

## Newspaper Framing of the Niger Delta Conflict

Journal of Management and  
Social Sciences  
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### Abstract

The Niger Delta conflict is viewed as a recurrent conflict that affects many facets of Nigeria's existence. Therefore stakeholders such as government, business organizations as well as oil-bearing communities use the mass media to promote their interest in the region. One strategy used by different groups is media framing that allows people to present events in a way that allows readers attach a particular meaning to specific contents. This study focused on the engagement of framing in newspaper coverage of conflict in the Niger Delta. The newspapers selected were *Vanguard*, and *Champion* newspapers. The study was anchored on framing theory that notes that the media not only tell us what to think about, but how to think about them. Sample size was drawn from 1998 to 2002. Findings revealed the newspapers preferred thematic to episodic frames, main sources of frames were own correspondents and government. News was used more than other editorial formats. It is germane that journalists are trained on the dynamics of framing, especially conflict and their implications on society. The mass media should also provide early warning signs that would contribute to the escalation of conflicts.

### Keywords

Niger Delta, conflict, frames, framing, newspapers

### Introduction

In the global information era, the mass media have the ability to create effects in diverse institutions in the society. A single event such as riot, war or other types of social upheavals can be captured by the media real time, therefore influencing peoples' perception or understanding of the event. Entman (2007) explains that powerful players in political, economic and other spheres plough massive resources to advance their interest by imposing their views on mediated communication. Drawing from the Gulf war, Palestine-Israeli conflict, September 11 terrorists attack in the United States, first and second world war, the Rwandan Genocide, the Nigeria –Biafra war, it is clear that the

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presence of the mass media in conflict situations can shape the transformation of such conflicts

McQuail (2005) posits that the mass media specifically play important roles in peace building and in the resolution of conflicts through their function of information dissemination. He further explains that the mass media have the social responsibility of mobilizing people towards positive change through setting agenda for peace and implementation of policies of conflict resolution. Modern warfare as well as other crises is now fought beyond the war fronts into media platforms as a result of the influence that media coverage can have on the citizens.

Hamdink (2008) notes that media portrayal of a conflict can influence the outcome of such a conflict. From the findings of various scientific enquiries, documentaries and legal pronouncements on the Second World War; the Gulf War, and the Rwandan genocide, it is clear that the media can play key roles in conflict. Therefore, the presence of the media in conflict situations such as the Niger Delta conflict can have effect on the resolution or escalation of the conflict. In the case of the Niger Delta conflict, considerable attention is needed to measure the role of the media in the evolution of the conflict.

### **Statement of the Problem**

The Niger Delta from pre-colonial era has experienced conflicts ranging from intra and inter communal as well those among government, oil –bearing communities and oil exploration and exploitation companies. Most of the conflicts are mainly a result of disagreement over ownership of resources and allocation of revenue accruing from such natural endowments. The recurrent conflict in the Niger Delta region especially post –Kaiama Declaration has resulted in the destruction of lives and property such that local and international media regularly beam their attention to the region. The media engage diverse strategies such as agenda setting, editorializing as well as framing to present events in the Niger Delta region.

Framing of conflicts and other social upheavals ,such as riots, demonstrations, war among others in the mass media shape the meanings, opinions or interpretations that the readers and others stakeholders might adduce to particular events. Therefore, the mass media is pivotal to conflict transformation, escalation or prevention. This study therefore focuses on the on the framing of the Niger Delta conflict in selected newspapers. Which types of frames, sources and editorial formats did the newspapers use in the coverage of the conflict.

### **Objectives of the Study**

1. Which types of frames did the selected newspapers prefer in the coverage of the Niger Delta conflict?

2. Who were the sources of frames used by the selected newspapers in coverage of the Niger Delta conflict?
3. Which editorial formats were used most by the selected newspapers to cover the Niger Delta conflict?

## **Theoretical Framework**

### ***Media, Frames and Conflict***

Framing is viewed as a technique used by communicators to present an issue in to the public that can have significant consequences for how people view and understand an issue. Scheufele (1999: 118) adds that:

Framing is a process of selective control over media content or public communication. Framing defines how a certain piece of media message or rhetoric is packaged, so as to allow specific political or social movement or organization to present their own view or aspect of reality.

