

The Niger Delta crisis and advocacy for peace by the Nigerian press: A content analysis of three Nigerian newspapers

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Abstract

The Niger Delta region of the Federal Republic of Nigeria has been embroiled in a protracted crisis over a decade now. The crisis is hinged on infrastructural deprivation of the people of the region by the Federal Government of Nigeria. As a result of the crisis, oil output dropped to 1.4mbpd as against 2.3mbpd in 2006 with the people of the region suffering untold socio-economic hardship. It is expected that the press could drive for peace through advocacy. To this end, therefore, this study set out to examine the editorial, advertorial and features content of three Nigerian newspapers *The Guardian*, *The Punch* and the *Niger Delta Standard* – with a view to finding out if content was directed towards advocacy for peace in the region. The period of study was July 2008 to June 2009. Measurement of news space was done in centimeters. Analysis revealed that advocacy for peace in the Niger Delta by the newspapers studied was abysmally shrift. Analysis further revealed that the newspapers reported more of the macabre and drama of the crisis than advocacy for peace in the region. It was therefore recommended that Nigerian newspapers should embrace the ideology of advocacy and use its kit to point out problems and solutions in the socio-political milieu.

Key words: Advertorial, Crisis, Editorial, Media advocacy, Niger Delta, Nigerian Press

1. Introduction

Advocacy is a mainstream function of the mass media since it is hinged on the need to point out problems with a view to correcting them. Conceptions on the functionality of the press within a social framework are often routed through aphorisms like “the watchdog role of the press” as well as the press as the “Fourth Estate of the Realm”.

The presupposition here is that the bedrock of media function should center on the need for the press to have a crusading interest for truth. This without equivocation accords nobility to a press system.

Indeed the press has a cardinal responsibility of making sense out of what goes on around us with a view to sensitizing the individual, in the society, on the goings on in his immediate environment. Newspaper reports, no doubt, should enable the individual foray through the task of routinely making sense of everyday experience. The primary concern of the press, in a socio- economic system, like Nigeria, should be geared towards bringing problems to light so they can be resolved. It is all about writing about things that matter. Shepard (1994) has noted the importance of newspapers in strengthening the political fabric of any society. According to her, “communities will fail if newspapers do not team up in a search for solutions to community woes”(p.30).

In this regard, therefore, the press serves as a cognitive filter. It lets into our cognition those issues that are deemed significant while letting out the perceived insignificant ones. The presupposition however is that the physical environment may be so vast that it may pose a challenge for the average individual to directly make sense of. This assumption seems to corroborate that of Lippmann (1922). According to him,

... The real environment is altogether too big, too complex and too fleeting for direct acquaintance. We are not equipped to deal with so much subtlety, so much variety, so much permutations, actions and combinations.

The Nigerian state is vast with a huge concentrate of oil and gas deposits in the Niger Delta (south-south) region. Within the past decade, this region has been embroiled in series of socio- economic and socio-political crises which have attracted international attention. It will be recalled that the “Niger Delta Struggle” as it is locally referred to started as an ideological advocacy for ecologically safe industrial practices by the oil companies. These crusades were aimed at reducing oil spill and gas flaring. With the killing, by hanging, of Ken Saro Wiwa- a notable Niger Delta crusader- by the then military administration of late General Sani

Abacha in 1995, the crisis assumed a guerrilla dimension characterized by large scale violence, killing and hostage taking in the region. Also, according to a report by Energy Information Administration (EIA), Nigeria has experienced, since December 2005, increased pipeline vandalism, kidnappings and militant take over of oil facility in the Niger Delta. Additionally, kidnappings of oil workers for ransom are also common and have led some oil firms to pull out of the country.

These no doubt have had a negative impact on the economy of the country manifested in a sharp drop in oil output and export. At present, oil output stands at 1.4mbpd against the backdrop of 2.3mbpd in 2006. (<http://www.eia.doe.gov/emu/cabs/nigeria/oil.html>)

It should be noted at this point that the mass media are instruments for peace and development. Deductively, therefore, the Nigerian press is expected to play a role in the Niger Delta crisis; particularly by instigating and sustaining peace through content.

Drawing from the social system parameters, the Nigerian press should champion advocacy by pointing ways out of, and solutions to, the lingering Niger Delta crisis. How the Nigerian press has fared in this role is the major concern of this study.

