Daily Trust and *Punch* Conflict Reporting and Portrayal of Persons with Disabilities: Implications for Media Mainstreaming Policies and Social Equity

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Abstract

This paper investigated the trend in conflict reporting with the aim of examining the portrayal of PWDs in news narratives. The paper adopted the framing theory to explain the subjectivity of news framing and prioritisation of issues in conflict reporting. It utilised mixed-method approaches including quantitative content analysis of two national dailies (Punch and Daily Trust) for a one-year period (January-December, 2023) and qualitative in-depth interviews to highlights the multi-dimensional challenges of individuals with disabilities in mainstream narratives and the need for inclusion in conflict reporting. Data of the study were analysed using both statistical and thematic analysis to examine the representation of PWDs in conflict reporting and their portrayal in news narratives. The paper found that there is still lack of disability presence in conflict reporting by Nigerian media, and also that PWDs are mostly portrayed as tragic victims during conflicts reporting. It further found that lack of access to scene of conflict is a major reason why PWDs are not visible in news media narratives. The study therefore recommends that media organisations should make it a policy to mainstream PWDs in news reporting with a view to promoting an equitable society that guarantees their rights and well-being during armed conflict situations.

Keywords: Conflict Reporting, Media, Security, Persons with Disabilities and Social Equity

Introduction

The portrayal of Persons with Disabilities (PWDs) in news narratives about conflicts is a complex and distinct area in media study. In recent years, inclusive representation of PWDs in media has gained attention among academia and has gone beyond conventional considerations of gender and ethnicity to include discussions on ways in which they are portrayed in the context of dispute, emergencies and mainstream news stories. In today's info-centric world where the media have the potential to influence society, shape certain beliefs and narratives about people, the visibility of PWDs in news narratives and how they are portrayed in conflict-related news articles raises concerns about the moral issues, societal ramifications and the possible influence of public opinion especially when they lack the power to tell their own stories which often result to

misrepresentation and stereotypical narratives that negatively portray their identity.

Over the years, the media have become the leading source of information not only for individual but also for community in obtaining a picture of reality about their world (Humeir and Nurbaya, 2017). In painting the picture of these realities therefore, too often, the narratives of dominant groups over-shadow those of marginalised people in media narratives which likely results to underrepresentation of marginalised communities leading to stereotypes and negative portrayal. Clement and Bigby (2009) contend that the physical condition of PWDs may affect how they participate in certain societal activities which in a way tend to limit or exclude them from media narrative. Conversely, when marginalised groups are absent from media discourse, misconception and prejudice about them can easily be formed.

Although, the primary role of the media is to inform, educate and entertain, the function of the media are not only restricted to these roles because their messages may likely contain frames that provide thematically reinforced clusters of judgment or facts. According to Power (2004), the extent to which marginalised groups like PWDs are represented in society, and the extent to which their characteristics and needs are understood by the general population may well be influenced by media framing. Media framing is how issues or events are placed and reported by the media in a certain perspective. Unarguably, due to certain societal barriers, majority of the general population obtain information about PWDs from media sources rather than through interpersonal contacts (Sieff, 2003). Therefore, whatever perceptions people hold about PWDs are based on information obtained from the media which largely depend on the frames used to communicate information about them even during armed conflict situation.

Across the geopolitical zones of Nigeria, the dynamic nature of conflicts and its impact on society have shaped the media landscape and how it is being reported. Given the complex nature of conflicts and its impact on societal well-being, conflict reporting has become a critical part of news reporting as communities are now seeking opportunities to better tell their story in the media with a view to paint picture of their own reality (Daltatu & Tafida, 2019).

During a security situation, diverse voices and interests are represented in the media, it is called media mainstreaming. Media mainstreaming describes how differentviewpoints, opinions and representations are incorporated into

mainstream media content to ensure that media platforms accurately represents the diversity of society. Abwao (2018) reveals that the voices of PWDs are suppressed and not mainstreamed into media, hence their visibility in news narratives is less, and therefore disabling stereotypes still continue to saturate the media. The 2006 Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) requires state parties to ensure that stereotypes related to PWDs are combated through media portrayal of PWDs in a manner consistent with respect for human rights. The CRPD was signed and ratified by Nigeria in 2007, and went ahead to enact the Discrimination Against Persons with Disabilities (Prohibition) Act. Based on this Act, mainstreaming PWDs would therefore require inclusive and equitable representations of PWDs in news, entertainment and other media narratives.

