

Broadcast Media Framing and Audience Perception of Nigeria-Ghana Diplomatic Feud of 2020: Effects on Economic Development

Blessed F. Ngonso & Ambrose Uchenunu

Abstract

Media framing of issues has dominated media discourses over the years due to media influence in setting agenda for public consumption. Media framing is a skewed report of situations perpetuated by media organisations to propagate an ideology of the owner of the media or country or environment where the media establishment operates with certain socio-economic, racial or segregational ideology, and which x-ray and keeps a burning media issue with the audience in perspective. Ghana and Nigeria are like twins. The two nations regained independence from British colonial administration in 1957 and 1960 respectively. Both countries have been in some forms of socio-economic competition or cold rivalry since the 1960s and both are guilty of mass repatriation of migrants. Recently, cold disagreement by the leaders of both countries resulted in border closure for over a year by Nigerian government, while Ghanaian government picking on Nigerian immigrants in Ghana even as far as pulling down Nigeria High Commission office, was heralded by the media. How the feud was framed, and how the public perceived the framing on economic ties between the twin Commonwealth countries, is the crux of this discourse. Methodologically, the researchers used survey research design leaning on interview as data collection instrument. Eighteen University scholars were interviewed on how Nigerian Television Authority (NTA) reported the feud and its implications on the economic ties between the twin Commonwealth nation. The findings on the viewership of NTA was more positive than negative, and that the feud had, and will have untold economic effect on citizens of both countries, and being on the payroll of the government, the ethics of journalism is compromised, resulting in biased report.

Keywords: Media Framing, Audience Perception, Nigeria, Ghana, Diplomatic, Feud, Effects

Introduction

The mass media of communication have brought the world together in a more dramatic form. Despite the unquestionable role of the media in uniting the nations of the world and helping to shape international diplomacy, there is a great fear that media organizations are often negatively manipulated by the owners (countries) to undermine the interest of other countries. This thesis is commonly found in the field of international diplomacy where media power is often exploited by the super powerful nations that control the media. The instance of this could be traced to the BBC, UK based media; CNN, US based, not to mention the big five news agencies (Associated Press, United Press International, Agence France Presse, Reuters, and TASS) are controlled by the powerful Western countries. These media organizations have been accused of dominating and suppressing developing countries and of course, African countries and their media. African issues are said to be better reported by these media than African media. This perception has equally spur academia and researchers to look for a better way of reporting Africa which led to the New World Information and Communication Order also known as NWICO debate (Uchenunu and Ngonso, 2020). This debate appears to bring African nations together and to enhance their diplomatic and economic relationship. On the other hand, African countries have continually engaged themselves in endless economic and political wars. For instance, Nigeria and Cameroon have had serious border crisis at the alleged instance of Cameroon migrants who make incursions into Nigerian villages (especially in the Bakasi Peninsula area) as well as regular harassment of Nigerians living in the border areas, (Idowu, 2014). Akanji (2012) states that in recent time, Africa has witnessed many protracted and gruesome conflicts. For

example, the protracted civil war in southern Sudan, the Liberian civil war, the Rwanda genocide, and the crisis in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), the Sierra Leonean civil war, the Nigerian civil war, the Darfur crisis, Somalia crisis are among the notable crisis recorded in Africa. Adepoju (2005) gave an overview of crisis in Africa arising from border disputes, between Senegal and Mauritania, Ghana and Togo which resulted in expulsion of immigrants, in contravention of the Protocol on Free Movement of Persons. Liberia's contagious civil war that started in 1989 soon engulfed Sierra Leone, Guinea Conakry, Guinea Bissau and Cote d'Ivoire.

