Conflict Sensitive Journalism and Elections: Analysis of the media coverage of the 2017 Elections in Kenya

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ABSTRACT

In any electoral process, the media plays a crucial role in informing the public and acting as a watchdog in ensuring a credible and fair election. Media influences the election dynamics and perceptions, how and what the media reports, builds, or breaks the credibility of an election. Media influences people by way of reporting, offering peaceful resolution, or even ending up in conflicts. Media is therefore instrumental in conflict resolutions and peace-building. In Kenya, the media is faulted for poor reporting and amplifying hate speech that inflames tension and leads to retaliatory attacks. The media has previously reported unconfirmed reports, inciting messages from politicians, or perpetuated viewpoint that has created political discourses that fun violent conflict. The media ought to report freely, fairly, and be neutral during elections without fueling violence. This paper sought to examine the role played by media in the electoral processes, analyses media coverage of the 2017 elections, establish the extent to which the media escalated and/or de-escalated election violence in Kenya. In collecting data, the researchers applied the qualitative approach through content analysis of newspaper articles, journals, and websites. These materials provided the intended information on the issue that was to be addressed, that is conflict-sensitive journalism. The study established that media has a role in framing conflicts and/or escalating conflict. It is also responsible for providing balanced reporting through good investigative journalism especially during conflict situations to promote peace and tranquility.

Key Words: Conflict sensitive journalism, media coverage, elections, constructive journalism

INTRODUCTION

Constructive journalism requires adequate, accurate, and impartial information that enables the public to make well-informed decisions, especially during conflicts. When a society is threatened with conflict, journalism faces greater difficulties of unreliable information or censorship. The primary role of media during conflict is to provide truthful and accurate information (White & Mabweazara, 2018). Performing these functions comes with a heavy burden especially in a continent such as Africa, where conflict-related to elections is increasingly a problem. Kenya has witnessed varying shades of election conflict, where violence majorly occurs before the elections, between electoral cycles, or in the aftermath of the electoral process (Kovacs, 2018). The 2017 election was no different; it was riddled with contestation and counter-arguments between supporters of the two main political parties. The opposition presidential candidate challenged in court, the election results citing gross irregularities and a host of other anomalies, the results that returned the sitting president, "resulting in a ruling by the Supreme Court in favor of new presidential elections" (Fjelde & Hoglund 2018, p. 41).

However, the re-run was further contested by the opposition presidential candidate who boycotted the voting process and urged his supporters to boycott it too. The opposition leader contested the results in the court of public opinion, whipping sentiments that heightened political tension that culminated into his mock "swearing-in" months after the incumbent was sworn in for a second term (Okoye et al., 2019). Kenya has previously experienced more and worse heightened election violence than the 2017 conflict. The most rivaled was the 2007 electoral violence where there was the destruction of properties and killings. The violence ranged from historical scores, inequality in resource distribution, and "failure to undertake comprehensive constitutional reforms" (Ogola 2011, p. 132). A particularly unusual culprit fingered for inflaming passion and fanning the embers of violence was the media (Okoye et al., 2019). Media houses and journalists were accused of biased, inaccurate, and problematic reporting that incited their audience along with ethnic and political groups (Makinen & Kuira, 2008), in a manner that shifted

the conflict from electoral discourse to ethnicity (Oburu, 2016). The electoral violence called for media to report fairly and constructively, to present accurate and impartial news.

During the conflict, more than any other time, the media ought to provide reliable information for understanding the causes of conflict; informs the public about the conflict beneath the violence; acts as a channel of communication between the conflicting parties; correct misperceptions by examining and reporting accurate information; puts real people in the story and describes the impact of the conflict; identify the underlying interests by asking tough questions for the public interest; frame the conflict by looking for a different angle, alternative view or new insight. Journalists face greater difficulties in covering in-depth, accurate, and impartial news without feeding flames, due to news sources and opposing sides who seek to control the media (Howard, 2008). Conflict should not compel media to formulaic and themed reportage (Waisbord, 2011). In conflict-sensitive journalism, the media advocates for peace by giving prominence and value to non-violent stories avoid setting conflict-generated agendas or framing stories to conflict angles (Lynch, 2010). It also provides the platform for people to exercise their right to free speech guaranteed in Article 19 of the International Declaration of Human Rights. Where there is free speech and reliable journalism, citizens make well-informed decisions, which is an essential element of democracy.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Kenya has experienced recurrent violent conflicts in the run-up to the elections (Ireri, 2013). The reporting of 2017/2018 brought to the fore the critical journalists' role in reporting accurately and instructively on conflicts to ensure the audience is well informed, to reduce hostilities, and offer information necessary in ending the conflicts. The media was criticized for negatively reporting on conflict and failure to consider peace initiatives (Okoye et al, 2019). The media gave contradictory and one-sided reports that could have fueled the 2017/2018 conflict. The media failed to bring out the main issues and players involved, this affected the accuracy and reliability of the information being reported. The media coverage was critical in conflict resolution or in escalating the violence, the media had an opportunity to ensure the journalist did not escalate the conflict.