Framing thus provides a platform for political or other groups to present their views on given issues. For instance the war a social deviant is framed can make separate segments of the society to view the as a terrorist, freedom fighter, religious extremist or other labels that could be used to frame the said individuals The media draw the public's attention to certain issues and decide what people think about by the way they set agenda or frame issues. The way in which the news is brought, the frame in which the news is presented, is also a choice made by reporters, editors or sometimes owners. Frames influence the perception of the news by the audience and refers to the social construction of a social phenomenon by mass media sources, or specific political or social movements or organizations. Frames define problems, diagnose causes as well as make moral judgments and suggest remedies (Entman, 1993). It is viewed as a process of selective influence over the perception of the meaning attributed to words or phrases. Tankard, Hendrickson, Silberman, Bliss and Ghanem (2000) cited by Weaver (2007: 143) say a media frame is "the central organizing idea for news contents that supplies a context and suggests what the issue is, through the use of selection, emphasis, exclusion and elaboration."

Nwosu (2009: 95) points out that in reporting politics, economy, religion and conflict, various social forces come to play, to slant the way the media report specific events. He notes that "the media have become recognized as powerful weapons of violence, when they propagate messages of intolerance and disinformation." In that the media can play a very negative role in conflict situations, by the way they present parties in the conflict or report the issues in contention.

The media are seen as key to determining the shape events take, through the pattern, frequency, prominence and also the words they use to present reports. Issues such as economy, politics, religion or conflict can be presented in a style that highlights some sides to a story. This could elicit reactions, some expected, and beyond the imagination of those who package media content. Therefore, frames in news reporting give a slant; the direction from which readers are encouraged to look at a given news item. Hayes cited by Merilainen and Vos (2011) hold that framing gives more salience in the definition of situations, thereby providing context where both topic and situation affect how opinions are shared.

For instance background experience, religious, political and ideological orientation, coupled with gender, age and social status influence the way people perceive issues. Goffman (1974) cited by Shanahan (1997: 108) opines that the idea of a frame is used to label “schemata of interpretation that allow individuals or groups to locate, perceive and label events and occurrence, thus rendering meaning and organising experience and guiding actions.” Explaining how frames come to play in the media, Reese, Gandy and Grant (2001) note that though journalists are usually guided by the principle of objective reporting, they still convey a dominant framing of the news, that does not allow most receivers of media messages to make a balanced assessment of a situation or report.

The idea of salience as a major platform in framing according to Higgin (1996) cited by Hwang, Gotlieb, Wah and Mcleod (2007) attracts an individual’s attention to the specific aspect of a message, which in turn, can have an effect on subsequent judgment. Invariably, focusing more attention on certain aspects of a message will render those aspects more important to an individual’s understanding and judgment of events, issues or personalities.

In the coverage of the Niger Delta including recurrent conflicts in the region the mass media engage various techniques including media frames that direct the reader to a preconceived or sometimes underlying meaning presented by the media. Usually frames do not have a bullet or hypodermic effect on the readers but engages existent opinions, background and psychograph that the readers bring to media usage.

## **Theoretical Framework**

The study is anchored on framing theory. Framing centres on the notion that the way an issue is presented in the mass media can have an influence on audience perception of such issues. Framing happens when the manner events are reported in the media has an impact on how they are understood by the audience. The framing theory focuses on which topics or issues are selected for coverage by the news media and at the particular ways those issues are presented. McCombs, Shaw and Weaver (1997) suggest that framing can be referred to as second level agenda setting in relation to the impact of salience of media coverage on audience interpretation of news stories.

Zilman (1994: 2) explains that professional journalists “structure experience for us, filtering out many of the complexities of the environment and offering polished, perhaps even literary version, in which a few objects and selected attribute are highlighted.” Therefore, through the style of presentation, the media are divided between objectivity and persuasion, which is highlighted during the process of filtering stories. Framing of events in the media allows the media to structure a socio-economic, political and other realities for the readers. Zilman (1994) citing Lippman (1922) notes that it is the media that sketch most of the pictures people have in their heads. In essence, the way we perceive events is as represented by the media. For instance, the portrayal of the Niger Delta in the print media to a large extent affects how someone who reads such stories would view the region.