2. The setting

The geographic entity referred to as the Niger Delta is a region in the Niger Delta sedimentary basin. The region is bounded in the east by the Calabar flank, on the west by the Benin flank, on the south by the Atlantic Ocean and the Gulf of Guinea and finally on the north by the Anambra Basin/Abakiliki anticlinorium and Afikpo syncline.

In terms of sedimentary deposits, the Niger Delta comprises three main formations viz; the Akata, Agbada and Benin formations. It should at this point be noted that the Agbada formation constitutes the main hydrocarbon reservoir of the region. About three – quarters of Nigeria’s oil and gas produced to date comes from the Agbada formation reservoir and is located mainly in growth falls and roll over anticlines of the Niger Delta. With petroleum energy taking over as the live wire of modern technology across the globe, the area has become the engine block of the Nigerian economy. This in reference to the region has produced, in unequivocal terms, such parlance as the ‘‘hen that lays the golden egg’’, ‘‘the treasure base of the nation’’ and ‘‘the heart beat of the nation’’.

3. The problem

The Niger Delta crisis is premised on deprivation in the face of abundance. The fiscal policy of Nigeria is such that total revenue from oil and gas export goes to the federal government via Federated Accounts. This in turn is disbursed to the federating units (states) in the form of monthly allocation. The overall sentiment is that what goes to the Niger Delta region in the form of monthly allocation is not commensurate with what the region generates in terms of oil and gas revenue.

Infrastructural development is also abysmal with more than half the population living in squalor. With renewed awakening and sensitization on wealth transformation as experienced in cities like Dubai, Kuwait etc; coupled with the global ranking of Nigeria’s oil export to the United States of America as the fifth largest foreign oil supplier to the USA (Energy outlook, March 2009) the disparity between wealth and poverty became more glaring. Efforts at renegotiating an upward review of the Derivation Formula (the fiscal allocation formula between the Federal Government of Nigeria and the Niger Delta Region) from 15% to 25% met with futility during the National Political Reforms Conference (NPRC) in 2006.

The youth of the Niger Delta region faced with no other option resorted to violent confrontation against the government of Nigeria and the oil companies in the region. This has led to guerrilla attacks on oil platforms and installation including hostage taking of expatriate workers in the region. The common goal is for the peoples of the region to take control of their God given oil resources which is popularly known as ‘‘resource control’’.

Media reports, both international and local, are replete with violence in the Niger Delta region. A review of some headlines in some Nigerian newspapers may suffice.

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THIS DAY – 1st January, 2009.

- * KIDNAPPED U. C. RUSAL – ALSCON DIRECTOR – FEARED KILLED (P.1)
NIGER DELTA STANDARD – 19TH January, 2009.
- * SHELL’S NEMBE FACILITY ATTACKED BY MILITANTS (P.2)
THE GUARDIAN – 5th February, 2009.
- * EX-PETROLEUM MINISTER’S WIFE KIDNAPPED (P.2)
THE PUNCH – 9th February, 2009
- * POWER OUTPUT DROPS, MEND*CLAIMS GAS PLANT ATTACK (P.15)
THIS DAY – 18th February, 2009.
- * NIGER DELTA CRISIS: SHELL SHUTS IN 180, 000bpd. (p.1)
THIS DAY – 16th March, 2009.
- * MILITANTS AGAIN VANDALIZE CHEVRON FACILITY (p.6)

Daily living in the Niger Delta region is characterized by fear and apathy due to large scale destruction of lives and property. Long lasting peace can only be engendered through meaningful dialogue. The platform for dialogue is empathy and the mass media are quite equipped to generate the platform for meaningful dialogue. This is where media advocacy comes in.

By common sense, media advocacy is the strategic use of news making, through the media, to elicit support for changes in community norms and policies. It is all about helping policy makers and the general public, through media reports, to more fully engage in creating systemic changes that improve the world we live in.

Media advocacy in this regard goes beyond straight news reporting to encompass in-depth reporting through “editorial” “features and advertorial” to influence attitude and norms. In other words, does the Nigerian press, through content, offer a recipe for peace and respite in the Niger Delta region? Does the press merely report the violence in the region without playing up ideologies on the need and ways to urgently stop the violence? The problem of this study is preconceived in the foregoing.