This paper therefore establishes the framework for investigating the complex relationship between PWDs visibility in news narratives and conflict reporting, probing ways in which the media can influence policy discussions by refuting stereotypes, and foster a more inclusive understanding of PWDs in public discourse with a view to promoting an equitable society that guarantees their rights and well-being in armed conflict situations.

Objectives of the Study

1. To examine visibility of PWDs in news narratives on conflict reporting
2. To know how PWDs are portrayed by the media in conflict reporting
3. To find out why media rarely mainstream issues of PWDs in conflict reporting.

Framing of Disability in News Media

Without doubt, the media play a major role in shaping public perceptions about a given phenomenon. People get information about what is happening around them through the media except for those they witnessed. The media narrate stories about issues including those related to disabilities through media frames. According to D'Angelo and Kuypers (2010), frames are structures that help in presenting and understanding of news, and serve as guidelines for categorising information so as to communicate it effectively to the audience. Through framing, media construct a subjective picture of reality by selecting and restructuring information in a way that makes sense to them and their audiences.

Alsewaiah (2021) explains that the portrayals of PWDs in newspapers are infrequent such that disabled community becomes invisible to the public domain. Recent studies have also shown that disability stories are hardly covered by the

news media, and when they do, the narratives are negative and offensive (Ellis & Goggin 2015; Worrell, 2018). Wälivaara (2018) equally observes that PWDs are only visible in the media except when the issue directly concerns them. Also, Burns and Haller (2015) note that media texts are a major way people without disabilities learn about PWDs and their community. Thus, due to continuous isolation from wider society as a result of architectural, social and institutional barriers, Ogundola (2013) argued that PWDs do not always get the opportunity to tell their own story, as such, media reports about them may not be a true representation of them and may not reflect their real situations. Since the media mirror how the world is perceived and the way people live their lives, the infrequent representation of the disabled community in social discourse and their visibility in the media is a concern that should be addressed.

Through agenda-setting and framing, news media can raise awareness, incite a general debate on disability issues, and shape perceptions of the lives of PWDs who remain largely invisible in society (Abwao & Mishra, 2021). Since the news media are important source through which the public receive information about disability, how the media present disability through the stories they tell about the disabled communities can possibly influence public opinion about disability issues and cultural representations of PWDs (Haller et al., 2012). Thus, increased representation of PWDs in the media can play a crucial role in combating the prejudice of negative stereotype about them (Ellis & Goggin, 2015).

Studies conducted in the 20th century framed disability in terms of tragedy, charity, pity, and struggle and accomplishment (Biklen, 1986). Also, PWDs have been framed using supercrip trope where they are seen as having extraordinary abilities often to an unrealistic extent. More recent studies have underscored similar problems in portrayal and framing of disability who are portrayed as either victims, heroes, villains, fools, and as a threat, unable to adjust, unable to be cared for, and people who should not have survived (Haller & Zhang, 2014; Worrell, 2018). Recently, the media have persistently used inspirational supercrip trope in representation of disability, that way they avoid discussion about other critical issues like accessibility and other issues that may tend to have financial implications (Haller & Zhang, 2014).

While there are still prejudicial stereotypes of PWDs in the media, there is now a shift in news coverage where disability rights frame are becoming more prevalent in media coverage. Teng and Joo (2020) explain that prejudiced information or journalists views shape the mainstream media and cause the audience to believe

stereotypes about the disable community. The subjective construction of meaning by the media is a major reason for biases as journalists select and restructure information that creates a specific meaning to them and their audience alike (Abwao, 2018). Mainstreaming disability will therefore help shape news narratives and factor disability issues, perspectives, and experiences into policies, programmes, media coverage, and societal attitudes rather than treating it as separate entity. Mick (1996) contends that framing may not be a result of malicious intent, however, the failure of the media to craft and portray PWDs with limited information about them often lead to difficulty in public understanding of disability-related issues which negates the principle of equal rights and participation of PWDs in society and media discourse.