The argument on framing is that the choice of statement, rhetorical devices words or phrases used by the mass media to report specific events can go a long way in not only shaping the opinions of the audience but also affect the transformation of the event or conflict. For instance in the coverage of the First World War most Western historians did not highlight the role played by citizens of the Arab nation drawn into the war by the British and the French and the Germans on both sides of the divide. On the other hand historians and documentaries by Arabs detailed the conscription as well as the casualty figures of the Arabians in the war. The theory holds that frames can alter the importance attributed to certain events or reports. As Marshal McLuhan cited by Folarin (1998) posits, the press can colour events, by using them in a particular way or refusing to use them at all. Whether semantic, visual, episodic or thematic, frames play a vital role in the way people understand reports in the media.

Scheufele (1999) argues that framing is affected by theoretical and empirical vagueness, due to the absence of a commonly shared theoretical model underlying framing research. Carragee and Roefs (2004) cited by Alozie (2007: 217) say the concept of framing lacks rigorous conceptualization. This includes “problems in the definition of frames, the in-attention to frame sponsorship, the failure to examine framing contexts within wider political and social contexts and the reduction of framing to a form of media effects,” They are of the opinion that studies on framing, especially as they relate to media content should look at the broader historical, political, economic, and cultural environment that affects the reportage of the subject. Based on this vague conceptualization, framing is sometimes used to refer to similar concepts, such as Agenda setting. The framing theory according to Weaver (2007) includes a broader range of cognitive processes- such as moral evaluation, causal reasoning, appeals to principles and recommendation for treatment of problems.

### ***An Overview of Niger Delta Conflict***

There is no consensus on the definition of the Niger Delta. Tamuno (2000) sees the region as one of the six geo-political zones of Nigeria, comprising the six states of the South-South zone: Akwa-ibom, Bayelsa, Cross-River, Delta, Edo and Rivers. These six, including Ondo, Abia, and Imo states, make up the Oil Producing states in Nigeria. While Obijiofor (2000) puts the population at 45 million, using the Niger Delta based on oil producing states, Etekepe and Ibaba (2013) cite information from Nigeria's National Bureau of Statistic (NBS) to put the population at about 33 million. Ekuerhare (2008) explains that the region is synonymous with oil producing areas of Nigeria. The provisions of the Niger Delta Development Commission (NDDC) Act of 2000, and the Oil Mineral Producing Areas Development (OMPADEC) Act of 1992, also agree that the region comprises only oil bearing states in the federation. In terms of geography, it is 70,000 square kilometers, comprising a mix of swamp and luxuriant rain forest with lush vegetation, lying between latitude 4<sup>o</sup> 14 and 5<sup>o</sup> 33 North and longitude 5<sup>o</sup>,48 and 74<sup>o</sup> East. The region is thus blessed with water resources and other derivatives, from its land and vegetation.

Okumagba (2011: 57) citing Environmental Impact Assessment (2005) notes that the Niger Delta is important to Nigeria and to the International Community because the region lies over one of the biggest oil reserves on planet earth with over 34 billion barrels of black gold. According to Oaikhenan (2004) and Roberts (2005) cited by Simbine, Benjamin, Danjibo, Oladeji, Iyani and Azubuike (2008) crude oil production from the region accounts for over 90 percent of Federal Revenue.

The Niger Delta has been characterized by a long record of resistance and rebellion against people or institutions working at cross roads with the interest of the inhabitants of the area (Ekuerhare, 2008). Some early instances include the 1894-1895 resistance by King William Koko of Nembe, against the Royal Niger Company's attempt to shut out the Nembe people from the lucrative trade in palm oil. The others include, the struggle led by King Nana of Itsekiri (1896) and Oba Ovorawen of Benin kingdom (1897).

Furthermore, Tamuno (2000) notes that the Niger Delta question from earliest time centred on political and economic issues. During the outset of independence in Nigeria, the communities of the region felt more disappointed. He points out that from 1953, the conference of Rivers Chiefs and people took up a fight against colonial oppression and others in charge of Regional Governments in Nigeria. The conference felt it was important for government to ensure that economic benefits from natural resources were given to the indigenes. The most recent conflict in the region relates to discord between oil-bearing communities and foreign oil companies and the Federal Government over lack of benefits to communities from oil revenue. In addition, the volatility of the region is also enhanced by the spread of ethnic militia groups fighting for the interest of the ethnic group within the broader Niger Delta conflict.