3.1 The objectives

1. To find out, through volume analysis, how much of the editorial, advertorial and feature columns of the newspapers studied, was directed towards suggestions for a peaceful resolution of the Niger Delta crisis.
2. To ascertain based on the above, the overall disposition of the Nigerian press towards the Niger Delta crisis.

4. Review of related concepts and studies

Media role in a developing country like Nigeria is shaped within the parameters of development theory demonstrated in the form of journalism for development. This normative ideology is what guides media practice in developing nations because for these countries, economic, social and political developments are primary national tasks to which every other institution must submit to.

Journalism within this context must be complementary of overall efforts to bring development to the people. According to Shepard (1994), “professional passivity is passé activism is hot. Detachment is out; participation is in”(p.34). In other words the media are expected to lend an active voice to ongoing socio-political debates. The media should therefore play an active role in solving the problems of their cities, towns and communities. The common denominator however is the assumption that a news paper should act as a catalyst to change.

The deduction is that the press, in the context of journalism for development, must play a pioneering role in addressing the problems of the community. Journalism business according to Itule and Anderson (2008), “is all about doing the right thing to make the world a better and safe place”(p.484). Journalism in this context must be goal oriented and purposeful. This is the pivot of advocacy using newspapers as arrow heads.

The scope of media advocacy naturally dovetails within the framework of the agenda setting function of the mass media illuminated by Cohen (1963). According to him, the press is significantly more than a purveyor

of information and opinion. He further noted that the press may not be successful much of the time in telling people what to think, but it is stunningly successful in telling its readers what to think about.

A correlation between media coverage of issues and peoples' perception of these issues was found to be very high by foremost researchers in the field.

In corroboration, however, Baran and Davis (2000), noted that "the world looks different to different people depending not only on their personal interests, but also on the map that is drawn for them by the writers, editors and the publishers of the papers they read"(p300).

The imputation therefore is that there is an association link between media coverage and cognition. The agenda setting function of the media clearly establishes that there is an important relationship between media reports and the peoples' ranking of public issues.

Contemporary researchers like Lang and Lang (1983), Iyengar and Kinder (1987) and Proress et al (1991) lent credence to this causality by noting that the agenda setting function of the media reflects the impact of news coverage on the perceived importance of national issues as well as the impact of news coverage on the weight assigned to specific issues in making political judgments.

Scholarly propulsion reveals that studies are now shifting from media use to information and new cognition acquired from the media. The inference however is that the media through selective presentation and emphasis set both political and social agenda for audience members. It should therefore be noted that the ability of the media to influence our cognition derives from their ability to focus attention on specific events, issues and persons; through content. The over riding summation is that the most powerful effect of the mass media on public knowledge – comparable even to the effect of the realism with which it can present distant events and places – is the ability of the media to focus attention on certain problems, persons or issues at a given time. This touches on the ability of the media to determine what public policy issues are important and to establish a debate around them. This is the bedrock of advocacy predicated on the propensity of the media to influence opinion and moderate behaviour through content.

Drawing from this premise, Staples (2009), has noted that "media advocacy is the act of strategically mobilizing community interest in a problem and its solutions"(p.175). It follows a series of orchestrated events. First, the issue appears topical and is perceived as important by some opinion leaders in the community. Second, a language develops around the problem including common knowledge about the cause of the problem and what change or policy is likely to address the problem. Third, decision makers are educated and people at the grass roots are urged to speak up and ask for a change from the decision makers. This no doubt involves some form of social mobilization.

According to Wallack, et al (1993), "advocacy is an innovative and sophisticated way of critically using the media to promote change because the mass media have become a powerful force in our society"(p.2).

In this regard, media advocacy can be a significant force for influencing public debate and putting pressure on policy makers by increasing the volume of social voice and in turn by increasing visibility of values and issues behind the voice.

Media advocacy requires the identification of an issue and an accompanying initiative to address that issue. An issue is a burning concern that drives an initiative. Whether it is a problem or vision statement, an issue defines the boundaries from which an initiative is shaped. The initiative could be instituted by an organization or a coalition.

Using the above as a premise, the issue in this context is the crisis in the Niger Delta while the initiative is a call for peace by a coalition which best describes a mainstreaming by the media.