Therefore, the presence of bias in news reporting prevents the audience from getting an ideal picture of the circumstances surrounding a person's experiences with disability, and has persistently created negative stereotypes and biases about PWDs in news narratives (Gold & Auslander, 1999). This negative stereotype about PWDs may tend to have an implication on media mainstreaming policy and the representation of PWDs in conflict reporting.

Disability and Conflict: Towards an Inclusive Reporting

The World Health Organisation, (WHO) has estimated that 15% of global population lives with a disability (WHO, 2011). Aaron, Lane and Barth (2014) quote the Center for Disability Studies, United States of America (USA) that about 16% of all disabilities are war and conflict related. Since most wars are low intensity conflict, they tend to disable people rather than kill them thus, continuously increase the number of people disabled from the conflict. During conflict situation, people most time are forced to flee area of violence, and PWDs could likely be at risk of being harmed. According to a study by Human Rights Watch in 2019, PWDs would often stay behind during conflict due to difficulties in fleeing to terrains that are difficult to access and thereby complicate efforts by their families or neighbour's to help them escape. Kun-Buczko (2019) explains that emergency situation like conflict and natural disaster can increase the number of people likely to experience disabilities as a result of new injuries. He argued that during emergencies, PWDs are often not considered in the planning, assessment, design, and delivery of humanitarian relief thus, they are among the most marginalised and excluded group of the population affected by the armed conflict.

The Convention on the Rights of Disabled People (CRDP) is a paradigm shift that provides a human rights-based approach on ways disabilities should be viewed in society. It also focuses on the removal of barriers to the inclusion and participation of PWDs in society which requires "States Parties to identify and remove barriers in society for people with disabilities and to harmonize social and economic support to facilitate the provision of equal opportunities for them (CRDP, 2006)." Furthermore, Article 11 of the convention serves as a link between traditional areas of civil protection in international humanitarian law and a new area of human rights for PWDs which calls for the extension of traditional provisions on the protection of the civilian population to include PWDs with reference to the protection of their needs. It states that "States Parties shall take in accordance with their obligations under international law, including international humanitarian law and international human rights law, all necessary measures to ensure the protection and safety of persons with disabilities in situations of armed conflict, humanitarian emergencies and occurrence of natural disasters."

In 2019, the United Nations Security Council for the first time adopted a resolution on the protection of PWDs in armed conflicts. By this resolution, the Security Council urged all parties to armed conflict to allow and facilitate safe, timely and unhindered humanitarian access to all people in need of assistance as well as to prevent violence and abuses against civilians in such situations including those involving killing and maiming, abduction and torture, rape and other forms of sexual violence both in conflict and post-conflict situations. The United Nations Security Council further called on State Parties to comply with obligations of the 2006 CRDP with a view to eliminating discrimination and marginalisation on the basis of disability in situations of armed conflict (United Nations, 2019).

State of Empirical Literature

Media coverage of disability issues is critical to reinforce and challenge stereotypes or exclusion of PWDs in media narrative. In recent time, disability issues have been receiving attention in the media, however, there are still elements of stereotype in some of the narratives even when they tend to be positive. Zhang and Haller (2013) investigated the impact of positive and negative media representation of disability on PWDs and found that positive media representation, even when perceived as unrealistic, led to the affirmation of disabilities while negative media representation led to denial of disability identity among PWDs.

Similarly, Njogu (2009) found that the Kenyan media provided infrequent coverage of disability issues in the media. The study found that PWDs are often portrayed only when they have accomplished some outstanding feat, are seeking medical assistance, or their disability is considered to be of a rare kind. The study also revealed that PWDs tend to receive media coverage on commemorative days such as the World Disability Day, and even such media coverage are usually accompanied by an organization official or a medical personnel. Thus, one hardly gets to hear PWDs speak, and when they do, what they say is debated by experts which limits public understanding of disability from the viewpoint of PWDs.

Also, Goethalsa, Mortelmansb, Van den Bulckc, Van den Heurckd and Van Hove (2020) study on framing analysis of media discourse revealed nine dominant frames and three counter-frames used in portraying PWDs in media narratives. Above all, the study found that the media placed more emphasis on the suffering, caring, fixing and overcoming the disability which is the hallmark of the traditional model of disability that negates the principles of social justice, equity and fair representation of PWDs in line with media mainstreaming.