According to Osaghae, Ikelegbe, Olarinmoye and Okhomina (2011) conflict in the Niger Delta region resulted from a desire by the people for self-determination referring to “the desire of a people to self-existence, self-management, self-development and sovereignty over resources.” This in another word means autonomy, where the people decide what to do with their God –given resources. Examples of such call for autonomy is the Ogoni Bill of Right, which called for more autonomy in the control of resources and governance for the people, and the Kaiama Declaration in 1998, where the Ijaw youths called for Resource Control and greater autonomy for the Ijaw ethnic group. Osaghae *et al.* (2011) add that other causes of conflict in the oil-rich region are the absence of development, social infrastructure, poor participation by the indigenes in oil business, poor benefits from the oil boom translated into low sharing of oil based revenues, poor corporate responsibility by the oil multi-nationals.

The prevailing conflict in the Niger Delta could be blamed on two causative factors: failure of government to provide the political and economic good and the marginalization of the Niger Delta in Nigeria’s political equation (Ekpo, 2004, citing Auvinen, 1997; Ijeomah, 2007). It is alleged that the major ethnic groups, which dominate the political parties, take decisions that favour their ethnic nationalities, to the detriment of the minorities, including the Niger Delta region. Etekpe (2007) stated the causes of conflict in the Niger Delta to include policies that promoted the under-development of the region. Such include the merger of the Izon or Ijaw people with other provinces, and finally the Eastern region in 1946. The people had wanted separate regions for themselves, which they believed would enhance their development.

Other causes include the dissatisfaction of the citizens with the negative effect of exploration and exploitation of crude oil, which has given rise to demands for environmental rights, justice, self-determination to the level of partial or total control of all resources in the region. Obi (2012) notes that the cause of the conflict sometimes results from the people demanding from the government and transnational oil and gas companies for employment of indigenes, as well as provision of basic social amenities. Others include environmental protection, state creation, resource control and payment of compensation for property destroyed as a result of crude oil and gas exploration.

Etekpe (2007) adds that other causes of conflict in the region are repressive Federal Government laws that handed over the ownership, management and control of all petroleum on land and sea to the Federal Government. These include the Mineral and Petroleum Act of 1969, Land Use Decree of 1978 and some sections of the 1999 constitution.

Since 1999, an agreement was reached between the Federal government, state governments as well as the National Assembly for the derivation to be based on 13% of onshore and offshore oil. In the last two decades groups such

as Movement for the Survival of Ogoni People (MOSOP) Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta (MEND), Ijaw National Congress (INC) Ijaw youth Congress (IYC) and Niger Delta Avengers have presented as advocates of the Niger Delta project. Some of the activities of these groups from pipeline vandalism, demonstration, riots, as well as seminars and militant acts. Conflict in the Niger Delta is recurrent because over the years the people protest over their economic situation, exploitation of crude oil, environmental degradation among others. Sometimes government send in military personnel to protect oil installations and, quell the protest. However, incessant agitations by various groups in the region always lead to the reoccurrence of violence in the region in the semblance of hostage taking, pipeline vandalism among others.

### ***Relevant Empirical Studies***

Segvic (2005) studied the Framing of Politics in Three Croatian Newspapers over a period of 11 years. He found that two of the papers were more favourable to the government. Only a privatized weekly *Feral Tribune* antagonised the government. His findings show that ownership of newspapers shapes the types of frames that are used to report stories. This is a pointer to the fact that reports on the Niger Delta, Boko Haram, and others are not immune to the influence of ownership of media.

Ekuma (2007) studied Press Framing of the 2006 Nigerian Constitution Amendment Debate, and found that there were differences in the amount of pro-third term and anti-third term positions reported by each of the selected newspapers.

