

Indigenous People of Biafra in the Frames of two Nigerian Dailies

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Abstract. The study centred on the newspapers' framing of Indigenous people of Biafra in their struggle for independence among the two widely read media outlets of Nigeria involving *Daily Trust* and *The Nation* newspapers. The study was anchored on framing theory that explains how media shape audience thinking. Content analysis was the chosen method. The study adopted a purposive sampling technique for the newspapers and the periods under study and a random sampling for the editions. A coding sheet was designed as the instrument. The data gathered were then subjected to SPSS analysis using figures. The study found that Indigenous people of Biafra were blamed by the frames on many fronts; that there were a lot of negative frames in the media reportage against them. The study therefore recommended that the government dialogue with this Igbo group on issues of alleged marginalization and unfair treatment meted out to them, that the media should be unbiased in reporting the group and their ordeals.

Keywords: *Frames, Nigeria, Indigenous people of Biafra, Dailies.*

1. Introduction

Indigenous people of Biafra under the leadership of 'Nnamdi Kanu', was a coined term representing the idea for the independence of Igbo as a republican state. To Ozoema (2016) the term was coined out of the Igbo clamour and

advocacy for a free and independent state of Biafra. The aftermath of the first civil war in Nigeria necessitated the outcry for separation by most Igbo people. It has been argued severally that this could be traced to apparent marginalization meted out to them since post-civil-war era. This may not be unconnected with the fear of reprisal by Igbo if given the mantle of leadership.

Obi (2001) reminds that history of political unrest occasioned by the quest for the republic of Biafra in 1967 among the major Nigerian ethnic groups is hardly forgettable. This struggle for secession was foiled by the Nigerian state after a three year war that resulted in the loss of over one million lives and displacement of many others in eastern Nigeria. The end of the war was followed by deliberate social, political and economic policies aimed at reducing the capacity of the Igbo people to challenge the state or the dominance of the victorious groups. These policies of marginalization were effectively carried out through the autocratic military regimes that dominated Nigerian politics for the greater proportion of its post-war history that spanned between 1970 till 1999.

Igbo tribe is the third largest ethnic nationality in Nigeria after Hausa and Yoruba ethnic nationalities. There is no other ethnic nationality in the country that has suffered marginalization like the Igbo people. Indeed, Igbo people have suffered great frustrations and reverses in

Nigerian history (Obi 2001). Beginning with the infamous pogrom of 1966 in the north where Igbo people lost up to one million lives which were followed by their bid for a separate and independent state of Biafra, a move that was necessitated by endless acts of wickedness and man's inhumanity to man meted against them in the northern part of the country. This culminated in a costly and gruesome civil war and a defeat, the story has remained unpleasant for Igbo people in Nigeria till date.

According to Bullock (2001:20), "framing affects how a story is told and influences public perception". One reason for this, according to Auerbach and Bloch-Elkon (2005:13) is that the public's lack of awareness, along with their reliance on media for information and decision-making, make them more likely to be influenced by framing. They observed that: When the media place stories in specific frames, they lend a different meaning to the news. The media increase or decrease the salience of issues, which allows the public to remember and make judgments on such issues.

Framing dwells on subtle changes in the wording of the description of a situation which likely affect how audience members think about the situation. Research indicates that news dealing with unrest and crises, like the movement of a few factions of the Igbo people in Nigeria for a free and independent Biafra, influences public perceptions and concerns. When such events cause destruction in the society, it severely affects members in that community. Generally, these events allow researchers to assess the degree to which media select news and shape its content (Brunken, 2006: 2).

One way in which news media shape perceptions of audience on key issues is through the act of framing. That is why Lippmann (2008: 52) observes that news is responsible for providing the "pseudo-environment" upon which people rely to experience and understand events they cannot observe directly and that news frames are important in how these events are reported since they reflect a process of

recurring selection and emphasis in communicating perceived reality.

There exist some guidelines that are expected to be the frame of reference when reporting conflict. It has been observed that the audience of mass media can be inflammable and this informed Okoye (2011, p. 268) to caution that "media contents that portray...scenes of...violence should be handled with caution." The Code of Ethics for Nigerian journalists puts it better, as it states in clear terms that media personnel should endeavour to eschew depiction of violence textually or pictorially.