This research was premised on the knowledge that media has a core role in informing society during conflicts. When it undertakes this role informatively, the society learns more and it can also help to bridge the divide between the protracted parties. However, when exercised partially, it is dangerous and can cause more harm, damage to property, and loss of lives. Conflict is a news value that media will always report on, and reporting on conflict is critical to the dynamics of the conflicts. This study, therefore, analyzed how the media covered the 2017/2018 election, the issues raised by the media, the source of their news, and whether the media was balanced in its reporting.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

i)   To analyze the media coverage of the 2017/2018 elections in Kenya
ii) To identify the sources of news in the media coverage of the 2017/2018 election
iii) To assess the impact of the media reports on the 2017/2018 elections in Kenya

LITERATURE REVIEW

Media and Conflicts

In times of conflict, the media has often been accused of not reporting accurately and inciting violent behaviours. Selemani (2012) argues that media is a source of conflict through propaganda and biased reporting. The media, however, acts as the channel of communication that provides information, builds trust among parties, counteract misinformation, analyze the conflict, help identify the underlying interests of issues, allow parties to express their emotions, empower the parties and help in consensus building (Villanueva, 2009). The public expects media to be truthful, prove their loyalty to the public, maintain independence, monitor power, give voice to the voiceless, and provide a forum for public criticism and problem solving (Whitaker & Ramsey, 2009). The language used by the media must be with care to get the maximum effect (Hodgson, 1996). It must be clear, unambiguous, and to the point, to avoid misinterpretation. The threshold should be higher because conflicts are emotional and destructive.

Media coverage highlights the importance given to the conflict as a news value. The way journalists cover conflict is affected by different imperatives. Media coverage varies according to the political context of the conflict, resources, skills, and political power of the players involved (Cottle, 2006). The coverage also depends on the

readership or viewership, because the media industry is a business that sometimes depends on conflict situations to increase circulation or coverage (Carruthers, 2000). Furthermore, the relationship between the media and the antagonist, the state of public opinion, and the ability of the journalist to gain access to the conflict areas affect media coverage of a conflict. Politics similarly influence media coverage of issues and politicians to use to their advantage (Lynch, 2006). Media coverage shapes the perceptions that form the reality on which people base their political actions (Hodgson, 1996). The political antagonists may use the media to fulfill their objectives, journalists should therefore be careful about their source of information and how they highlight conflicts (Cottle, 2006). When conflicts occur, the reporting must be devoid of emotions and other prejudices. Journalists should seek to understand historically the conflict at hand (Mchaughlin, 2002).

Conflicts provide the raw material for strong human-interest stories where the media can seek to find pathos and tragedy, heroism, camaraderie, acts of selfishness, and personalized experiences of suffering (Cottle, 2006). The media should therefore seek to understand the institutional roles of various organizations involved, and, devote more attention to the regulation and management of the conflict. Most conflicts involve value differences, power disparities, originate from economic issues, or identity differences (Jeong, 2009). Misperceptions and miscommunication play an important role in the evolution of conflict, the media is one of the institutions that can be relied upon to bring out the missing links that create perception and effective communication during conflicts (Burton, 2011). There is no aspect of political reality in contemporary society that is more important than media (Cortright, 2009). Media is powerful in shaping politics and culture, and in setting non-violent agendas. The framing of the message puts issues on the public agenda, defines the meaning of actions and policies, and shapes the debate. In Kenya, various opinion polls have put media among the most trusted institution, providing it with a critical platform that should be exercised responsibly.

Media is ideally at the center of information flow between the public and leadership. It captures the public mood and shapes perceptions people have on issues surrounding them and society. A media that is independent and free to exercise its function is a key pillar in any democracy (Makokha, 2010). The ability of media to perform its duties without coercion or undue influence to alter news is fundamental, just as the media's responsibilities of accuracy, factual reporting, balanced, and general professionalism is key. These functions can however be exercised better when the media is liberal and supported by institutional frameworks (Makokha 2010). The liberalization of the media in Kenya gave rise to many outlets including commercial, vernacular, and community. It brought a variety of media content and expanded the space for media to have wider coverage and the agenda-setting role to take center stage.