Literature on African crisis shows that in West Africa, migrants' expulsion has contributed to major conflicts in Africa. According Ngonso (2020), Senegal expelled Guineans in 1967; Ivory Coast expelled about 16,000 Beninese in 1964; Sierra-Leone, and later Guinea and Ivory Coast, expelled Ghanaian fishermen in 1968. Earlier on, Ivory Coast had expelled over 1,000 Benin and Togo nationals in 1958; Chad expelled thousands of Benin nationals who were 'illegal migrants' and not 'law abiding'. In early 1979 Togolese farmers were expelled from Ghana and Ivory Coast. Ghana expelled all illegal aliens without valid residence permit as from 2 December 1969; this exercise involved an estimated half a-million people mostly from Nigeria, Upper Volta and Niger. Nigerian traders were once expelled from Cameroon, Zaire and Ivory Coast. These examples show that expulsion has been used extensively by most countries of the sub-region. The largest case of mass expulsion of undocumented aliens took place in Nigeria in 1983 and 1985 under General Muhammadu Buhari as Military Head of State and Ghana as the worst victim besides 1969 feud that existed between these two West African nations. Again, in 2019, Nigeria closed its borders. Benin Republic became the greatest victim of this immigration policy by Nigeria. In June, 2020, Nigeria Embassy in Ghana was attacked and Nigerian traders were asked to leave Ghana. This appears to be a payback time to Muhammadu Buhari and Nigeria by Ghana's President Nana Akufo-Addo. According to the Nigerian Minister of foreign affairs, Geoffrey Onyeama, two criminal attacks were made on the residential building within Nigeria's diplomatic premises. In one of the attacks, a bulldozer was used by unknown persons to demolish the building within the premises. The Minister made this known on his Twitter handle (Brafma, 2020). This act has not left the two Commonwealth nations without economic shortfall. Brafma captures it succinctly thus:

In recent months, Nigerian traders and businesses in Ghana, as well as Abuja's diplomatic mission in Accra, have reportedly faced harassment as the countries' leaders clash over trade and diplomatic issues. Last year, Nigeria closed its border with Benin to curb smuggling, hurting Ghanaian traders and manufacturers. In recent decades, West Africa's two economic powerhouses have had close economic and diplomatic ties, both bilateral and through the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS). At the end of 2019, Ghana became Nigeria's largest single trading partner, accounting for 17.2% of Nigeria's exports. Ghana is currently in the middle of a recession, and while its GDP was once growing at an impressive 6%, it has now grinded to a halt. Ghana's economic growth rate is now at its lowest rate in 37 years. Since Nigeria is Ghana's largest trade partner nearly 20% of Ghana's imports come from Nigeria these fresh rounds of diplomatic tensions will slice off some of Ghana's key economic lifelines. More than a million Nigerians work in Ghana and support crucial manufacturing and food industries creating products that are then either sold in Ghana or exported abroad.

The role of media in shaping and reshaping public opinion and perception has been established through agenda-setting role of the media, but media interferences in international politics and public diplomacy is another form of media-agenda setting role which many international media outlets such as CNN, BBC and Al Jazeera have taken up in recent times. These media organizations have essentially influenced what people think about, through their news gathering and dissemination, video, pictorials and discussion programmes.

While these media contents influence nations and their relationship with other nations, they have descended heavily on African continent, reporting Africa more than African media report Africa. In the mid of year 2020, Nigeria and Ghana had a diplomatic feud which was brought to the front burner of public opinion through the

mass media, but the construct and framing of the narrative by the NTA, and its effect on Nigerian public's perception of the economic relationship between the two nations has not been ascertained.

Statement of Problem

This study seeks to examine how Nigerian media framed Nigeria-Ghana feud of 2020, and public perception of how that framing impacted on economic ties between the two Commonwealth nations.