Newspapers give attention to reportage of crises especially those having grave consequences on people and their environments. The media performs its cardinal roles of the mass media-surveillance and provision of information to the society. However, there exist concerns as to what may constitute the frames of reference in the media contents resulting from indigenous people of Biafra move against the Nigerian state. It is against this backdrop that the researcher wants to find out how the newspapers frame the Indigenous people of Biafra and their quest for the sovereign nation of Biafra using *Daily Trust* and *The Nation* newspapers.

2. Research Questions

The following research questions were raised to address those issues:

- What priority is given to reports on the indigenous people of Biafra by *Daily Trust* and *The Nation* newspapers?
- What angle of frames do the reports on the indigenous people of Biafra represent in *Daily Trust* and *The Nation* newspapers?
- Where are the blames traceable for the actions of indigenous people of Biafra as framed by *Daily Trust* and *The Nation* newspapers?

3. Literature Review

Ikenna (2016) argues that the storyline of the modern Igbo in the Nigerian mass media has

received a lot of criticisms. The issue of portraying Igbo in the Nigerian newspapers is said to be based on the regional and ethnic perspectives. It is believed that the northern newspapers portray them as being a problem to the security and conversely, the southern newspapers portray them as a group fighting for their political rights. Consequently, Asemah (2011) posits that media both print and broadcast are often criticized for several reasons. One of the issues is the status conferral; which is a theory used when increasing or decreasing the status of an individual or a group. Igbo community has been portrayed as epidemic to national security because of their agitations and call for the division of the country.

Nnamdi (2013) has noted that politics is about power relations and the allocation of economic resources for political gain within a body polity and this has made the struggle for acquisition of power to constitute the rationale behind all political activities. The political process in Nigeria has always been characterized by conflict, counter conflict, ethnic rivalries and deep rooted animosity between political players and their support based. As a result, Nigeria's politics can be tense with its many ethnic nationalities. As such, it is important to understand the prime factors of political conflict in Nigeria which may include; feelings of alienation and struggle for recognition, fear of domination, state formation, delineation and contestation of borders, access to political powers (IPCR, 2003 in Gandu, 2005).

Kumar (2010) observes that defining the concept of national security continues to be a challenging task as various factors identifying its capacity at all levels of perception, and thus cannot be restricted to a single definition due to its changing nature from state to state. Hans (1948) observes that the concept of national security has now entered the public domain. Security is being framed by most scholars as 'the creation of conditions that contribute to *The Nation's* political, social and economic consolidation and ensure territorial integrity of the country, acquisition of capabilities to sustain these conditions, safeguard freedom of options and

capabilities to survive in a volatile security environment.

Vohra (2008) states that in the current security environment, national security cannot be inter-linked with national defence only; as it covers a wide range of aspects that require the cooperation and understanding of the State, its forces, institutions and the public. So, national security therefore encompasses the expected behaviour of a democratic nation, as in the case of Nigeria by focusing on providing the right to life and liberty to its citizens; equality in all spheres of activity; cooperation between the public and private sector in the state; preservation of territorial sovereignty and integrity; maintaining a flexible civil and military relation. Oshio (2009) observes that some definitions equate the concept of national security to the state and centre all related policies revolving around *The Nation* state, while others factor the state and individuals as the constituents of national security.

In the findings of Nwabueze and Ezegwu (2013), on geopolitical media coverage of terrorist activities in Nigeria, an analysis of New Nigerian, Vanguard and Daily Sun. Using Content Analyses method, the three newspapers carried 264 items on ethnic orientation on media coverage of terrorist activities, out of the total, New Nigerian carried 71 items, Vanguard carried 88 items, and Daily sun carried 105 items. 75% of the coverage was unfavourable, 5% were favourable and 20% were neutral within the regional interests in the reports. Also in the findings of Shehu and Suleiman (2015) on the analysis of *Daily Trust* and Vanguard newspapers framing of the Boko haram terrorist identity, vanguard has the higher percentage in identifying boko haram as Muslims with 71.3%, *Daily Trust* with 43.8%. They noted that it may be as a result of the location of the newspapers.

In the findings of Omebije (2012) on Boko Haram, using Content Analysis, *Daily Trust* and Daily Sun reported the conflict differently and more so, the two newspapers have different directions. *Daily Trust* wants government to negotiate and dialogue with the group while Daily Sun, support the use of force and dialogue.

This by implication indicates the sympathy from the northern newspaper which is *Daily Trust* and in the opposite, the call for force from the southern newspaper. The frames by these two newspapers suggest ethnic belonging which has a negative implication for Nigeria.