The constitution of Kenya (2010) recognizes the importance of media freedom and upholds media freedom in Article 34. The media freedom and independence under the constitution are applicable with the caveat that the right does not extend to propaganda for war, incitements to violence, hate speech or advocacy of hatred. There are also legislations around the media that are found in various pieces of laws. They include the Kenya Information and Communication Act (KICA) that created the Communications Authority of Kenya (CA), and the Media Council Act (MCA) that established the Media Council of Kenya (MCK), the Public Order Act, the Defamation Act, the Preservation of Public Security Act, the Books, and Newspapers Act. Under these laws, conflict-sensitive reporting is one such model to equip journalists with the tools and techniques to enable them report informatively on conflicts. Journalism and conflict have changed as a common factor, while journalism is about change and the impact the change will have on society, conflict is also about change as people try to meet unfulfilled needs and defend their identities (Howard, 2003). Journalists should therefore better understand conflict for them to report ably on it.

Conflict sensitive journalism

Considering the conflicts of the 1990s, scholars focused on the role of media in conflict emerged with two schools of thought: peace journalism as advocated by Johan Galtung and Jake Lynch (2010) and conflict-sensitive journalism presented by Ross Howard (2008). Peace journalism advocates for journalists to take a more active role in finding solutions to conflict. As Galtung (2015) argued that journalism inherently or intentionally emphasizes and encourages violent conflict by its treatment of the issues. He, therefore, advocated for journalism that plays a more active role in bringing peace. However, such a role meant that journalists would rather be active and subjective advocates for peace than borrow from the traditional journalistic values of accuracy, impartiality, and responsibility. The Howard school of thought advocated for conflict-sensitive journalism, the problem of covering conflict was that journalists were not covering them responsibly because they did not understand conflict (Howard, 2003).

Conflict-sensitive journalism focuses on the restoration of peace rather than promoting violence. It was developed from the 1970 Johan Galtung's Peace Journalism initiatives propounded to condemn the traditional journalism penchant for promotion and sensationalism of conflict and war. Howard (2003) describes it as journalism that applies conflict analysis and searches for new voices and ideas about the conflict. The journalist reports on who is trying to resolve the conflict, look closely at all sides, reports on how other conflicts were resolved, and is engaged in the search for solutions. Howard further asserts that conflict-sensitive journalism abhors only reporting what divides the parties in a conflict as well as avoiding the use of words like 'terrorist', 'extremist' or 'fanatic' (2003, p. 13). These languages portray a journalist as taking sides and making the other side seem impossible to negotiate with, which tends to prolong the conflict. A journalist that is conflict-sensitive will therefore identify and label people what they are called either before the emergence or during the conflict.

However, due to the nature of the news media, conflict discourse is often not exhaustive because news reporting does not capture the entire life circle of a particular conflict situation (Eti, 2009). The process of approaching conflict from a holistic perspective called 'conflict mapping' (Woodhouse & Miall, 2005); creates an understanding of the origins, nature, dynamics, and possibilities for resolution of the conflict (Wehr, 1979). Conflicts attract intense media coverage and attract viewership. Media covers exclusive and bizarre scenes, exaggerates casualty figures without credible and reliable sources, given conflicting stories, uses chilling and gory photographs (Moeller, 2009). Such media coverage requires greater analytical depth and skills to avoid contributing to further violence or overlooking peace-building initiatives. Conflict-sensitive journalism involves recognizing that, "the role and responsibility of reporting on conflict represents an expansion of journalism practice but not a radical change" (Ross 2009, p. 14). The media has a responsibility to influence public opinion, especially during conflict.

The media's responsibility is not just about reporting bare facts, but it is also about taking responsibility for what happens after reporting the news. The lack of trust between warring parties is a major factor that media can play a role in, by reducing suspicion, digging into issues, and revealing facts. Media can also present news that offers resolution by airing examples from other places and explaining local efforts at reconciliation (Howard, 2008). Conflict-sensitive journalism advocates for a more responsible and responsive media that presents balanced reports and not only what is known (Ross, 2003). Journalists need to report well-researched facts, in a non-biased way and without contributing to conflict (Waheed, 2009). Journalists should use their skills of conflict analysis to report based on the standards of accuracy, truth-seeking, objectivity, balance, and fairness (Jimoh & Kayonde, 2014). As such, the journalists are aware that news sources can choose certain facts to tell the media or use the media to influence the public's view of the conflict (Waheed, 2009).

