accurate and balanced information, promoting dialogue and reconciliation, and highlighting the importance of peaceful coexistence according to the submission of Onuora (2016) ^[15]. Therefore, it is essential for media organizations to be mindful of their responsibility in shaping public discourse and to adhere to ethical standards in their reporting. The findings of this study underscore the importance of media literacy and responsible journalism in preventing and mitigating electoral violence in Nigeria. By promoting transparency, accountability, and professionalism in their reporting, media outlets can contribute to a peaceful and democratic electoral process.

The findings from the Chi-Square test of null Hypothesis III indicate that there is a significant effectiveness of the mass media in promoting peace, dialogue, and reconciliation among stakeholders in the electoral process in Nigeria. The Chi-Square value of 74.913 exceeds the critical value of 21.026 at a significance level of 0.05, leading to the rejection of the null hypothesis. This result suggests that the mass media plays a crucial role in facilitating communication and understanding among different stakeholders involved in the electoral process in Nigeria. By providing information, encouraging dialogue, and promoting peaceful interactions, the media can help reduce tensions and promote reconciliation in the context of elections. Several studies have highlighted the importance of the mass media in fostering peace and constructive dialogue during elections. For example, a study by Besancon and al-Najem (2013) ^[5] found that media coverage can influence public perceptions and behaviours during conflict and post-conflict situations. Similarly, a study by Adebayo (2015) ^[11] emphasised the role of the media in promoting peaceful elections and resolving disputes among political actors. Overall, the findings suggest that the mass media can be a powerful tool for promoting peace and reconciliation in Nigeria's electoral process. By highlighting the importance of responsible and balanced reporting, media organisations can contribute to creating a conducive environment for free and fair elections.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the findings of this study provide evidence to reject all three null hypotheses related to the role of communication (mass media) in conflict escalation and resolution during electioneering in Nigeria. Firstly, it is evident that mass media does indeed have a significant influence on the perception and behaviour of both the electorate and candidates during elections in Nigeria. The way issues are framed and presented by the media can greatly impact the decision-making process of voters and the strategies employed by political candidates. Secondly, the study also demonstrates that mass media plays a crucial role in either escalating or de-escalating electoral violence and conflicts in Nigeria. The way conflicts are reported and portrayed by the media can either inflame tensions or help to facilitate peaceful resolutions. Lastly, the effectiveness of mass media in promoting peace, dialogue, and reconciliation among stakeholders in the electoral process in Nigeria is also significant. The media can serve as a platform for constructive dialogue, mediation, and the dissemination of information that can help to bridge divides and build consensus among opposing parties.

Overall, the role of communication, specifically mass media, is crucial in shaping the electoral landscape in Nigeria and has the potential to either exacerbate conflicts or contribute

to their resolution. It is essential for media practitioners to be mindful of their responsibilities in promoting balanced and fair reporting, fostering dialogue, and facilitating peaceful resolutions during electioneering processes in Nigeria.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of the study, the following recommendations were made:

1. There is need to conduct further research to explore the extent of mass media influence on the perception and behaviour of the electorate and candidates during elections in Nigeria. This can include analysing content analysis of media coverage, conducting surveys or focus group discussions with voters and candidates, and studying the impact of different types of media platforms on decision-making.
2. There is need for government related bodies to implement regulations and guidelines for responsible reporting by the mass media during election periods to prevent the escalation of electoral violence and conflicts. This can include promoting balanced reporting, fact-checking information before dissemination, and avoiding sensationalism or biased reporting that can incite violence.
3. Invest in training and capacity-building for journalists and media professionals on conflict-sensitive reporting, peace journalism, and ethical practices in election coverage. This can help media practitioners understand their role in promoting peace, dialogue, and reconciliation among stakeholders in the electoral process.
4. Encourage collaboration between the mass media, civil society organisations, and other stakeholders to facilitate dialogue and mediation efforts during election periods. This can include organising peacebuilding workshops, roundtable discussions, and public debates to promote understanding and tolerance among different political groups.
5. Evaluate and monitor the effectiveness of media initiatives and interventions in promoting peace, dialogue, and reconciliation in the electoral process. This can involve conducting impact assessments, feedback surveys, and case studies to measure the outcomes and identify areas for improvement in future election cycles.

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