4. Theoretical Approach

The study is anchored to media framing theory. Framing and frames are primary means through which people make sense of a complicated world as argued by Gregory Bateson and Erving Goffman (Entman, Matthes & Pellicano, 2009). Framing has been defined as “the way events and issues are organized and made sense of, especially by media and its stakeholders (de Vreese, 2001).

Framing is traceable to psychology and sociology and it is based on the assumption that how an issue is characterized in news reports can have an influence on how it is understood by audiences (Pan & Kosicki, 1993). The psychological origin of Framing lies in experimental work by Kahneman and Tversky (1979, 1984), for which Kahneman received the 2002 Nobel Prize in economics (Kahneman, 2003).

To frame is “to select some aspects of a perceived reality and make them more salient in a communicating text, in such a way as to promote a particular problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation, and/or treatment recommendation” (Entman, 1993:7). However, problem definitions are the core objectives of this study. According to Norris, Kern and Just (2003) the idea of ‘news frames’ refers to interpretive structures that journalists use to set particular events within their broader context. The essence of framing is selection, to prioritize some facts, images, or developments over others, thereby unconsciously promoting one particular interpretation of events (Price, Tewksbury & Power, 1995).

5. Research Design

Content analysis may also be understood as exploratory or descriptive or both in terms of

design (Anastas, 1999). The design for this study based on the purpose is exploratory and descriptive as noted by early basic content analysis theorists that emphasized its exploratory and descriptive uses (Berelson, 1952; Holsti, 1969). Researchers use exploratory research designs when they know little about a topic, or where few prior definitions, few concepts, and little theory are available on a topic thereby employing small sample (Drisko & Maschi (2015). This informed the selection of only 90 editions for the analysis. The descriptive design is employed to describe the content in the line of the categories set for the study.

The design based on the timing is cross sectional as observed that basic content analysis studies often employ cross-sectional research designs, in the sense that they explore and/or describe the characteristics of a specified sample at one point in time or over a short span of time (Menard, 2002; Mann, 2003; Riffe, Lacy & Fico, 2005; Bryman, 2012; Drisko & Maschi, 2015).

5.1 Categories and Measurement

The design at the level of coding is both deductive/ priori and inductive/emergent, this is because the researcher first identified the main categories a priori which are negative and positive frames, blamed and non-blamed frames and frames of priority which helped him in finding the relevant frames under each main category using emergent design. It has been noted that content analysis may use either deductive, a priori coding, or inductive coding techniques, or a mix of both techniques (Neuendorf, 2001; Drisko & Maschi, 2015).

The measurement of all the categories is at nominal level. In nominal measurement, numerals or other symbols are used to classify people, objects, or characteristics. Another property of nominal measurement is that all categories are exhaustive and mutually exclusive. This means that each measure accounts for every possible option and that each measurement is appropriate to only one category (Wimmer & Dominick, 2010).

5.2 Method

The study adopts quantitative content analysis method; the reason for the choice of this method is to get relevant data from the newspapers that will answer the research questions raised for the study. It is through content analysis method that the frequencies of the categories can be coded. Scholars who give preference to quantitative content analysis do so because apart from being systematic and objective, it also gives emphasis in quantifying the frequency of occurrences of the phenomenon under study. But those who disagree with this position point to the limitation of quantitative content analysis for failing to understand the importance of the hidden meaning that underlies any media text (Gunter, 2002). This position gave rise to qualitative content analysis.

Content Population

The population is made up of all conceivable elements, subjects or observation relating to particular phenomenon of interest to the researcher (Asika, 2009). The population of this study comprises of all the editions of *Daily Trust* Newspaper and *The Nations* newspapers from 19th January, 2018 to when the struggle for independence by indigenous people of Biafra was proscribed to 19th June, 2018 spanning across 6 months.

5.3 Sampling Technique and Size

In content analysis, some scholars note that there may be times, when purposive sampling is useful (Wimmer & Dominick, 2010). Riffe and Freitag (1997) confirm the popularity of purposive sampling in content analysis. They found that 68% of all the content analyses in *Journalism Quarterly* from 1971 to 1995 used a purposive sample (Wimmer & Dominick, 2010). The newspapers to be analyzed were purposively sampled that is the class of non-probability sampling because of its wide readership in the country. As for the editions, ninety (90) editions were randomly sampled.

