

Assessing the Role of the Mass Media to Conflict Resolution in Tuabodom

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Abstract

This study was embarked upon to investigate the role of the media in the management of conflict in the Tuabodom area of Ghana. The study specifically sought to evaluate the media's role in Tuabodom conflict, to examine the perception of residence about the media's role in managing conflict and to suggest feasible policy recommendations. The use of questionnaires and interviews were employed as major data collection instruments. Secondary information was gathered from other sources which include the internet, literatures on conflict and the media, archival findings and other related works. The data collected was analysed using tables, charts and simple percentages with the help of Statistical Product and Service Solutions (SPSS) version 16.0 software system. The analysis revealed that most conflicts in some parts of Ghana occur through the media of which Tuabodom area is of no exception. It was therefore concluded that, the media should play an effective role by adopting a multi-dimensional approach in educating the public about conflict and its resolution. In addition, panels used for discussions on radio and television programmes should be decorous in their choice of words and be tolerant in others views when given the appropriate medium.

Keywords: mass media, conflict, conflict resolution.

1.0 Introduction

As a result of their ability to reach and influence large numbers of people, the media carry immense power in shaping the course of a conflict. Although many examples of the media's negative contribution to the escalation of violent conflicts exist, fair and accurate journalism and media circumspect is vital for the development of every nation and attainment of peace (Melon, 2002).

Media content that builds confidence and counteracts misperceptions may have a potential in both conflict prevention and transformation. Mass media often plays a key role in today's conflict (Melon, 2002). Basically, their role can take two different and opposed forms; either the media takes an active part in the conflict and has responsibility for increased violence, or stays independent and out of the conflict, thereby contributing to the resolution of conflict and alleviation of violence. Despite the critical significance of the roles played by the media in conflict and conflict resolution, this area has been relatively neglected by both scholars and practitioners. Most existing studies focus on the often negative contributions of the media to the escalation and violence phases of conflict. Few studies deal with the actual or potential media contributions to conflict resolution and reconciliation. Indeed, the media, particularly radio and television, were instrumental in fomenting conflict and violence in places such as Rwanda and Bosnia. (GNA, August 26, 1999)

2.0 Statement of the Problem

Several parts of Ghana have been plagued with communal conflict, particularly land and chieftaincy related conflicts in the past two decades or more. Some of these conflicts easily attract the attention of the whole country (Kendie, 2007). In this age and time, the media is a powerful tool that can be used to change the course of development of any country and even abate and resolve conflict but that has not been seen within the context of the Ghanaian media as most conflicts in the nation, mostly on ethnic level has not felt much of the impact of the media in the resolution of the conflict. The media foundation for West Africa on the November 21, 2012 published a paper titled "MFWA's HIGHLIGHT OF FINDING FOR 32 WEEKS OF MONITORING ELECTORAL CAMPAIGN LANGUAGE ON RADIO". It was realized that some radio stations allowed indecent languages to be used on their air waves and some politicians were identified as politically intolerant in their expression of views. In 2009, a group of armed supporters of the ruling National Democratic Congress (NDC) in Techiman, a town in the Brong Ahafo region of Ghana besieged the premises of privately owned radio station Classic FM physically attached three persons and vandalized the station (Ghana Alert, West Africa, 2009).

Therefore, the purpose of this research is to find out the role of the media in curbing conflict in the Tuabodom area.

3.0 Purpose of the Study

The general objective of the study is to examine the role of the media in the management of conflict in Tuabodom.

4.0 Research Questions

The following research questions guided the study;

1. What role do the media play in managing the conflict in Tuabodom?
2. What are the perceptions of residents about the role of the media in conflict?
3. What are some of the policy recommendations to curb this conflict?

5.0 Significance of the study

The findings of this study would be relevant to researchers and media practitioners. It will serve as a source of literature to any individual or institution for the purposes of further research on the subject or other related areas and also help media men and women to appreciate role of the media in managing conflict. The findings or outcome of this study will also be relevant to chiefs and some community residents to know how to communicate effectively and use decent languages when given the medium.