Pershuck and Wilbur (1991), in corroboration have noted that "the key to a successful media campaign is to have the same message conveyed through multiple channels"(p.83). The imputation therefore is that advocacy does not provide a platform for lone rangers. A lone voice will inadvertently be drowned. Advocacy

campaigns must be pervasive and collaborative – different channels must be used at the same time and in the same context.

No doubt, by structuring public discourse, the media determine our social priorities. This is predicated on the premise that the news media have the power to set agenda on public discourse, direct attention to particular issues and ultimately influence how we think about those issues. The media indisputably create an important link between citizens and their governments.

Media advocacy is sometimes subsumed in the dynamics of social marketing and it is geared towards the engagement of the media to promote the adoption of favourable policies and individual behaviour change.

The Encyclopedia of Public Health (2002) views media advocacy more broadly since almost identical techniques are often used to encourage people to change health behaviours as those directed towards changing policy. The ultimate targets of media advocacy as noted, in this reference material, are individuals and policy makers.

Media advocacy may be proactive or reactive. Proactive means instigating action while reactive involves taking action when required especially when non conformists try to mislead or divert attention. Media advocacy offers useful tips for on going campaigns.

An example of media advocacy is the global on going campaign against tobacco. Another prominent example is the campaign against drinking and driving.

Balbach and Glantz (1998), further noted that “certain media content is directed towards politicians and other opinion leaders whose support is needed for anti-tobacco measures while different but related content is aimed at changing policy”(p.402). The latter seeks a behaviour change. Both however share the overall goal of reducing social disorders.

Advocacy is a two pronged tool that can engender policy change on the one hand while moderating behaviour on the other hand. In a related study, Northbrook (1998) found that as a result of media advocacy, cigarette sales and youth smoking prevalence declined significantly while concern by smokers about their health increased significantly. Public Service Announcements have also been found to be a staple of tobacco control and other health promotion strategies. (Center for Disease Control and Prevention-1998-. Best Practices for Comprehensive Tobacco Control Programmes, Atlanta)

Woodruff (1996), has noted that “media advocacy was instrumental in the success of a campaign that pressured the alcohol industry to change the ways in which they portray women in much of their advertising”(p.332). In the same vein, Holder and Trenor (1997), established a link between a drop in perceived risk of drinking while driving and increased news coverage on the issue (p.192).

Deductively, media advocacy must employ paid media campaigns such as informational advertisements in newspapers. This is so because paid media campaigns involve a more programmed delivery of education-oriented information and carry more credibility.

The scenario above in relation to the subject matter can be typified by, the media in Nigeria; particularly newspapers, directing the attention of government to the necessity of developing a more community oriented policy towards the Niger Delta region while encouraging the people of the region to adopt a non violent approach in a bid to produce a change in the socio-political climate of the region.

Goldman and Zassloff (1994), have recommended steps in implementing media advocacy. According to them, when developing a media advocacy strategy, “the overt issues need to be determined with possible remedies as well as streamlining those who have the power to make it happen”(p.7). With a clear cut delineation of the foregoing, the succeeding issue naturally dissolves into developing the advocacy tools. The tools below have been streamlined by the praxis project as veritable for media advocacy.

OP-Eds - These refer to articles in the opinion section of a newspaper including the editorial column.

- PSA – It is a paid or sponsored message with a crusading interest e.g. “to prevent alcohol related birth defects, pregnant women should not drink alcohol”.
- Soft news – This includes features often characterized by creative writing and descriptions of people/issues usually in features sections.
- Visual Arts – The use of cartoons and other graphic representations.

In terms of evaluation, since the goal of advocacy is aimed at policy change and behaviour change induced by awareness, the impact is measurable. Descriptively, if the goal of media advocacy is to stimulate debate and raise awareness about the importance of the issue being advocated (for instance, ways of attaining peace in the Niger Delta region), then this can be measured by the amount of coverage the issue received in the media. This is an overt justification for the content analysis method adopted in this study.

5. The study design

This study by its very nature entailed a content analysis of three Nigerian newspapers. Content analysis as a method of study has been defined by Walizer and Wienir (1978) as the systematic procedure devised to examine the content of recorded information. According to Wimmer and Dominick (2005), the justification for this method lies on “its potential to identify trends over a long period of time”(p.142).

To ensure comprehensibility and generalizability, the period of study spanned twelve calendar months; precisely July 2008 to June 2009. The justification for the study period is recency coupled with availability of records.