5.4 Coding Scheme and Reliability Test

Coding sheet was used as the instrument of data collection. It was designed with a priori categories and the hints of the emergent categories as well. The coding sheet contained all the variables captured by the research questions with the aim of answering it during discussion.

After conducting intra-coder reliability test with an interval of two weeks, 12 editions were picked from both *Daily Trust* and *The Nation* newspapers at random. The data was subjected to Re Cal 2 internet based software to calculate the reliability. The result showed a reliability coefficient of between 94 and 100 for percent agreement, and between .72 and 1.0 for Scott Pi, Cohen Kappa and Krippendorff's alpha. Reliability is substantial if it yields kappa coefficient ranging between .61 and .80 (Stemler 2001). This range of value is similarly held as substantially reliable in Scott Pi and Krippendorff's alpha.

5.5 Unitization

News, feature, opinion and cartoons were adopted as the units of analysis for the study. The unit of analysis is the smallest unit of content that is coded into the content category. The units of analysis vary with the nature of data and the purpose of research. Thus, the unit of analysis might be a single word, a letter, a symbol, a theme (a single assertion about one subject), a news story, a short story, a character, an entire article, or an entire film or a piece of programme (Wimmer and Dominick, 1994).

6. Data Presentation, Analysis and Interpretation

This section contains the discussions of the findings of the research. The data collected were represented in figures and further interpreted for better understanding.

Daily Trust Newspaper

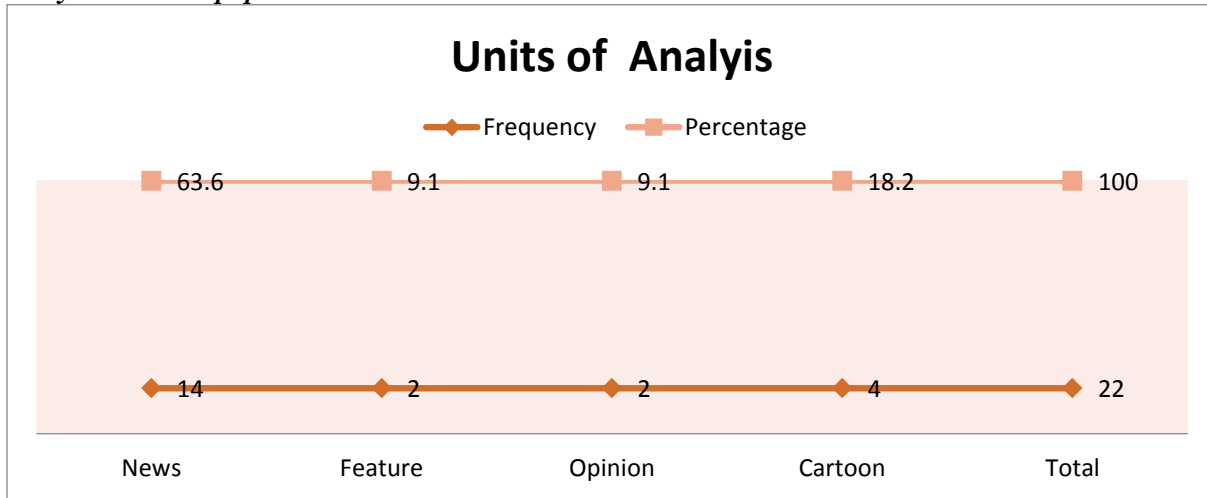


Figure 1: Frequency of the Units of Analysis

From the data on figure 1, the units of analysis have recorded many stories from the number of the entire editions sampled for this study. It shows that 63.6% of the newspapers analysed were in news columns and 9.1% were feature and opinions and also 18.2% were cartoons. This is to say that there were more news articles covered regarding the indigenous people of Biafra cases than were in the other units.