6.0 Literature Review

6.1 The media's role in conflict management

Conflict over the media is an important dimension of any conflict. One way to view it is like a particular arena in which actors compete to control or influence the media in various ways in order to secure or gain political influence (Wolfsfeld 1997). It is a continuous dynamic competition that involves being able to communicate to the audience (or prevent from communicating) in an attempt to promote their version of the story. For example, in order to be able to point out who is "good", who is "bad" and thereby justify policies and actions.

Actors who compete over the media usually assume that success in controlling access automatically leads to success in the second, the cultural or framing dimension. In societies where the media is heavily controlled by the state or by other interests this is usually the result. However, as media become more independent this becomes more difficult. The relation also works in the opposite direction, the particularities and characteristics of how media functions at all levels will have important implications for how a conflict is played out between the primary parties in a conflict (Dixon, 1996).

The media plays a crucial role in a democratic system's self-correcting mechanism, and while public information may have dramatic consequences for any democratically elected government per se, it does not threaten the political system. In a non-democratic system, the political structures and institutions are often more personally dependant on those who hold key decision-making positions. Meaning that, a threat to the credibility of those in power also implies a threat to the legitimacy of the whole political or governmental structure. External support to non-representative and non-democratic actors could have detrimental effects, or vice versa.

What constitutes news is always the result of a selection of certain facts and the overlooking of others. "The news media bring some features of 'reality' to our attention, placing them in the light, whereas most of the rest is kept in the dark" And it is important to remember that the accumulated glimpses, given in the reports of the international media, portray the world, as it should not be, rather than how it is. In relative terms, in-depth reporting is marginal and the number of Western foreign correspondents stationed in non-Western parts of the world is small. It is also rare that the international media reports successful conflict resolution and peace-building processes. This is partly understandable, due to time constraints and the magnitude of potential news in the world.

In most situations of rising tension, before a conflict has passed the threshold to violence, international media has little interest or use for these news stories. As Jakobsen (2011) argues, it is usually after some sort of trigger event, like "an exodus of refugees or a massacre" that is also sufficiently photogenic and dramatic, that the international media takes notice. Once international media does show interest in a conflict it is unfortunately usually when the critical preventive moment has passed.

However, several cases seemed to point towards the international media being able to pressure governments into intervene militarily. On closer examination of the cases, Western governments' policy decisions tended to precede international media pressure (Robinson 2002). In other words, several researchers conclude that the effect of the international media is greatly exaggerated, even if it does seem to have an influence under certain circumstances. Notably, it can have significant influence but only when a government is unsure as to which policy road to take. Furthermore, Jakobsen argues that, media generated pressures are likely to result in minimalist policies, which are primarily aimed at demonstrating to their action-demanding publics that something is being done' so that ground deployment can be avoided. He refers to these as mere 'gesture-politics' but there are also numerous examples where, for example, mere international recognition of a non-state actor has had determinant consequences (Jacobson 2011).

There is a clear correlation between media coverage and funding levels in humanitarian emergencies. Unfortunately, this also results in that budgets for long term projects, in many "forgotten" conflicts, get rerouted to conflicts with high international media attention. It is also in these situations, when donors all rush to the same conflict that the most acute coordination problems arise (Wolfsfeld 1997). International media, as it works today,

has a negligible or negative influence on violent conflicts in the pre- and post- violent conflict phases. Negligible effect, because in most cases internal conflicts do not get substantial media attention in these conflict phases. The negative influence, of the international media is closely related to its preference for sensationalist events and its increasingly “infotainment” orientated news reporting (Wolfsfeld 1997).

Although authorities and elites exert considerable influence over the media the international media can mobilise third party support for victims of violence and oppression. The media is often blamed for giving too much attention to political groups capable of capturing the media's interest with spectacular behaviour. It is true that media, particularly television media and perhaps international media, depend on spectacular events in order to keep their audiences interested. As such it creates a potential venue for certain factors that may not otherwise have access to extensive media exposure, for better or for worse. International media in the violent phase of a conflict can exert positive pressure and have negative consequences. (Wolfsfeld 1997).

In one conflict that received considerable media attention, parties in the conflict repeatedly fired on themselves in order to put pressure on international decision-makers. In these circumstances, accurate reporting is essential, but often due to a lack of time and accessibility, it is difficult to verify information. One aspect that this reflects is that parties who are willing to shot at themselves for the cameras are probably also more dependent on, and vulnerable to, international media pressure. Contrary, to some of the negative effects on peace processes, with the eyes of the international media fixed on the parties in a conflict, actors may be more reluctant to break agreements (Jakobsen 2011).