The Guardian and *The Punch* newspapers were purposively selected and studied based on their nationwide spread while the *Niger Delta Standard* was purposively selected and studied because of its regional (Niger Delta) outlook. The underlying reason for the selection, outlined above, was to ensure a balance in the ideological posture of these newspapers.

In streamlining the actual issues studied, a sampling procedure involving the constructed calendar approach was adopted to ensure even spread and equal representation. This method has been found by Riffe, Aust and Lacy (1993), to be “very effective in eliminating bias”(p.136). Based on this, a total of thirty-six (36) issues of the newspapers, twelve issues for each newspaper, were studied and analyzed. (See the constructed study calendar).

CONSTRUCTED YEAR/STUDY CALENDAR 2008-2009.

	2008						2009						
	JULY	AUG	SEP	OCT	NOV	DEC	JAN	FEB	MARCH	APRIL	MAY	JUN	
MON	*												7 th July 2008
TUE													3 rd March 2008
WED													
THUR													
FRI					*								7 th Nov. 2008
SAT													
SUN													
MON													
TUE		*											12 th Aug. 2008
WED										*			14 th April 2009
THUR													
FRI													
SAT						*							13 th Dec. 2008
SUN													
MON													
TUE													
WED			*										17 th Sep. 2008
THUR											*		21 st May 2009
FRI													
SAT													
SUN							*						18 th Jan. 2009
MON								*					23 rd Feb. 2009
TUE													
WED				*									22 nd Oct. 2008
THUR													
FRI												*	26 th June 2009
SAT													
SUN													

Fig.1 Constructed Calendar

Note: The essence here is that the constructed year approach demands the construction of a graph that will have twelve columns and twenty-eight rows. The columns are for the months while the rows are for the frequency of days in a month. To this end, therefore, the newspaper editions of 7th July, 12th August, 17th September, 22nd October, 7th November and 13th December, were selected and studied. Those for 2009 featured 18th January, 23rd February, 3rd March, 14th April, 21st May and 18th June, 2009. These were also selected and studied.

The procedure for analysis first of all consisted of the operationalization of media advocacy within the context of the Niger Delta crisis. In this regard, the definition of the subject matter was given thus: “any form of interpretative writing, representing the corporate and allied opinion of a newspaper, which calls attention to the Niger Delta crisis and recommends ways for peaceful resolution”

By deduction, therefore, the editorial pages and the feature columns formed the principal units of this analysis while excluding straight news stories since they neither represent the opinion of a newspaper nor afford a reporter the latitude of infusing his opinion. As a corollary, advertorials in the form of Public Service Announcements (PSA) by the newspapers were also incorporated and studied.

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News space was measured in centimeter and this formed the basis for quantitative analysis. Based on the foregoing, coding of content into categories was made along the lines of editorial, features and advertorial.

To ensure reliability and researcher non-bias with a view to reducing the margin of error while widening the limit of accuracy, a professional coder was employed to assist in the coding.

A total of 180 items were categorized. Based on this categorization, the coders agreed on 152 categories and disagreed on 28 categories. Differences in coding were correlated using the Holsti (1972) formula:

$$r = \frac{2(C1.2)}{C1+C2}$$

C1.2 = Number of category assignments agreed on
 C1+C2 = Total number of category assignments made by both coders.

$$r = \frac{2(152)}{180 + 180}$$

$$= \frac{2 \times 152}{360}$$

$$= \frac{304}{360}$$

$$= 0.84$$

The computation shows a high correlation which no doubt holds validation for the coding categories.

5.1 Data presentation

Data is presented in tables using centimeter as the unit of measurement. Analysis is however done in simple percentages for descriptive and inferential purposes.

Table 1^A
Content distribution in *The Guardian* newspaper (July 2008-June 2009).

Content	Allocation of space in centimetres	Space in percentage
Straight news	334,374	28.42
Editorial	5,422	0.46
Features	51,712	4.40
Advertorial	734,654	62.44
Sports	50,437	4.28
Total	1,176,599	100.00

The table shows the distribution of space along the line of content. From the table above, the editorial column, feature and advertorial pages lend themselves to media advocacy since they afford the newspaper the latitude to express its cognate opinion and interpretation of topical issues as they relate to the Niger Delta crisis. By deduction, therefore, the table shows that, for the period under study, *The Guardian* newspaper had an allotted space of 791,788cm^s for media advocacy. Descriptively, this represents about 68% of the total space. The assumption in this study is that through Public Service Announcements, (PSA) the opinion of a newspaper can still be projected. Nevertheless, Table 1^B shows how this advocacy space was used by *The Guardian* newspaper.