Daily Trust Newspaper

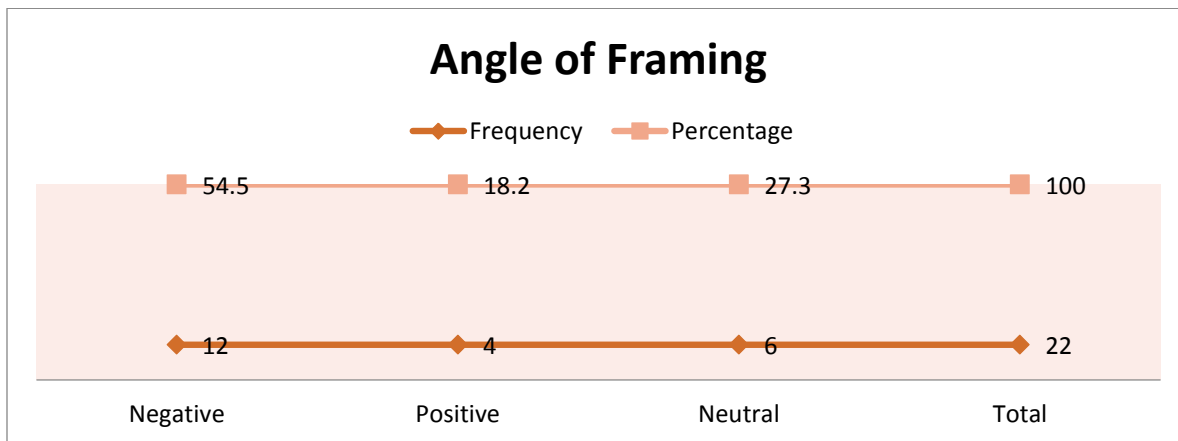


Figure 2: Angle of Framing

Figure 2 shows the angle of framing *Daily Trust* gave the indigenous people of Biafra. The figure shows that 54.5% of the report was covered from negative frames while 18.2% to positive frames and 27.3% of the report were on neutral ground. This is to say that *Daily Trust* reports of indigenous people of Biafra were more of a negative perspective than on the positive or neutral grounds.

Daily Trust Newspaper

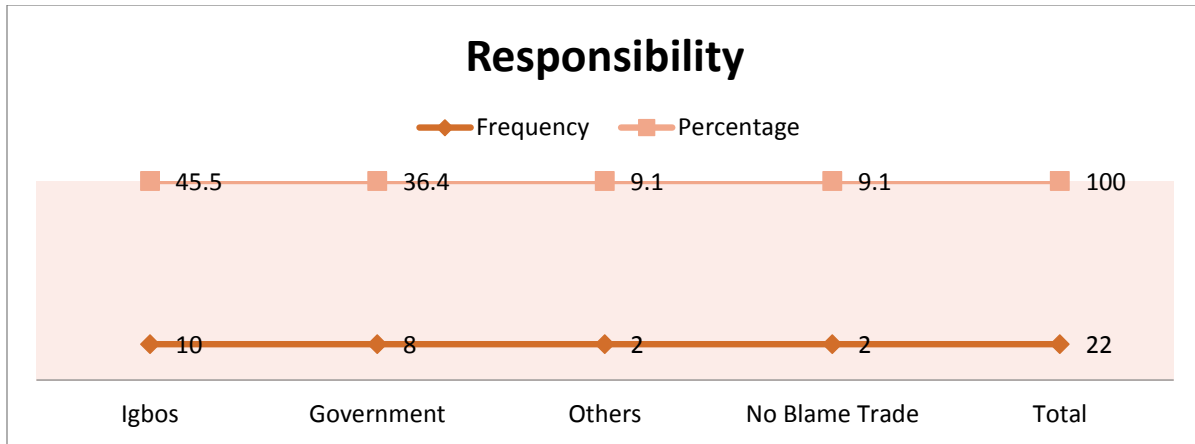


Figure 3: Responsibility

Figure 3 shows the record of the blame trade in the reports according the volumes of *Daily Trust* newspapers content analysed. The figure shows that 45.5% of the blame goes to the indigenous people of Biafra and 36.4% of the blame goes to the government and that 9.1% of others were blamed and others refers to governmental policies and also marginalization and also 9.1% indicates that there were no blame trade recorded. This suggests that indigenous people of Biafra are responsible for their ordeals.