Furthermore, Abwao and Mishra (2021) also reveal greater use of traditional frames than progressive frames when reporting PWDs. These traditional frames even though are important in highlighting problems faced by disabled individuals, they contend that it can also perpetuate the notion that PWDs are a charitable case, a burden, and dependent on the government and society for economic support rather than one who can live independently, be productive members of society, and have rights.

To dispel this sentiment about PWDs, it is important that newsrooms include disability perspectives in coverage even though not directly related to disability by consulting advocates and disability-led organisations to address their own stereotype about PWDs. This way it will encourage inclusive reporting with a view to portray PWDs as multidimensional subjects, sources, and leaders rather than objects of pity, charity and medical treatment thereby, recognizing disability diversity beyond physical disabilities

Framing Theory

The framing theory credited to Erving Goffman, explains how the media shape perceptions by framing information in a way, and how the presentation of such information influences audience understanding and interpretation of event (Goffman, 1974). The framing theory framework provides insight into how the

media focus on specific events by placing them in specific reference areas known as frames. D'Angelo (2017) explains that media frames are either in form of written, spoken, graphical, or visual message modality used by journalists to contextualise a topic, such as a person, event, episode, or issue. McQuail (2010) notes that framing reflects the position a media source takes from political, social, or cultural perspectives. Thus, depending on the agenda a media organization pursues, its framing of issues will be tailored towards such an agenda to influence the public in that direction (Lawlor and Tolley, 2017).

Research had shown that media frames have been applied in the coverage of disability issues since they are also a community of interest that can also benefit or suffer depending on the type of frame used in portraying them, which may follow destructive patterns that could lead to the formation of unfavorable stereotypes and biases (Abwao, 2018). McQuail (2010) also explains that frames contribute to creating the subjective and fragmentary sense of awareness about a particular topic, which prevents audiences from constructing a wholesome and fair view of the population and the obstacles that these people encounter in everyday life. A study by Ogundola (2013) that focused on the portrayal of PWDs in Nigerian Newspapers using content analysis, argued that framing theory was significant for the study on disability presentation in newspapers because it contributed to the research on disability presentation by offering insight into the distorted reality via manipulation in story creation delivered through media messages.

Haller et al (2012) differentiate between negative framing of issues from positive framing arguing that some journalists and media sources create positive frames from which PWDs benefit. Cobbinah, (2013) notes that negative frames connected to PWDs rely on stereotypes that fuel misrepresentation of the community, and which see them as objects of pity. Also, certain news reports have also frames of danger and burden associated with other people's interactions with the disabled community (Tang and Bie, 2016). Significantly, the presence of positive frames has also emerged in modern media. The emergence of positive frames of disability rights and social justice empowers PWDs to advocate equal representation and unbiased portrayal in media narratives (Haller et al., 2012). Although more negative frames exist than positive ones, this stuy therefore identifies these frames and the trope frequently used to portray PWDs by journalists in conflict reporting.

Methodology

The Mixed-Method approach was adopted for the study using quantitative content analysis and qualitative In-depth interview. Combining the mixed approach offers a more comprehensive understanding of the issue being studied. Content analysis of two national dailies, *Daily Trust* and *Punch* newspapers published from January 1st to December 31st 2023 was carried out. The two newspapers were chosen because of their nationwide circulation as well as their regional interest in news coverage. The population of the study is the 730 editions of the two dailies. The Krejcie and Morgan (1970) sample size determination table was used to determine and select the sample size for the study. Thus, by using the table, 254 editions of both newspapers were chosen to determine their coverage of conflicts reportage and the representation of PWDs in media narratives.