They can also contribute by informing and supporting democratic values, in general and in the case of an intervention. It can play a particular role in promoting independent media and journalism based on sound journalistic principals. It is often more difficult for national media to be economically and politically independent of the regime. Meaning that in the violent phase of a conflict it is exceedingly difficult for national media not to get sucked into the conflict. In such situations, international media could act as a temporary as an alternative to national media in conflict situations where the national media is seriously crippled. One way of doing this is, not only mediating information that would otherwise be censored, but also act as a guarantee for local journalists (Okere 1996). However, in order to do this credibly, the international media itself should be structured according to democratic principles, which is not always the case.

7.0 Methodology

In this study, the design used was descriptive research design. Descriptive design made room for the concepts and issues to be well assessed by the researcher. The study made use of quantitative method. The quantitative method made use of questionnaires. The purpose of the study was aimed to find out the role of the media in the abatement of conflict in the Tuabodom constituency. The study aimed at soliciting information from chiefs and residents of Tuabodom. To fulfil this mission, the researcher tried to explore in all angles of the research by preparing an interview guide to elicit the relevant information with questions pertaining to the research topic. According to the 2010 population and housing census, the population of Tuabodom is 2368 (GSS, 2010 Population and housing census). The community was chosen because it has over the years witnessed conflict that erupted based on ethnic and chieftaincy lines of which the media can have a positive influence in the maintenance of peace in the communities.

The sample for this study were chiefs, elders, opinion leaders, youth in the Tuabodom constituency and some media practitioners. These people were deemed to have adequate knowledge into the project topic. A sample size of fifty (50) respondents was used for this research. The researcher used the fifty as his sample size because of logistical and financial constraints involved in taking the actual probabilistic sample size of three communities. In that case, the research employed the purposive sampling technique in selecting respondents and some residents for the research. The purposive sampling technique offers this researcher convenience and aptness as far as the data collection is concerned. The purposive sampling was used because the researcher wanted key figures in the community and stakeholders involved in the conflict who have much knowledge about the conflict and could offer in-depth response to the concept of conflict and the role of the media in conflict.

Questionnaires and the structured interview guide were used for this research. The questionnaire which contains a maximum of twenty (20) questions was administered to the chiefs, elders, opinion leaders and youth leaders in Tuabodom. The researchers personally delivered the questionnaires to the respondents at their various houses and the various chiefs palaces. Questionnaires were used at that point in time because that was the data collection tool which was most available at that time for the research and it helped respondents to answer the questions to the best of their knowledge with no interferences from the researchers. Data analysis was done with the use of Statistical Package for Service Solutions (SPSS version 23.0). After the data had been collected, they were edited and then coded. The coded values were input into the value view of the SPSS after which the actual data collected from the field in coded format were input into the data view of the SPSS. Frequency tables and cross tabulation were used in the data analysis.

8.0 Results and Discussions

8.1 Research Question One: What role do the media play in managing the conflict in Tuabodom?

Research question one sought to find out the role played by the media in managing the conflict in Tuabodom. The results are displayed in Table 1.

Table 1-*Role of the Media in the Abatement of Tuabodom Conflict*

Responses	No.	%
By negotiation with actors	12	24
Mass education	10	20
Applying high journalistic standards	8	16
Editing of media contents	10	20
Media fun games and musical explosions	10	20
Total	50	100.0

Source: Field Data, 2017.

Among all the fifty (50) interviewees, each person gave or suggested what role the media should play to promote total peace in the Tuabodom constituency. Twelve people (12) representing twenty-four (24%) percent said that the media should negotiate peacefully with rivals in order to prevent conflict. Ten (10) people representing 20% said that mass education should be promoted in order to reduce the conflict issues and this had a representation of 20%. Also eight (8) people representing sixteen percent (16%) were of the view that high journalistic standards should be practiced by media men and women in order to prevent further occurrences of conflict, Ten (10) people also representing 20% said that media reports should be edited well before read out to the general public and lastly 10 (ten) people again representing 20% said that media fun games and musical explosions should be organized in order to avoid the tension in the conflict zone areas.