Daily Trust Newspaper

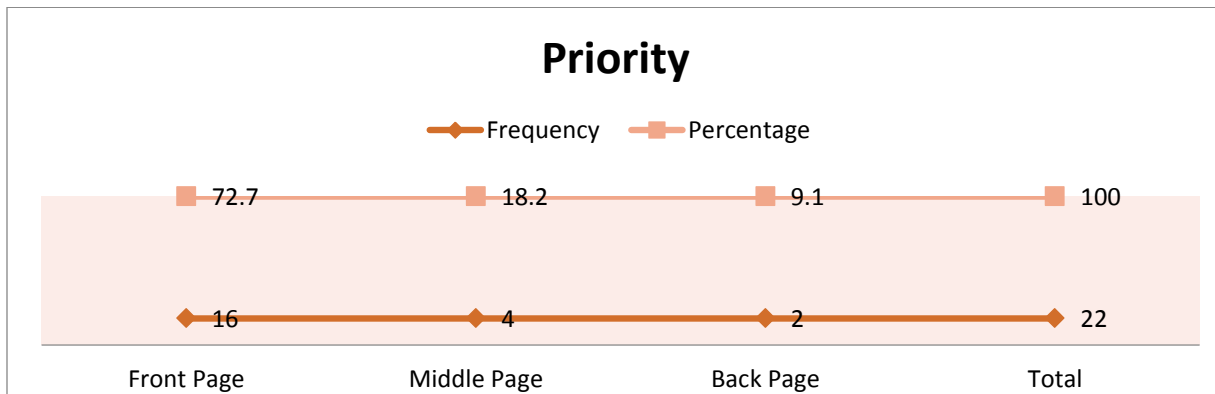


Figure 4: Priority

Figure 4 shows the priority range accorded to reports regarding indigenous people of Biafra. The figure shows that more priority is accorded to the indigenous people of Biafra cases with it appearing 72.7% times on the front pages and 18.2% on the middle page and 9.1% on the back page. This indicates that the issue became trending at the time of their uprising.

The Nation Newspaper

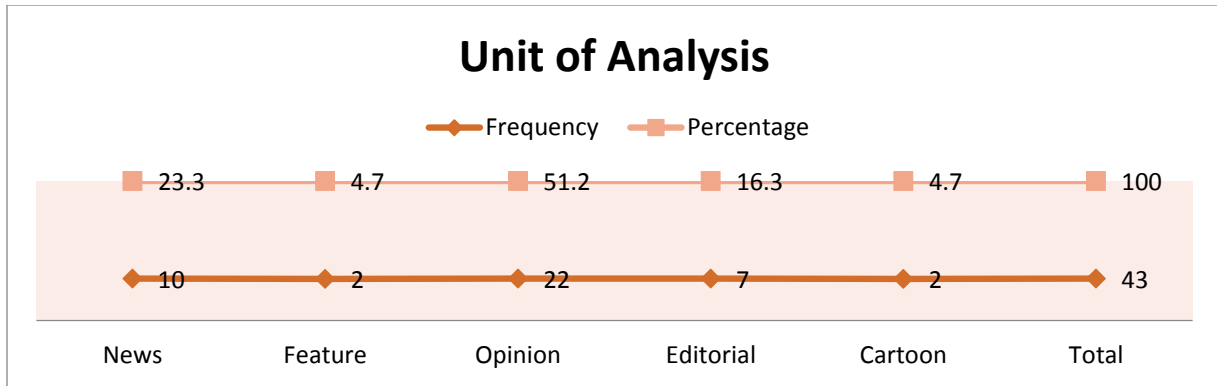


Figure 5: Units of Analysis

Data on figure 5 shows the unit of analysis utilized for the sampled editions. It shows that 51.2 of the newspapers analysed were in opinion columns and 4.7% were feature and cartoons and also 23.3% were news reports and 16.3% were editorials. This is to say that there were more opinion articles covered regarding the indigenous people of Biafra cases than were in the remaining units.