According Chilisa (2012), the sample size of 254 is good enough for a study of this nature because it is the representativeness of a sample that matters and not its largeness. The 254 editions of the newspapers were divided between the two dailies, and each had a total of 127 issues for the year as sample for the study. Only security and conflict related issues in the newspapers were content analysed to examine the visibility of PWDs and the frame/tropes used by media in conflict reporting. The units of analyses were straight news reports, features, editorials, pictures, cartoons, letter to the editor, and opinions on conflicts. The content categories are visibility, and narrative on PWDs. To ensure representativeness, a systematic sampling technique was employed where the first newspaper was randomly selected and subsequently a one day interval was given to cover a representative portion of the population without needing to individually select every member of the population for the study. The coding sheet was the instrument used to collect data. The code sheet contains the unit of analysis used by the researcher. News reports that are conflict and security related were selected to determine the representation of PWDs and how they were portrayed in the narratives. Five frames, relating to conflict and disability developed by scholars were adopted for the study. They are tragic victims, medicalization, dependency stereotype, supercrip and ableism frames. These frames were studies in terms of whether they were used to portray PWDs in conflict reportage by the journalists of the two newspapers.

For the qualitative interview, six respondents were selected for interview using the snowball non-probability sampling technique. These participants were selected based on their experience in conflict and disability related issues so as to provide insights into individual experiences and perspectives. And, also to find

out, among participants why PWDs are rarely mainstreamed in media narratives during armed conflicts. Two participants were selected each among journalists, PWDs and media management experts. They were selected based on their experience in conflict reporting and involvement in conflict related issues. The data obtained were analysed to determine the variations and similarities of participants' experiences and perspectives in conflict reporting, and why PWDs most often are not included in news narratives during conflicts. Significant quotes were identified to illustrate themes. The themes were defined and named to generate a clear description that captures each theme in order to provide a framework and understanding of data.

Data obtained from the study were analysed using both statistical and thematic analysis to analyse the visibility of PWDs in conflict reporting, their portrayal in news narratives and why they are rarely included in news narratives during armed conflicts. The results of the analyses of the data are presented in tables below.

Data Presentation

Table 1: Media Visibility of PWDs in Conflict Reports

Daily Trust Newspaper					
Content Categories	**Conflict Reports**	**%**	**PWDs Visibility**	**%**	**% of PWDs in Media Narratives**
News	169	83.3	14	77.8	8.3
Features	16	7.9	2	11.1	12.5
Editorials	5	2.5	1	5.5	20
Pictures	0	0	0	0	0
Cartoons	0	0	0	0	0
Opinions	11	5.4	0	0	0
Letter to the editor	2	0.9	1	5.5	50
Total	**203**	**100**	**18**	**100**	**8.9**

Table 2: Media Visibility of PWDs in Conflict Reports

The Punch Newspaper					
Content Categories	**Conflict Reports**	**%**	**PWDs Visibility**	**%**	**% of PWDs in Media Narratives**
News	178	80.9	17	70.8	9.6
Features	21	9.5	4	16.7	19
Editorials	7	3.2	2	8.3	28.6
Pictures	2	0.9	0	0	0
Cartoons	0	0	0	0	0
Opinions	7	3.2	0	0	0
Letter to the editor	5	2.3	1	4.2	20
Total	**220**	**100**	**24**	**100**	**10.9**

Data in tables 1 and 2 above show media visibility of PWDs in conflict reports. The results indicate the lack of disability presence in news narratives during armed conflicts.

Table 3: Framing of PWDs in Conflicts Reports

Daily Trust				*The Punch*	
Framing of PWDs	**Frequency**	**%**		**Frequency**	**%**
Tragic victim	11	47.8		15	44.1
Medicalization	1	4.3		4	11.8
Supercrip	0	0		0	0
Dependencystereotype	5	21.7		8	23.5
Ableism	6	26.1		7	20.6
Total	**23**	**100**		**34**	**100**

In event of disability coverage in conflict reporting, PWDs have been framed using five tropes as shown in table 3 above. Most often as indicated in the table, PWDs are usually portrayed as victims in news narratives in conflict reports with an average of 45% as by both *Daily Trust* and *Punch* newspapers. While there are no reports indicating that PWDs did anything extraordinary to stay safe during armed conflicts (supercrip), other reports revealed that they depend on support (*Daily Trust* 21.7%, *Punch* 23.5%) and advocate inclusivity in news narratives during armed conflicts.