Research Objectives

1. To ascertain the viewership of NTA
2. To ascertain the awareness of diplomatic row between Nigeria and Ghana in 2020
3. To ascertain the non-biased news reportage of the feud by NTA
4. To ascertain if the prejudice framing have economic tolls on both nations

Literature review

Media Framing of News and Audience Perception

Media framing of issues is gradually dominating media discourse due to perceived powerful influence of the media to set agenda and the negation of the ethics that guides media practice worldwide. Media audience however perceived and analysed media messages differently due to a number of intervening variables such as age, level of exposure to media messages, interest of the audience on the issue, pre-conceived belief, and the influence of opinion leaders. These intervening variables are believed by media scholars as having effects on the extent to which media messages can influence audience behaviour irrespective of the framing. It could also kill the enthusiasm of viewers, judging from some of the responses in an interview conducted for this research. "Dr. Very sorry, I don't listen to NTA news" (Uhunmwuango, S., personal communication. 15, Jan. 2021). This response is a shut us down from further enquiries. Whatever framing is adopted, the media has lost the audience in this respondent. In a similar situation, respondent 2 says he does "not know" whether Nigeria and Ghana are having imbroglio. (Ezeogwu, I. personal communication. 17, May, 2021), and respondent 3 does "not believe in the system anymore", spelling erosion of confidence and the failure of news framing to influence the audience. (Egielewa P., personal communication. 15, May 2021). Egere and Egere (2020, p.19) see media news framing as a recent concept used "widely among communication scholars in relations to media effects, politics, sociology and other disciplines. It could be described as shaping of ideas/opinions for news content which creates a perspective and stimulates the issue through the use of selection, stress, exclusion and amplification". Media framing is the construction and presentation of issues to the public by the media. According to Okoro, Ezea, Agbana & Agbana (2018, p.74) framing is "one major way, which news media form perceptions of the key events in the society. It expands the agenda setting research by putting a lot of emphasis on trending issues as a replacement for topical matters", with framing issues presented and placed within a certain context with a certain meaning. Framing is a key component in the selection, understanding and interpretation of news. Media news framing can place a news story in a particular news hole, it can narrow the story or broaden the subject matter thereby focuses attention on the key variables within the story line. A news information can be framed to suit a particular ideology thereby exploiting the propagandist power of the media. It could be framed metaphorically or simply hyped the situation out of normal proportion to achieve a certain aim. For instance, news can be framed to promote disaster, disunity, victimization, agitation, negative labelling, number game, legitimacy, and depersonalization. Media news framing can be categorized as positive, negative and neutral frames. For the purpose of this study, framing is limited to specifics such as, bad governance, social conflict and economic downturn.

Ultimately, the aim of framing news is to influence the media audience to perceive the news in the angle of the media or its sponsor. Though in certain cases, the audience's perception may differ from the expectation of the media particularly, if the audience know more about the event, perceived a media organization as being corrupt, and not having the competency to report facts about the event. The issue of passive and active audience may come

to play in media consumption, making individual comprehension plausible. The other factor that could affect media audience perception of an issue is the fear on the part of the public that certain internal and external forces are manipulating the media.

Media Influence on Diplomatic Relationship among Nations

The mass media of communication over the years have been seen as powerful tool for national rebirth as well as development among African nations. In spite of the power of the media in promoting national values, culture and government policies, to what extent has Nigerian media use their power to defend Nigeria's territorial integrity? The argument that most of the news stories that flow from the Western media, that is, Europe and America into Africa portray Africa in bad light still left much to be desired of African media. These claims have continued to diminish the image of Africa and indeed Nigeria in the eyes of the international communities. It has no doubt also contributed to decline of Nigerian economic fortune. According to Uchenunu and Ngonso (2020, p. 65), "it has been noticed that the Western media have not changed their positions in the negative reportage of the developing countries. Rather, they have intensified effort in news flow imbalance". This scenario has made many to have postulated that African media should challenge Western media. The earliest proponents of this debate include Wilbur Schramm, Daniel Lerner, Lucia Pye, Everest Rogers and Mohammed Masoudi and later Beltran (1976), Merrill (1974) Dennis McQuail (1980) cited in (Onwumehili & Ndolo, 2013; Nwodu & Fab-Ukozor, 2003). Their argument was premised on the fact that, Africa is underdeveloped and needs to remedy the situation through media technology. These researchers further advanced their argument on appropriate focus of development messages and media for delivering those messages to African communities. Lerner argued specifically that independent African States should focus on transitioning from traditional to modern states by emulating the trajectories of Western nations. This implies that African development lies with the ultimate utilization of the media if the government can create an enabling environment for the media to operate freely. Since in the modern economy, no nation can stand alone without having support from other nations particularly within the same geographical region, it therefore becomes expedient for African nations to support one another with their media technology to promote development. This was part of the recommendations of the 1980 report of United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) popularly known as McBride's Report as cited in Nwodu and Fab-Ukozor, (2003). The report states inter alia:

- The media should give priority in news and information to link with other developing countries which are close geographically, culturally or politically.
- The media should give priority in their content to national culture and language.
- The media should accept and carryout positive development tasks in line with a nationally established policy.
- Freedom of the media should be open to restriction according to economic priorities and development needs of the society.
- In the interest of development ends, the state has a right to intervene in, or restrict, media operations, and devices of censorship, subsidy and direct control can be justified.

Coban (2016, p.4) captures the above recommendations more succinctly thus, "without understanding the media's political functions and the influences on the nations, it is not possible to provide a comprehensive picture of their impacts on the state and international relations." McQuail (2010) trying to x-ray the relationship between the mass media and politics states thus:

At the level of performance, the content of most daily media is still often dominated by politics, but not usually because it is so fascinating and newsworthy for the public. While citizens do need to be informed and advised in the longer term, they do not really need what they are offered every day. The reasons lie partly in the advantages for news media in terms of free staples commodity and partly in the enormous efforts made by political interests (in widest sense) to gain access to the public for their diverse ends. It also stems from the longstanding links between media and political

institutions that cannot easily be broken. Politics cannot do without the media and the kind of (news) media we have would struggle without politics (p.123).

The survival of politics and the media in economic struggle which is interdependent, has untold effect on the media that also need the support and trust of the public to thrive and survive. A balance, in fact, a bias towards the public is advocated because the public is bigger than few politicians who also need their propaganda to be consumed by a large audience who are made up of the public.

Quoting Maxwell McCombs and Donald Shaw in attempting to explicate how the mass media shape political reality, (Baran 2002), wrote:

In choosing and displaying news, editors, news room staff and broadcasters play an important part in shaping political reality. Readers lean not only about a given issue, but how much importance to attach to that issues from amount of information in news story and its position. The mass media may as well determine the important issues that is, the media may set the agenda of the campaign (p.385).

In the international diplomacy, the mass media particularly television and radio play significant role in determining what the people hear and perceive as the truth. "It has been widely debated that the media has played a crucial role in diplomacy, a particular example is the TV news coverage of war. The way TV portray war might have major effect on decision making and might intervene when it concerns humanitarian actions" Chung (2020). The reason why TV plays a crucial role in international diplomacy may not be farfetched, in the last few decades, politics and diplomacy has been transformed from involving only states to involving the general public and different non-state actors. This is where the TV medium comes in. The media changes the dynamics of international politics, diplomacy and international political-economy. Gilboa (2001, p.2) asserts that,

Interrelated changes in politics, international relations, and mass communication have greatly expanded the media's role in diplomacy. Growing mass participation in political processes has transformed many societies from autocracies into democracies. The revolution in communication and information technologies, the capability to broadcast - often live - almost every significant development in world events to almost every place on the globe.

According to Coban (2016, p.3), writing on media and politics averred that the media help to construct the reality of international politics in three key ways; "first, that global media has created global village, second that the political importance of media can be identified by the shifts in the way the state's power configuration. Media are pluralizing forces which work against power's ability to influence and control, third that the global media have integrated its audiences to wars, peace and diplomacy process. The global media's efforts to attract public attention bring the crises and conflicts to the top of the agenda to persuade its audiences to pressure and influence government policies". Stover (1981) however, identified three ways mass media changed the role and nature of traditional diplomacy: (1) Gathering information; (2) Disseminating information and (3) Affecting international relations and contributing to policy change.