In order to know the effective role the media can play to help solve conflict, some residents of the Tuabodom community and chiefs were interviewed.

It is recalled from the literature review according to (Wolfsfeld 1997) that, the media is a tool for peace characterised by a long, drawn out succession of tedious meetings and furthermore some secrecy is often a prerequisite for success. One of the interviewee from the area also said that, the media can help solve conflict in Tuabodom by peaceful negotiation and psyching up the actors involved in the conflict through the various media platform. The interviewee also said that mass education through adverts, announcements and shows by the media can help prime actors and stakeholders on the benefit of peace and tranquillity.

Research Question Two: What are the perception of the residents about the role of the media in Conflict?

Research question two sought to find out the perception of the residents about the role of the media in conflict. The results are presented in Table 2 and 3.

Table 2 - *Ability of the Media to Cause Conflict*

Response	Frequency	Percentage
Wrong Reportage	15	30
Stereotyping	16	32
Unwholesome talks	19	38
Total	50	100

Source: Field Data, 2017

Averagely, most of the respondents highlighted on wrong reportage, stereotyping and unwholesome talks as the main influential ways the media cause conflict in Tuabodom. To the citizens, wrong relay of information, allowing studio panels to say unwholesome statements that can incite anger and media officials and studio panels using stereotyping words has the ability to anger a group of people, or an ethnic group against others.

The researcher then went ahead to find out whether the media, both electronic and prints can help in the resolution of conflict. From the data collected, 40 out of the 50 respondents said YES, whiles the remaining 10 said they do not think so. Ten (10) respondents said most people do not have television and also cannot afford the newspapers so major issues of discussion to help solve this conflict could not reach their end. They also stated that though most people have radios, they only listen to musical programmes on the radio station and not specifically talk shows and newspaper reviews. Again, others stated that much of the local are not well educated to understand the level of discussion at the television station and most often, the discussion is done in the English language which is a disadvantage.

Table 3 - *Effects of Conflicts*

Effects	Number of Responses	Percentage
Human Toll	50	20
Political	50	20
Socially	50	20
Economical	50	20
Social-psychological	50	20
Total	250	100

From the table above, it can be observed that all the people numbering 100 per cent responded to the effects of conflict. The respondents agreed to the effects listed on the questionnaire for them to tick. With regards to the human toll all fifty respondents agreed that there has been some death since conflict started in their respective towns, also there has been some disablement, displacement and forced migration of some people. On the social front, all respondents agreed that there has been some destruction in the two communities but their most worry was the effect it has had education. They were so much worried about the future of their children because due to the conflict sometimes classes are interrupted and some even could not go to school because of the adverse dangers they might encounter on their way to school.

Economically the respondent stated they are seriously affected since the trade relation between the two is broken more so due to the conflict trade activities within the community has fallen because of the fear of losing lives, people from outside are scared of trading there. Again whole sellers do not want to give their goods on credit to people from these two communities for fear of defaulting payment as a result of the conflict and this has really affected the economic standing of the two communities. Politically rule of law is absent due to the fact people can take up arms and cause mayhem without any respect for authority. The authority of the traditional leaders is undermined since the leaders are also part of this conflict. Another effect realized was the social psychological aspect of the conflict people go through. In this regard we looking at the post-traumatic stress syndrome the people go through as a result of the conflict. All this effect talked about has also been captured in the UNDP report on legacies of armed conflict 2008. This shows that in all conflict prone areas these effects are likely to be noticed or found.

9.0 Conclusion

Conflict is an inevitable part of the society today, the ability to manage it well is of importance as far as development is concerned. Conflict in it right is not evil but its management if not addressed with the keenest of attention can destroy developmental process. The media has a role to play in conflict and should be guided by the core ethics of its functions to handle conflict situations in the better of interests.

10. Recommendations

In view of the findings and conclusions of the study outlined above, it is proper to make the following feasible recommendations. First of all, for the problems of conflict to be minimized especially ethnic conflict, there is the need for the media to adopt a multi-dimensional approach in educating about conflict and resolving conflict. Secondly, the media should be given a role to play in resolving conflict. Lastly, panels used for discussions on radio and television programmes should watch their choice of words.

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