Media coverage of a conflict can be destructive for a community, promote fear and violence or it can be constructive by making citizens better informed, and possibly safer by reporting on efforts to promote conflict reduction (Lynch & McGoldrick, 2010). A conflict-sensitive journalist applies conflict analysis and searches for new voices and new ideas about the conflict (Howard, 2008). Such journalists report on who is trying to resolve the conflict, look closely at all sides, and report on how other conflicts were resolved. Conflict-sensitive journalists choose their words carefully.

Understanding conflict-sensitive journalism in the Kenyan context

Since the introduction of multiparty politics in 1992, Kenyan elections have witnessed the violence of varying shades (Fjelde & Hoglund, 2018). Electoral violence is not uniquely Kenyan but a staple of the elections cycle (Makinen, & Kuira, 2008). The media in Kenya focuses more on divisive negative issues rather than on things that can unite a people who remain splintered by the legacies of the past election violence that left unforgettable scars (Rabuogi 2019). The media also take sides in the reporting of contentious political issues due to factors such as media ownership, advertising, and government regulations. Media houses such as NTV, KTN, and Citizen TV got in trouble during the 2017 elections after defying the government order not to air the "swearing-in" of the opposition leader Raila Odinga as the "Peoples President" and got suspended (Okoye et al., 2019). These media houses were suspended for covering the events of the swearing-in. The government argued that the television stations were yanked off the air for reasons connected with national security and to save the country from public ridicule of the international community.

The journalists were censored from covering that event, this made it hard for the media to perform its traditional role. In such conflict situations, not only do journalists work in a highly charged, politicized, and violent environment, but they continue to answer to their editors, managers, and media owners who may have their stakes in the conflict and/or its outcome (Lynch & McGoldrick, 2007). In the case of the swearing-in, government regulations and media ownership had a significant role on how journalists covered that news story. It is important, therefore to consider, the independence of the media for there is immense variation and complexity that have implications on conflict-sensitive journalism (Rabuogi, 2019). Media sustainability, a lack of resources and access to information for fair and impartial reporting, regulatory and legislative environment that restrict movement or shut down media outlets may be significant barriers to conflict-sensitive journalism (Okoye et al, 2019). Such structural constraints have resulted in partisan news reporting in a country that is already fractured politically along ethnic lines.

Conflict-sensitive journalism asks tough questions and seeks out the real meaning of what warring parties say, looks beyond the leaders' interests and seeks the larger groups' interests (Howard 2008). At the end of the day, journalists must remember that people are at the heart of any story – they are the story, they produce the story, and they consume the story and react to the story (lynch, 2006). Therefore, when the media prints or airs stories in their raw form, incendiary rhetoric made by politicians, the media becomes an accessory to the hate speech crimes committed by such politicians because the effect of such speeches would be reduced if the media acted responsibly by self-censoring (Rabuogi 2019). Such was the case of the violence in the 2007 elections in Kenya. Mbeke, Okello-Orlale, and Ugangu (2010) claim that journalists, editors, and owners are politically co-opted and openly showed editorial bias. The conflict was reported differently leading to increased tension and introducing the need to launch negotiations (Kempf, 2005).

The media council provides the code of conduct for journalists and media houses that govern the work of journalists during conflicts but the conformity to it is problematic. Still, the editorial policies are also strongly tied to safeguarding their business interests to the extent that some stories are censored, altered, or rejected for other interests, if not they are sensationalized to sell more copies (Rabuogi 2019). As a result, there has been formulaic and themed reportage devoid of substance that has undermined the code and discipline of journalism in Kenya.

Code of Conduct for the Kenya journalists

The Media Act, Chapter 3 of the Laws of Kenya enacted in 2007 provides for, among other things, the conduct and discipline of journalists and the media. The Second Schedule of the Act provides a code of conduct. The following four extracts are relevant in conflict-sensitive journalism: The first one is covering ethnic, religious, and sectarian conflict news, views, or comments on ethnic, religious, or sectarian disputes should be published or broadcast after proper verification of facts and presented with due caution and restraint in a manner which is conducive to the creation of an atmosphere congenial to national harmony, amity, and peace. The second extract is on Accuracy and Fairness as a fundamental objective of a journalist. The journalist shall report all sides of the story wherever possible; they will be fair, accurate, and unbiased. Comments shall be obtained from anyone who is mentioned in an unfavorable context, provocative and alarming headlines should be avoided. Headings containing allegations made in statements should either identify the body or the source making them or at least carry quotation marks. Journalists should treat all subjects with respect and dignity, show compassion to victims of crime or tragedy, seek to understand their diversity, inform the public without bias or stereotype, and present analytical reporting based on professional perspective, not a personal bias.