Ariyibi (2008) in his study of *Review of Nigeria's 1999 Constitution in Some Selected Newspapers* discovered that the newspapers, through frame usage, presented the attempted review as an undesirable exercise. He found that salience and emphasis employed by the newspapers elevated the Tenure Amendment proposal so high, that it became the defining frame for the constitution review. Perhaps if the press had focused attention on other pertinent aspects of the review, like True Federalism, and Resource Control, the amendment might have come out better Christie (2006) in a study of framing rationale for the Iraqi war found that the use of the phraseology developed by policy makers in some selected newspapers (*The New York Times* and *Washington Post*) did not mean that the newspapers covered the war in either a critical or non-critical manner. Rather, they used the wordings used by the White House. In many instances, the White House rationale reported in the newspaper was in the form of quotations from various government officials.

### **Methodology**

The research method selected for this study is content analysis. Walizer and Wieni (1978) cited in Wimmer and Dominick (1991) define content analysis as

any systematic procedure designed to examine the content of recorded information. It was selected because it created the platform for this researcher to analyse information that were contained in the select newspapers. It is largely systematic, objective, and quantitative. This quantification enables researchers engage statistical to support interpretation and analysis of data derived from the manifest content. In addition an enquiry that focuses on investigating tangible material benefit from using such a method as content analysis. Two national newspapers: *Vanguard and Daily Champion* were selected for the study due to the fact that they published during the period that this study covered.

The study period covered by this study is from 1998 (Kaiama Declaration) to 2002. The content that were analysed include (1) Frame types (2) Framing Condition (3) Frame sources (4) Editorial format and (5) Placement of stories. This study used a sample size of five months, which was viewed as able to provide data to draw inferences on some specific period in the Niger Delta conflict. Particularly, the December 1998 Kaiama Declaration is seen in many quarters as a turning point in the escalation crisis.

This study used frequency count and simple percentages to analyse data that were derived from content, analysing the selected newspapers.

### ***Data Presentation and Analysis***

**Table 1:** Framing Types used by *Daily Champion* and *Vanguard* newspapers in the coverage of the Niger Delta conflict

Frame Type	<i>Daily Champion</i>	<i>Vanguard</i>	Total	Percentage (%)
Episodic	3	4	7	76.4
Thematic	9	1	2	23.6
Total	4	5	9	100

Mass Media frames are most times presented as thematic or episodic. They are evident in reports were the media focus on specific events alone, devoid of the general context or providing adequate background. In the coverage of the Niger Delta conflict, episodic content mainly appeared as news items. The consequences of the preference for episodic frames by the selected newspapers is that the media did not provide adequate historical angle to the reports or provide other information that would assist the readers in understanding in a broader way the Niger Delta conflict. The implication of the preference for thematic frames is that the readers only get information or news as they break without the needed background or detailed information that would aid their understanding of reports on the Niger Delta conflict.

**Table 2:** Framing Condition/Dominant Frames used in the Coverage of the Niger Delta Conflict

Framing condition/ Dominate frame	<i>Daily Champion</i>		<i>Vanguard</i>		T o t a l	Percentage (%)		
Economic frame	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Political frame	4	8 0	1	2 0	5	1	0	0
Ethnic frame	2	22.22	7	77.77	9	1	0	0
Militant/Separatist	1 2	5 0	1 2	5 0	2 4	1	0	0
Justice/HumanRights	1 2	31.57	2 6	68.42	3 8	1	0	0
Environmental frame	-	-	2	-	2	1	0	0
T o t a l	3 0	38.46	4 8	61.53	7 8	1	0	0

In using media frames, stakeholders in an event or issue use various approaches: statements, phrases, words etc to describe individuals or concepts. This could be viewed as framing condition or dominant frame. Scheufele (2000) cited in Melkote (2009) note that media influence how audience view issues, not by making aspects of the issue more salient, but presenting interpretive schemas which influence the meaning that the audience ascribe to content. In the reportage of the Niger Delta conflict selected newspapers used different frames to refer to the people involved in the conflict. The preference for Militant/separatist frame can be understood if one looks at militant nature of agitations that followed the issuance of the Kaiama Declaration in 1998. Around this period militant groups such as Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta (MEND, Niger Delta Peoples' Volunteer Force (NDPVF), Egbesu, Chikoko Movement etc arose. From the findings on Table it is clear that the dominant frame used in the coverage of the Niger Delta conflict is the Militant/Separatist frame.