The Nation Newspaper

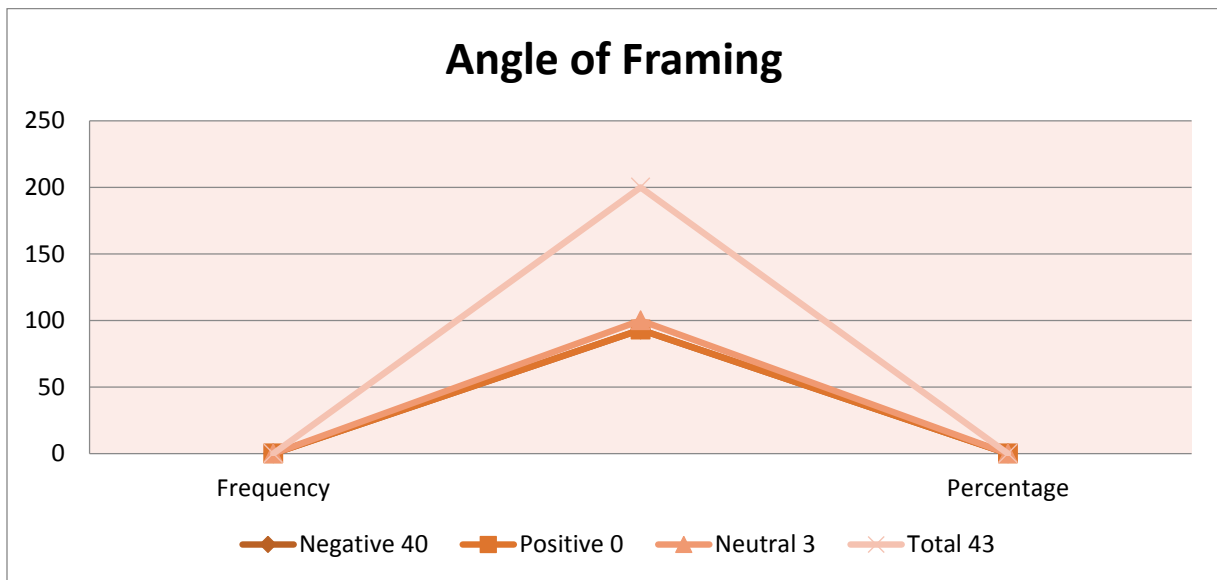


Figure 6: Angle of Framing

Figure 6 shows that 93.0% of the reports were negatively framed while 7.0% of the reports were neutral and none for the positive frame. This indicates that *The Nation* has found faults with indigenous people of Biafra in their uprising.

The Nation Newspaper

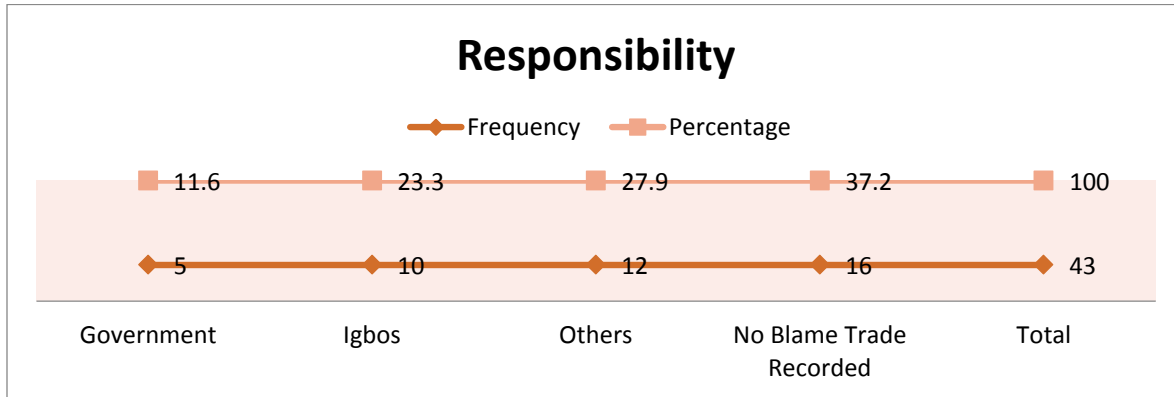


Figure 7: Responsibility

Figure 7, 37.2% indicates that no blame trade was recorded in the reports, also 23.3% of the reports blame the indigenous people of Biafra and 11.6% of the reports blame the government while 27.9% of the reports blame others. This indicates that the blame on the indigenous people of Biafra is very close to the categories of others and no blame trade.