Citing a work done by Livingston and Eachus on CNN effect debate, Robinson (2013, p.2) states in the contrary to Coban, that US media reporting of the Somalia crisis of 1992-93 actually followed the cues of US government officials who had been attempting to draw attention to the crisis there. They concluded that, rather than media driving the intervention, journalists were actually conforming to more traditional patterns of indexing, whereby their coverage was indexed to the viewpoints of US officials who were already persuaded of the need for intervention in Somalia. In sum, political agendas were influencing the media much more than media were influencing politics. It thus follows that the media involvement in international politics goes beyond media performing their social responsibility to the society, but it is the government that is manipulating the media to achieve its international policy in the international arena. This appears to support Feist, (2001) assertion that, "it

has been figuratively suggested that CNN is the sixteenth member of the United Nations Security Council as their decision of what to cover have massive effect on diplomacy". Mass media acts as a catalyst in international affairs that could alter relationships between states (Stover, 1981). Media function as sources that report and cover international events and foreign policy issues, it is also argued that it constructs and shapes foreign-policy making. Scholars suggested that the involvement of the media concerns different stages of foreign policy and that political leaders place media on a high priority, be it national or international aspects (Naveh, 2001).

Theoretical Framework

The framing theory is found relevant in this study because its major tenets are in-line with the variables that make up this research topic. Framing theory is essentially the work of Erving Goffman in 1974. In his study entitled, *Framing Analysis: An Essay on the Organization of Experience*, Goffman explained framing to be a method through which the mass media promote a particular definition of an issue through selection, emphasis, exclusion, and elaboration (Lamidi and Olisa, 2016). Okoro, Ezea, Agbana & Agbana (2018, p.74) state that Goffman in his postulate of media framing view that people interpret what is going on around them through their primary framework. Citing Entiman (1993) Okoro et.al state that media framing perform four functions which are to define problem, to diagnose the cause of problem, to make moral judgments and to suggest remedies. Odoemelam, Okeibunor & Adibe (2013) citing the works of (Brunken, 2009, Bullock, 2011, Cappella and Jamieson, 1997) assert that framing theory is a key component in the study of selection and interpretation of news representation of issues. Framing affects how a story is told and at the same time influences perception. For a better understanding frames must have identifiable conceptual and linguistic characteristics and commonly observed in journalistic practice.

Research methodology

The study used the survey research design relying on qualitative data obtained through interview from 18 scholars of Mass Communication, History and International Studies, and Political Economics, from three, federal, state and private universities. The purposive sampling method was used drawing on a population size of 172 lecturers. This comprised 93, 44 and 35 lecturers from the University of Benin, Benin City, Edo State University, Uzairue, and Western Delta University, Oghara, respectively. The sampling size is 10% which equals 17.2, approximate to 18 since fractions cannot be achieved in humans.

The following were the questions that guided the interview process:

1. Do you watch NTA news?
2. Did you have an insight about the Nigeria-Ghana crisis of 2020?
3. Did you think NTA framed the feud between Nigeria and Ghana in favour of Nigeria, or was it a balanced report?
4. What do you think may have been the economic implications of the prejudice in framing?

The first three questions were closed-ended while the fourth question was open-ended and conversational in order to create room for in-depth responses from the lecturers. The responses to questions 1-3 were positive from 15 respondents, with 3 returning negative. The negative responses range from disinterestedness to news in general, news on NTA and loss of confidence on what emanates from that medium.

The 15 positive respondents let out that Nigerians may not be enthusiastic in engaging in trade relationship with Ghana for fear of safety of their investments, and that the row affected the economies of both nations greatly and having attendant effect on surrounding ECOWAS states. These respondents wholly believed that the framing of the report was positively skewed in favour of Nigeria, closing all eyes to Nigeria diplomatic errors of attaching human values to her citizens. The economic implication is predicated on the axiom that he who pays the piper dictates the tune which is tied to media ownership debacle in issues in electronic media. NTA has choice than to frame its news that way, blindly defending and justifying its proprietor, Nigeria, in order to survive economically.