**Table 3:** Frame Sources used by *Daily Champion* and *Vanguard* in the Coverage of the Niger Delta Conflict

Frame Sources	<i>Daily Champion</i>		<i>Vanguard</i>		Total	Percentage (%)		
G o v e r n m e n t	6	6 0	4	4 0	1 0	1	0	0
O i l C o m p a n i e s	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
O w n C o r r e s p o n d e n t s	2 4	3 6 . 3 6	4 2	63.63	6 6	1	0	0
F o r e i g n A g e n c i e s	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
L o c a l M e d i a / A g e n c y	5	3 3 . 3 3	1 0	66.66	1 5	1	0	0
N i g e r D e l t a C o m m .	-	-	6 5	100	6 5	1	0	0
O t h e r S o u r c e s	-	-	3	100	3	1	0	0
T o t a l	3 5	3 5 . 3 5	6 4	64.64	9 9	1	0	0

In coverage of events, the mass media depends on various sources for reports. This brings the possibilities of various groups and individuals presenting different frames to the content.

The findings which show that the select newspapers depended mostly on their correspondents, local media agencies and government sources for media frames agree with Gamson and Modigliani (1989) and Scheufele (1999) that various social forces influence the presentation of frames in the mass media. The implications of this finding is that reality of the conflict is presented by the

media in the form or slant preferred by the correspondents, government sources and local media.

**Table 4:** Referential frame used in the coverage of the Niger Delta conflict

Discourse Analysis	<i>Daily Champion</i>		<i>Vanguard</i>		Total	Percentage (%)
Pursuit of Resource Control	-	-	6	1 0 0	6	1 0 0
Community Dev./Minority Agitation	2	9 . 5	1 9	9 0 . 4	2 1	1 0 0
Nationalism/Federalism	3	7 5	1	2 5	4	1 0 0
Injustice/Corruption	7	3 0 . 4	1 6	6 9 . 6	2 3	1 0 0
Need for Dialogue/Negotiation	8	3 2	1 7	6 8	2 5	
Economic Activity	-	-	-	-	3	1 0 0
Militancy/Secessionist Act	1 1	6 4 . 7	6	3 5 . 2	1 7	1 0 0
T o t a l	3 1	3 2 . 2	6 5	6 7 . 7	9 6	1 0 0

Referential frames in this study means the phrases or statement used to refer to the Niger Delta conflict in the selected newspapers. Again the high volume of Referential frames Injustice/Corruption and Need for Dialogue/Negotiation can be explained from the post-Kaiama disposition of youth or agitators in the region who became more volatile in their demonstrations, kidnapping, pipeline vandalism among others. When selecting frames to report the conflict, the media presented some aspects of the situation by emphasising some and underplaying others. The implication of the referential frames focused on minority agitation, dialogue, negotiation, injustice and corruption are indications that the select newspapers had an understanding of the issues that gave rise to the Niger Delta conflict.

**Table 5:** Editorial Formats Used by *Daily Champion* and *Vanguard* in the Coverage of the Niger Delta Conflict

Content Format	<i>Daily Champion</i>		<i>Vanguard</i>		Total	Percentage (%)
News Reports	2 8	3 8 . 8 8	4 4	6 1	7 2	1 0 0
Editorials	-	-	2	1 0 0	2	1 0 0
Features/Commentaries/Opinionated Essay	5	6 2 . 5	3	3 7 . 5	8	1 0 0
Letter to the Editor	-	-	1	1 0 0	1	1 0 0
Adverts/Advertorials	-	-	-	-	-	-
C a r t o o n s	-	-	-	-	-	-
P h o t o g r a p h s	-	-	3	1 0 0	3	1 0 0
S p e c i a l R e p o r t s	-	-	-	-	-	-
Speeches/Interviews	-	-	5	1 0 0	5	1 0 0
O t h e r s	-	-	-	-	-	-
T o t a l	3 3	3 7 . 5	5 5	6 2 . 5	8 8	1 0 0

Content format or nature of publication situates the value or otherwise that the content producer attaches to a report. Zhou and Moy (2007) as well as Melkote (2009) agree that in evaluating media framing or reportage of a matter such as war riots or event the media focuses on articles, paragraphs and other units that create for better understanding of content.