The Nation Newspaper

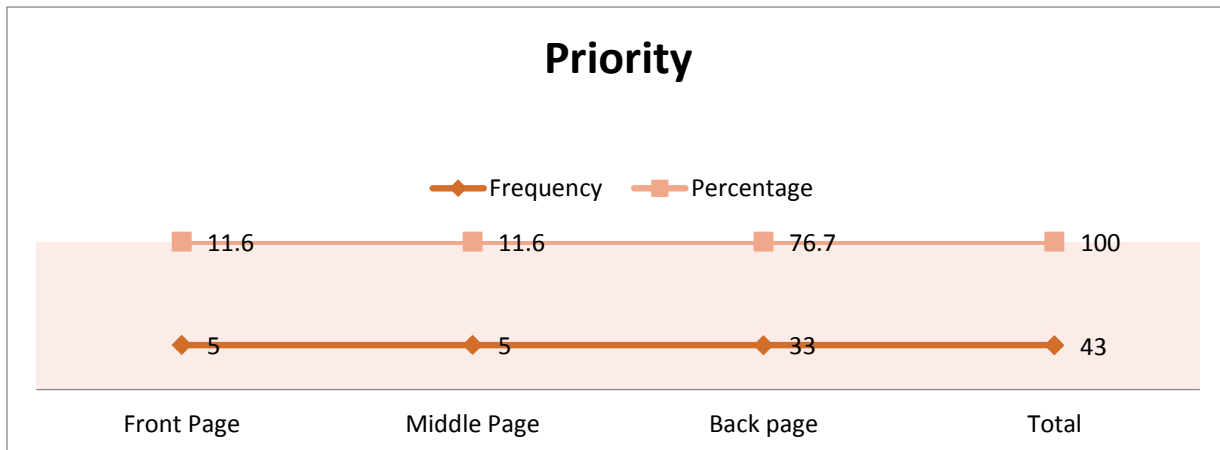


Figure 8: Priority

Figure 8 indicates that 76.7% of the reports were on the back page section, while 11.6% of the reports were on the front page and also on the middle page. This indicates that *The Nation* gave less priority to the indigenous people of Biafra case at the time of their uprising.

7. Discussion of Findings

RQ-1: Priority given to issues regarding the indigenous people of Biafra

Cognizance of the position put forward by Nnamdi (2013) where he noted that politics is about power relations and the allocation of economic resources for political gain within a body polity and this has made the struggle for acquisition of power to constitute the rationale behind all political activities. The sampled editions for this study took reports on the political unrest between the Nigerian state and Indigenous people of Biafra seriously. This is buttressed by figures 4 and 8, where most of the issues regarding indigenous people of Biafra by

Daily Trust within the sampled editions were in the front page.

The result shows that 72.7% of the indigenous people of Biafra reports were on the front page and that is to say that more priority was accorded to reports related to them. Figure 1 also shows that 63.3% of *Daily Trust* reports were in the News columns. However, figure 5 from *The Nation* shows that most of the reports on its pages are in the opinion columns than they are on the other columns. Figure 8 shows that 76.7% of the reports were on the back page. This could be traced to the fact that opinion columns are mostly found at the back pages of *The Nation* newspaper.

RQ: 2: Angle of framing indigenous people of Biafra

From the findings, figure 2 and figure 6 show the angle of framing issues related to indigenous people of Biafra by the two national dailies analysed. The study shows in figure 3 that 54.5% of *Daily Trust* reports regarding the issues of the indigenous people of Biafra are negative. This has confirmed the position of Ikenna (2016) who argues that the storyline of the modern Igbo in the Nigerian mass media has received a lot of criticisms. The result from *The Nation* also shows that 93.0% of its reports are from the negative frames. This finding agrees with the major assumption of the framing theory as media shapes audience thinking about Igbo thereby seeing their activities illegitimate (Entman, Matthes & Pellicano, 2009). The nature of the framing here also negates the caution put forward by Okoye (2011, p. 268) that “media contents that portray...scenes of...violence should be handled with caution. This call is rationalised behind helping the society to be united than living in conflict.

RQ: 3: Blame games between government and Indigenous people of Biafra

Daily Trust shows that 45.5% of the blame goes to the indigenous people of Biafra but 36.4% of the blames goes to the government. The finding from *The Nation* shows that 37.2% of the reports had no blame trade recorded. This is to say that they had not framed the messages to blame anyone among the parties involved in the

conflict. Notwithstanding this result by *The Nation*, their reports totally condemned the activities of Indigenous people of Biafra. This has confirmed the allegation by Obi (2001) that Igbo people have suffered great frustrations and reverses in Nigerian history. The result of this study has shown that Igbo enjoy very little or no sympathy from the remaining ethnic groups of Nigeria.

8. Conclusion and Recommendations

The goal of this study was to analyse *Daily Trust* and *The Nation* newspapers contents in relation to indigenous people of Biafra struggle for independence. Attention was given to the direction of coverage in terms of priority, blame trade and framing. The results indicate that *The Nation* has more reports on indigenous people of Biafra than its northern counterpart *Daily Trust*. Both the two sampled newspapers were harsh in tone of their coverage against the indigenous people of Biafra.

Consequently, the study recommends that media should ensure that they report sensitive issues of conflict from a more unbiased and objective tone; media should ensure that the opinion of the marginalized group is given space and help in resolving conflict by bringing it to an end. The media should adhere to the core tenet of social responsibility in order to help in getting a peaceful country.

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