The third extract is on how and when confidential sources should be used. Confidential sources are to be used only when it is clearly in the public interest to gather or convey important information or when a person providing information might be harmed; (b) clearly label opinion and commentary; (c) use technological tools with skill and thoughtfulness, avoiding techniques that skew facts, distort reality, or sensationalize events. Unnamed sources should not be used unless the pursuit of the truth will best be served by not naming the source who should be known by the editor and reporter. When the material is used in a report from sources other than the reporter's these sources should be indicated in the story for integrity reasons (Constitution of Kenya, 2010).

The fourth extract on conflict journalism is Obscenity, Taste, and Tone in Reporting. Publication of photographs showing mutilated bodies, bloody incidents, and abhorrent scenes should be avoided unless the publication or broadcast of such photographs will serve the public interest. The media should apply caution in the use of pictures and names and should avoid publication when there is a possibility of harming the persons concerned. Manipulation

of pictures in a manner that distorts reality should be avoided. Pictures of grief, disaster, and those that embarrass and promote sexism should be discouraged. The media should avoid presenting acts of violence, armed robberies, banditry, and terrorist activities in a manner that glorifies such antisocial conduct. The print media should not allow writings that encourage or glorify social evils, warlike activities, ethnic, racial, or religious hostilities. Quoting persons making derogatory remarks based on ethnicity, race, creed, color, and sex should be avoided. Racist or negative ethnic terms should be avoided (Constitution of Kenya, 2010).

METHODOLOGY

The researcher analyzed the media coverage of the 2013 elections in Kenya by focusing on print media newspapers' reportage on election conflicts. The scope of this study was editions of *The Daily Nation and The Standard newspapers.* The actual population of the study was purposely picked from stories published on the 2017 elections. The total sample size was arrived at by adopting a systematic sampling technique which, Nwodu (2006) noted, is done by establishing a sampling interval and using such interval to select samples from the entire population. The main instrument used was a coding sheet and coding scheme to analyze the articles on 2017 election violence from the two main newspapers in Kenya. A total of 40 editions of the two newspapers (The Daily Nation and Standard Newspaper) were selected and analyzed to discover the volume, direction, space, and prominence given to news items on the conflicts.

In order to have a fair and balanced representation, the dependent variables were picked from different news items including News stories, Feature stories and News analyses. The dependent variable was the extent to which conflict-sensitive journalism was displayed in the two newspapers (Headlines, Placement, Size, news story, Date of publication). News items placement (position) in the newspapers were assigned attention score thus: Frontpage main story = 5 points, Frontpage sub-story = 4 points, Back page main story = 3 points, Back page sub- story = 2 points, Inside pages stories = 1 point. The periods of analysis were between 8th -14th August 2017; 2nd -5th September 2017; 26th -30th October 2017; 30th January -3rd February 2018. Table 1 below provides the details of the news story.

Daily Nation	Standard Newspaper	Total
8th August	8th August	2
9th August	9th August	2
10th August	10th August	2
11th August	11th August	2
12th August	12th August	2
13th August	13th August	2
14th August	14th August	2
2nd September	2nd September	2
3rd September	3rd September	2
4th September	4th September	2
5th September	5th September	2
26th October	26th October	2
27th October	27th October	2
28th October	28th October	2
29th October	29th October	2
30th October	30th October	2
30th January	30th January	2
1st February	1st February	2
2nd February	2nd February	2
3rd February	3rd February	2
20 Issues	20 Issues	40 Issues

Table 1: Summary of selected newspaper issue

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

The dependent variable (News items) was measured by seeking answers to the kind of news items published about the election violence in both newspapers (The Daily Nation, and The Standard Newspaper). There was a total of 92 news items (47 from the Daily Nation and 45 from the Standard Newspaper). The study found three kinds of news items including News story, Feature Story, and News analyses. See table 2 below.