Table 4: Reasons for sideling PWDs in Conflict Report

Themes	**Frequency**	**%**
Access to conflict zone	11	34.3
Focus on Sensational aspects of conflicts	9	28.1
Social Biases	5	15.6
Lack of awareness and training	7	21.9
Total	**32**	**100**

Media focus on sensational aspects of conflicts (34.3%) is a major reason why PWDs are often sidelined in news narratives. Thus, focusing on sensational aspects of the news during conflicts would mean less coverage for PWDs. Also, access to conflicts zones (28.1%) is another challenge for media coverage of PWDs in conflict reporting as journalists most times go to the scene of incidents after conflicts have been brought under control. Furthermore, some journalists may not have the requisite training in conflict reporting hence, often neglect PWDs in their coverage during armed conflicts.

Discussion of Findings

The study sought to find out how PWDs are portrayed and represented in the media during conflict reporting and its implications on media mainstreaming and social equity. The results of the analyses in table 1and 2 provide answer to objective 1 of the study which seeks to find out the representation of PWDs in news narratives during conflict situation. The results showed that with over 80% of conflicts reportage, the visibility of PWDs in news narratives is less than 15%. On the average, the visibility of PWDs in conflict reports in both the *Daily Trust* (8.9%) and *Punch* (10.9%) newspapers is less than 10%. This is to show that *Daily Trust* and *Punch* gave less attention disability issues during conflict situations. This justifies the narratives of dominant groups over-shadowing those of marginalized people in media narratives, thus leading to underrepresentation of marginalized communities stereotypes and negative portrayal (Humeir & Nurbaya, 2017).

The second objective of the study was answered in table 3 which sought to know how PWDs are framed or portrayed by the media during conflict reporting. During the period under study, *Daily Trust* (47.8%) and *Punch* (44.1%) portrayed PWDs as tragic victims during armed conflicts. Also, *Daily Trust* (21. 7%) and *Punch* (23.5%) reported that PWDs do depend on others for assistance during armed conflict. This implies that *Daily Trust* and *Punch* newspapers showed prejudice while reporting PWDs issues during conflict situation. Although there is now an improvement in news coverage where disability rights frame are becoming more prevalent in media coverage, this prejudice or journalists' views have continued to shape the mainstream media and cause the audience to believe stereotypes about the disable community (Teng & Joo, 2020).

Table 4 addresses the third objective of the study which sought to find out reasons why media rarely mainstream issues of PWDs in conflict reporting. Qualitative data from the in-depth interview revealed that journalists find it hard to go to the

scene of conflicts (34.4%). Most of them covering conflicts visit the scene of incidents after conflicts have ended. Also, in the heat of conflict, they may only break the news, only to inform the public of happenings, and even when they have the opportunity to report issues, PWDs may not be in the narrative. Furthermore, the focus on sensational aspect of conflict report by journalists (28.1%) is another reason why the media do not give priority to PWDs issues in conflict reporting. Others are social biases (15.6%), lack of awareness and training (21.9%) are also reasons why PWDs issues are not prominent in the media.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Although Nigeria has ratified the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and its operational protocol, and despite the enactment of the Discrimination Against Persons with Disabilities (Prohibition) Act, it remains to be seen whether the media would deliberately make it a policy to increase the representation of PWDs in it narratives. More so, that findings of this study revealed that the Nigerian media do not consider mainstreaming issues on PWDs important enough to give them the needed visibility either in editorial comments, depth feature stories in conflict reporting. Thus, given the significance of media mainstreaming, it is therefore imperative media organisations to be intentional and deliberate in mainstreaming issues around PWDs, as well as integrate their perspectives and experiences in news narratives, as this will help to increase visibility, promote inclusivity and challenge stereotypes related to disabilities. This may be so because when PWDs are regularly featured in the media in whatever format, it will contribute to a more diverse and representative portrayal of disability issues in society.

Therefore the study recommends that:

i. There is need for media organisations to make it a policy to deliberately increase the visibility of PWDs in news narratives especially in conflict.
ii. Media should promote positive story telling that challenge stereotype of PWDs as well as those that undermine their achievements in order to avoid biases.
iii. There is need for a conscious and deliberate effort by the media to report issues of PWDs in news narratives during armed conflicts rather than rely on other people's experiences to portray the views of PWDs.
iv. Journalists need to show bravery during conflict situation in order to avoid biases in their reportage of PWDs.

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