Table 1^B
Utilization of space for advocacy on Niger Delta

Content	Space	Advocacy for peace in Niger Delta
Editorial	5,422	0(0%)
Features	51,712	338 (0.65%)
Advertorial	734,654	0(0%)

N = 791.788cms

Table 1^B shows how *The Guardian* newspaper utilized its corporate opinion space in the light of advocacy for a way out of the Niger Delta crisis. The table shows that for the period under review, *The Guardian* never highlighted the Niger Delta crisis in its editorial column. It should however be noted at this point that the editorial column above every other thing represents the corporate opinion of a newspaper and as such attracts an ideological importance. On the other hand, the features pages attracted a space of 338cm^s on the Niger Delta crisis. This represents 0.65% of the features space as highlighted on Table 1^A. This space contained an article calling for dialogue among interests and parties in the crisis.

Table 2^A
Content distribution in *The Punch* newspaper (July 2008-June 2009)

Content	Allocation of space in centimetres	Space in percentage
Straight news	190,592	25.77
Editorial	2,884	0.40
Features	94,179	12.74
Advertorial	427,469	57.80
Sports	24,372	3.29
Total	739,496	100%

Table 2^A shows content distribution in *The Punch* newspaper. Editorial, features and advertorial hold relevance for media advocacy. Table 2^B shows the direction of the editorial, features and advertorial content in the light of the Niger Delta crisis.

Table 2^B
Utilization of space for advocacy on Niger Delta.

Content	Space (cms)	Advocacy for peace in Niger Delta
Editorial	2,884	0(0%)
Features	94,179	0(0%)
Advertorial	427,469	0(0%)

N = 524, 532 cms

Table 2^B shows that out of a total space of 524, 532 cms, that has potential utility for advocacy, the Niger Delta crisis did not get any attention as a topical issue worthy of interpretative reporting in the *Punch* newspaper within the period under review.

Table 3^A
Content distribution in the *Niger Delta Standard* (July 2008-June 2009)

Content	Space in centimetres	Space in percentage
Straight news	213,348	38.73
Editorial	5,124	0.93
Features	181,964	33.03
Advertorial	45,240	8.21
Sports	105,199	19.10
Total	550,875	100

Content distribution in the *Niger Delta standard* is shown on Table 3^A. Since the focus of the study is on media advocacy, Table 3^B highlights the direction of the editorial, features and advertorial in the light of the Niger Delta crisis.

Table 3^B
Utilization of space for advocacy on Niger Delta.

Content	Space (cms)	Advocacy for peace in Niger Delta
Editorial	5,124	1425 (28%)
Features	181,964	17.156 (9%)
Advertorial	45,240	0 (0%)

N = 232, 328 cms

Table 3^B shows that the *Niger Delta Standard* within the review period devoted 28% of its editorial space to the Niger Delta crisis. As also shown on the table, nine percent (9%) of its features was directed to the Niger Delta crisis while there was no Public Service Announcement, in the form of advertorial, on the Niger Delta crisis.

5.2 Discourse Analysis

The editorial features and advertorial highlight given to the Niger Delta crisis by the three newspapers studied was very shrift. *The Guardian* newspaper devoted 0.65% of its features space to advocacy for peace in

the Niger Delta region. The features space under focus was 338 cms and it contained an article titled; ‘Niger Delta Crisis: Beyond Dialogue’, by M. K. Eneche; on page 79 of the *Guardian* of 7th July 2008. An in-depth review of this story revealed that it fell within the framework of media advocacy since its thrust was hinged on a clamour for a peaceful resolution of the Niger Delta crisis through constructive dialogue. Data analysis further revealed that *The Guardian* newspaper neither devoted any editorial space nor advertorial space to the Niger Delta crisis.

In the same vein, *The Punch* newspaper recorded a zero highlight on editorial, features and advertorial categories as regards the Niger Delta crisis. This in other words means that *The Punch* newspaper never devoted space to a detailed review of the Niger Delta crisis with the aim of driving opinion towards peace in the region.