Kinds of News Items	Daily Nation	Standard Newspaper	Total	Percentage
News Story	36	30	66	71.7
Feature Story	8	10	18	19.6
News Analysis	3	5	8	8.7
Total	47	45	92	100

Table 2: Types of news items on election conflicts

The findings reveal that the highest number of news items was a news story, which had 66 stories (36 from Daily Nation, and 30 from the Standard Newspaper). There were 18 devoted feature stories (eight stories by Daily Nation and 10 stories by Standard Newspaper), there was eight news analysis (three by Daily Nation and five by Standard Newspaper). From table 2 above, out of the 92 news stories published, Daily Nation gave the highest importance to election conflict by publishing 47 news items, while the Standard newspaper published 45 news items. On the back page, Daily Nation published 12 items, while the Standard published only six news items. The two newspapers mainly focused on straight news and less attention to news analysis which is an opportunity to look deeply from different angles at a news theme or issue of interest to readers who may not be in the news. Daily Nation reported straight news totaling 36, and The Standard 30. On the contrary, Daily Nation published three news analyses and The Standard published 5 respectively. The total News stories published by the two newspaper was 71.7%, Feature story were 19.6%, and 8.7% was News analysis.

Source of News	Daily Nation	Standard Newspaper	Total
Views of all parties	17	13	30
Views of one party	9	6	15
Journalist observation	10	4	14
News agency	10	4	14
Government source	14	5	19
Total	63	29	92

Table 3: Source of information in conflict-sensitive journalism

Table 3 above reveals the extent to which the two newspapers (Daily Newspaper and Standard Newspaper) practiced conflict-sensitive journalism in their coverage of the 2017 election violence. The findings indicate that there were five main sources of news including journalists, news agencies, government, main political party, and other political parties. show that both newspapers, with 30 reflect views of all parties involved in the conflicts. Sources of news from the government were 19, News agency was 14, Journalist sources were 14, while views of one party used by the two newspapers were 15, 30 items were views from all parties. Based on the findings on the kinds of news items published about the 2017 election violence, it is evident that the source of information determined the level of attention given to the conflict. The media played a useful tool that provides safe spaces for politicians with divergent views to debate issues constructively and by extension, allow citizens to have a better understanding of governance and how democracy works. However, the two newspapers were partially conflict-sensitive and reflect plurality about the conflict as substantial sources of their facts were based on journalists' observation and views of one party involved in the conflict. The danger of this is that the information disseminated is not necessarily a blueprint of the original story. For instance, at the heart of the political crisis in January 2018, the media sustained, among others, the narrative that there were divisions in the National Super Alliance (NASA) coalition to the extent that NASA leaders threatened to ask their supporters to boycott Nation Media Group's products (Rabuogi 2019).

Category of News	Daily Nation	Standard Newspaper	Total
Positive	5	12	17
Negative	39	28	67
Neutral	4	4	8

| Total | 47 | 45 | 92 |

Table 4: Kinds of news items on election violence

Out of the 92 stories covered by the two newspapers, 17 of them were positive, 67 stories were negative and 4 stories were neutral. This means that media played a role in setting the agenda and framing of the election conflict. The exposure to the media coverage could have escalated the violent behaviors among media audiences. Balanced reporting is therefore critical in minimizing the effects of the conflicts. The adjectives used were conflicting, they included words such as brutal, cruel, heinous, and barbaric. There was also the use of victimizing words such as devastated, defenseless, and pathetic. By use of such words, the emotion of the journalist takes center stage and is viewed to be taking sides in the conflict. The use of violent language could have led to the escalation of violence.

CONCLUSIONS

The media plays a key role in balanced reporting, agenda-setting, and framing during conflicts. The media is the channel through which parties to the conflict, communicate, build trust between conflicting parties and the public, counteract misinformation, analyze, and help identify the underlying interests or issues. Balanced and factual reporting of a conflict helps in minimizing the escalation of a conflict (Jeong, 2009). The journalist must therefore explain the conflict, deconstruct, and find out the real agendas which are the truth of the war. The language they use must be clear, unambiguous, and to the point. Journalists must interrogate through research, the different dynamics involved in the conflict to better inform their audience.

RECOMMENDATION

During conflicts, it is important for journalists to seek views from all parties involved in the conflict. Journalists must seek to understand the conflict, history, issues, and parties involved, seek divergent views and sources of information to strengthen and validate the process of crisis reporting so that all stories can be put in proper context. A truthful and objective media coverage of conflicts sets the standards, brings out the critical role of the media. Through its power and reach, there is a need for responsible and fact-based communication. There is also a need to build the capacity of journalists and encourage government based on the rule of law that upholds justice and human rights. The media should provide peace interventions that reinforce shared identities between opposing groups rather than differences

Conflict of Interest

Authors declare no conflict of interest.

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