This findings are at variance with some other studies on conflict and war that posit that when conflict arise the media must engage format or frames that allow more room for details, analysis and explanation. Tiegreen and Newman (2002) studied the coverage of the Iraq war and found that framing of the war stories became more thematic as the war progressed and helped to give detailed context to the news. The preference for news as a format for reporting in this study did not allow the selected newspapers give adequate background to the Niger Delta conflict.

**Table 6:** Position of Reports in the Selected Newspapers

Page Position	<i>Daily Champion</i>	<i>Vanguard</i>		Total	Percentage (%)	
Front Page	1 6	38.09	2 6	61.9	42	100%
Back Page	-		-	-	-	-
Editorial Page	-		2	100	2	100%
Inside Page	1 5	34.09	2 9	65.9	44	100%
Opinion Page	2	66.6	1	33	3	100%
Other Pages	-		-	-	-	-
Total	3 3	36.26	5 8	63.73	91	100%

Placement of a new item or other reports in the mass media are used as measure of the quality or importance that a media house attaches to a given report. Nwosu (1996: 81) explains the position in which a newspaper places a story (Front page, back page or inside back page) indicates the kind of emphasis and importance it places on that story and this helps to determine the amount of readership the story gets. Against this backdrop, media owners, advertisers, politicians and others who have a stake in the content strive to shape the frames used in the media.

## Discussion

The findings from this study indicate that the selected newspapers looked as the Niger Delta conflict as a Militant/Separatist issue that had some Ethnic colouration and there were concerns for Human Rights. In addition, the dominant frame sources used by the selected newspapers were Own Correspondent, followed by Government and Niger Delta Communities as well as Local Media/News Agency. Findings show that the referential frames used most by the selected newspapers were community Development/Minority Agitations, Nationalism/Federalism, Pursuit of Resource Control and Need for Dialogue/Negotiation.

Findings from reveal that both newspapers preferred News Reports, Features/Commentaries, editorials. The preference for news is a pointer to the fact that the media focused on immediate occurrences in the Niger Delta, rather than focusing on providing detailed information on the history and causative factors of the conflict. The selected newspapers placed most of the stories on the front and inside pages, which shows some prominence by the media in the coverage of the conflict.

## Conclusion

Framing is a vital technique that mass media reporters, correspondents or editors use in the presentation of content, with a view of influencing the perception or conclusions that the readers or viewers would take on particular issues. In covering the environment politics, religion, conflict and other occurrences the mass media provide a spin to the story that then raises questions on the balance, fairness and objectivity of content. The media need to be tactical in reporting knotty cases such as conflict, war and other divisive issues like religion, resource control, politics, land use among others.

From the findings in this study, this researcher concludes that the selected newspapers: *Guardian* and *Nigerian Tribune* used more of episodic frames in the coverage of the Niger Delta Conflict, which did not allow the media give background or depth to the events that led to escalation of the conflict.

Both newspapers also preferred news reports to other editorial format, such as features, editorials, advertorials, opinionated essays etc. It was also found that the dominant sources of frames used most by both newspapers were own correspondents and government sources.

Data also showed that the newspapers placed most of their stories on the inside pages, ahead of the cover or back pages, while the Referential frame used most was Community Development/Minority Agitation, and Militancy/Secessionist Act and Nationalism/Federalism. In addition, framing condition used most was militant/Separatist, Ethnic frame, Justice/Human Rights frame and Economic frame.

Based on the findings from this study, this researcher therefore, made the following recommendations:

- 1) Journalists should receive regular training on the coverage of sensitive issues such as conflict, wars and other social upheavals.
- 2) Enhance reporting skills of journalists in the use of imagery and language, including media frames and other techniques that could alter the balance, accuracy, or objectivity of the report. Such accuracy should also include truth.
- 3) In framing conflict the media should provide information on the history of the violence, including the actors, causes, ethnic, religious, political or other angles to the present phase of the conflict. The media should also report on the humanitarian effect of the conflict such as environmental damage, mental, psychological damage
- 4) Media should also serve as early warning signs of conflict and provide agenda for the prevention as well as de-escalation of conflicts.

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