The Niger Delta Standard on the other hand devoted 28% of its editorial space and nine (9%) percent of its features space to media advocacy for peace in the Niger Delta region. No advertorial space was given to the subject matter.

The inference therefore is that though the *Niger Delta Standard* appeared to have given more space to advocacy for peace in the Niger Delta region than *The Guardian* and *The Punch* newspapers, the interpretative (advocacy) reportage of the crisis by the three newspapers within the study period was abysmally poor.

Descriptively, *The Guardian* which neither gave editorial nor advertorial space to the subject matter gave less than one percent of its features space to advocacy for peace while *The Punch* gave no space at all including editorial and advertorial. The 28% and 9% recorded by the *Niger Delta Standard* in its editorial space and features space respectively is notably poor considering its regional (Niger Delta) posture. The assumption however is that the *Niger Delta standard* with its focus on the region should cry the loudest by calling attention to the crisis with a view to advocating for peace. The findings of this study, however, seem to contradict this ideal posture because a synthesis of the analysis reveals that there was no significant difference in the coverage given to the subject matter by the three newspapers studied. In other words, the three newspapers assumed the same pattern of coverage.

The irony however is that in as much as the advocacy for peace in the Niger Delta region was found to be shrift, there was a preponderance of straight news stories on the Niger Delta crisis by the newspapers studied. The imputation therefore is that the newspapers reported more of the macabre and drama of the crisis than a constructive clamour for peace in the region. Straight news stories of killings and violence in the Niger Delta region often made the front page as well as other prominent pages of the newspapers studied. Although the reasoning for this practice may not be far from marketing (circulation), it leaves a sore thumb in the profile of Nigerian newspapers. One however wonders if there can ever be a justification for a newspaper that reports on its front page, in a given edition, that “a Shell platform at Escravos was blown up and twenty (20) expatriate staff abducted by Niger Delta militants” without a corresponding editorial, features and advertorial that advocates for the adoption of means and ways of ensuring peace in the Niger Delta region.

The findings of this study aptly capture the scenario painted above. More disheartening is the fact that two of the newspapers- *The Punch* and *The Guardian*-are reputable national newspapers that have the potential to refocus the framing of a problem and its solutions from an individual level to a policy level. In other words, these national newspapers through their content can drive opinion to advance policy and attitudinal change as regards the Niger Delta crisis. This is very possible through placement of content in columns and pages that do not and should not compete for attention like editorial, features and advertorial. Advocacy according to Wallack (1999), is the “thrust of contemporary journalism” (p.9). It falls within the ambit of communication for development and should be the focus of emerging press systems. How the Niger Delta crisis is handled, is heavily dependent on how the press reports it because according to McCombs and Shaw (1972), “audiences not only learn about public issues and other matters through the media; they also learn how much importance to attach to such issues based on the emphasis placed on them by the media”(p.180). This seems to further reinforce the causative link between news and policy change established by Holder and Trenor (1997), In their study, ‘News as a means to Advance policy change’, they established a “link between a drop in perceived risk of drinking while driving and increased news coverage on the issue”(p.195).

The assumption contained herein however is that if the Nigerian press focuses attention on the ideology of peace in the Niger Delta region, peace becomes an ideology for social marketing/mobilization which when given the right prominence and salience by the press paves way for actualization.

Drawing from the foregoing, it becomes quite glaring that the issue of peace in the Niger Delta crisis was never treated as an ideology that should be given a voice by the newspapers studied.

5.3 Recommendations

1. Newspapers in Nigeria should not be seen to sit on the fence when it comes to issues of great socio-economic and socio-political importance like the Niger Delta crisis. They should go beyond mere straight news reporting to drive for public opinion and serve as the people's parliament where opinion and ideologies can be projected for adoption.
2. Newspaper proprietors in Nigeria should shake off the docility conditioned by protracted military rule in the country and embrace the liberty occasioned by our emerging democracy to sponsor, within newspaper content, Public Service Announcements (PSA) in the form of advertorial that will champion a course of action on topical issues of great significance like the Niger Delta crisis.
3. Nigerian journalists should embrace the ideology of advocacy and use the kits of advocacy to engage in constructive criticisms within the purview of pointing out needs and solutions in the socio-political milieu.

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