It is either you co-operate or get fired for not doing your job well as propagandist certainly torments media personnel.

The positive responses from the 15 lecturers upset our preconceived expectations of NTA audiences which we thought will be tilted towards negative. In the course of preparing the interview questions, a child of one of the researchers innocently asked his father a rhetorical question, “Dad, do you watch NTA?” (Ngonso, G., personal communication, January 12, 2020). His father responded affirmatively, that he does at the office, and at the expiration of cable TV subscription. He may also have been propelled to watching NTA for the purpose of this research. If the person in question here watches NTA at all, and regularly, this child would not have conceived of the question.

There is an astounding scenario on the social media where tertiary undergraduates were caught in a vox pop to tell the meaning of the acronym-NTA. Eleven of the respondents floundered. Two lessons could be deduced from this. Either the parents of these 11 students do not tune to NTA, or the students are simply not sensitive to their environment. In similar vein, Fig.I posting of NTA on University of Benin Faculty of Arts social media academic platform, left much to be desired on the viewership of NTA.



Fig. I

This joke, true to its billings, de-markets NTA and elicits what the choice of news stations seriously minded audience would tune to. The reactions from the academia on this, re-echoed the views of the 15 positive respondents formally interviewed for this research particularly, the ownership issue which is highlighted in the three paragraphs of the joke. Paragraph 1 and 2 on Fig.I is clearly euphemistic which could account for the response from respondents 1, 2 and 3.

From the interviews formally conducted and informal public opinion, there is glaring evidence that: Nigerian media, NTA skewed the framing of Nigeria-Ghana feud of 2020 in favour of Nigeria; the framing obviously had a negative impacted on economic ties between the two Commonwealth nations; both nations recorded low in economic growth; and citizens of both nation loss confidence on cross border investments. We also gathered that even in the midst of 18 respondents, with 15 being positive, 3 were sceptic about the positive popularity of NTA, and this view is shared by the lad who asked his father about his viewership of NTA and the vox pop as well as the pictorial joke which is conceived as organic to the quest in this research.

Conclusion

This research on *Broadcast Media Framing and Audience Perception of Nigeria-Ghana Diplomatic Feud of 2020: Effects on Economic Development*, elicited the ugly trend in journalism worldwide negating the ethics and guiding principles behind the practice. A high number of the audience from the sampling interview conducted believed that, the report of the feud between Nigeria and Ghana in 2020 was skewed in favour of the government of Nigeria who are the employers of the journalists in the news station.

The objectives of the research bothering on the: viewership of NTA; awareness of diplomatic row between Nigeria and Ghana in 2020; non-biased news reportage of the feud by NTA; and the economic tolls that prejudicial framing would have had on both nations was treated in the interviews. We found out that more people watch NTA news against our presumptions, which led to awareness of the Nigeria-Ghana diplomatic, framed in favour of Nigeria, with untold economic difficulty between citizens of the two nations.

Recommendations

As panacea, even though media establishments all over the world are biased in their reportage tilting towards ownership and national patriotism, we recommend therefore that:

- the media should strive towards balanced reports framing so as not to mislead the citizens on topical issues
- the media stations should conduct periodical survey about its popularity, to know how to improve on news framing
- there should be regular broadcast of entertaining programmes to rekindle the interest of the audience, and repose their confidence
- news programmes should tone down on propagandist framings

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Blessed F. Ngonso (PhD) is of the Department of Mass Communication Edo State University Uzairue, Edo State, Nigeria.

ngonso.frederick@edouniversity.edu.ng

Ambrose Uchenunu is of the Department of Mass Communication University of Benin, Benin City, Edo State, Nigeria.

uchenunua@yahoo.com