

NEWSPAPER REPORTAGE OF PRESIDENT OLUSEGUN OBASANJO AND VICE-PRESIDENT ATIKU ABUBAKAR POLITICO-PERSONAL CONFLICT IN NIGERIA

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Politico-personal conflict has been a recurrent problem of Nigerian politics since First Republic. Up to the early 1980s, several political conflicts with attendant violence and loss of lives and properties, which were rooted in politico-personal relationships, occurred in the country. The politico-personal conflict between former president Olusegun Obasanjo and the former Vice-President Atiku Abubakar was one of these conflicts. In this conflict and the crises that accompanied it, the mass media played important role as disseminators and conveyors of reports, images and analyses about political activities. This study focused on how selected newspapers reported the politico-personal conflict between Obasanjo and Atiku, and how these reporting styles contributed to conflict escalation and violence. All the sampled newspapers tended to ignore the ethics of professional reporting and social responsibility by allowing ownership influence and political consideration to colour their presentation and reportage of the conflict. Media need to develop the ability of being mediators in political conflicts and pay careful attention to their gate-keeping, agenda-setting and status-conferral roles in the political reporting process.

Keywords: political conflict, Nigerian politics, mass media, newspapers

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According to Popoola (2011:3), the observed role of the media in conflict situation appears non-detachable from Lasswell's (1948:14) framework of *surveillance of the environment* as one of the functions prescribed for, and expected of journalists and other key players in mass communication business. As amplified by Lasswell, the said surveillance entails policing and alerting members of a community to dangers and opportunities in the environment. In the context of surveillance of the environment and conflict reporting by the mass media therefore, if conflict is truly "a fight, a struggle, a disagreement between or among people with different ideas or beliefs, to be in opposition or disagreement over a matter or issue," as Gambo (2002:107) conceptualizes, then it appears a matter of expedience and necessity for the media to alert the society about the conflict, not just because of the need to mention the conflict and the parties to it, but more importantly the implications and consequences which such conflict may have for the peace of the environment. However, a meticulous review of scholarly works and research findings with respect to accuracy of reporting of conflict by the mass media shows that it may be fallacious sometimes to say that the media always handle conflict reporting with fairness, accuracy and justice, at least as expected of a socially responsible media. Frankly, if the allegations of distortion of contents and biased reporting as well as inaccuracy in reporting, put up against the media appear not to have been substantiated considerably in other conflict situations, there are seemingly scholarship evidences on the allegations as far as political conflict reporting by the mass media is concerned.

Gardner (2001:26) laments that since political leaders and warring factions are well aware of the power of the media, the tendency to manipulate the media to further their political agenda often manifest in conflict situations. Tehranian (1996:2) seems fortifying this indictment of the media by lamenting that:

In pursuit of the sensational, the scoop has come to define news. Peace, like war, is celebrated in the interest of profit and short term political gain. Politicians have come to recognize how essential mass mediated celebrations are to their own ambitions to power. As a result, peace tends to be short lived, temporary and tense.

Analysing this stance, Owens-Ibie (2002:33) avers that the fallout of this seeming engineering of content and manipulation of public space in the struggle for power through the instrumentality of the mass media is that 'truth becomes a casualty'. As Tehranian (1996:3) elaborates, there no longer is any serious attempt to provide an in-depth diagnosis of contexts. The focus of the media is on "the episodic and fragmentary accounts of the most dramatic moments, largely leaving out the preceding causes and antecedent consequences." Giving evidence on this, Isola (2002:3), comments that media perceptions of conflict

situations are most often wrong, resulting in negative influence on their contents. He laments that the media sometimes inadvertently report conflicts in ways that, conflicts, rather than being prevented are escalated. Adducing likely reasons for this questionable conflict reporting by the media, Isola, mentions the constraints of time and distance, as factors which appear militating against the possibility of thorough investigation and analysis of conflict theatres, before reporting such conflicts by the media. On the same frequency of thought, Gardner (2001:26) observes that in most cases, reporters are dispatched to cover a conflict without adequate time to study and understand the underlying history or context of the conflict at stake.

Consequently, seizing this undue advantage therefore by politicians, as Shaw (1996:47) depicts, in most of the violent political conflicts around the world, what the media report and interpret to the public about conflict situations are often coloured, packaged and dictated by politicians and elite groups according to their prejudices, beliefs and stereotypes, all in order to suit their interest. The result of all these, as Giner-Sorolla and Chalken (1994:165-180) write, is the reporting of only the horrific and dramatic incidents of atrocities of the conflict, with no explanation of the background histories and complexities of the conflict, thereby giving a one-sided or distorted view of events, which leads to conflict escalation. Giner-Sorolla and his associate attribute this ugly phenomenon to lack of neutrality and objectivity by the media, with attendant consequences of exposing the public to biased coverage of conflicting events, which may influence their (the public's) attitudes and feelings and thereby structure their behaviours in particular directions in certain conflicts. Scholarly questions that are best answered by empirically based research therefore are to be asked on what the relationship between the mass media and conflict reporting should be. Much earlier than now, Owens-Ibie had asked a few thought-provoking questions concerning how those responsible for public communication and education should respond to potential and actual conflict and the role journalists should play in covering conflict. He asks:

Should such professionals merely report, comment on and interpret it (conflict); or should they be actors in the resolution — or, more importantly, the prevention of conflict? In a mass mediated world, what are the moral and social responsibilities of journalists involved in reporting conflict situations?

A critical analysis of these questions and answers which they require, is apparently pointing to what constitutes socially responsible media, as advanced by Siebert, Peterson and Schramm (1956: 24) in their blueprint of the *Social Responsibility Theory of the Press*. Consequently, this study is devoted to evaluating newspaper reportage of politico-personal conflict between a former president of Nigeria, Olusegun Obasanjo and his vice Atiku

Abubakar. Germane to a scholarly articulation of the problem of this study is a conceptualization of politico-personal conflicts.

POLITICO-PERSONAL CONFLICTS

As conceptualized and explained in the Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary, Seventh Edition, the term 'politico' means 'politics relating to something' or 'something grossly rooted in politics'. Politico is exemplified further in the Chambers Twentieth Century Dictionary, as "noun and adjective combining form, denoting politics or political; as in politico-economics, politico-industrial, among others". Within this morphological framework therefore, and based on how every scholarly work such as this, is expected to be an original contribution to knowledge, by bringing about, new concepts, ideas and provocative submissions, the term 'politico-personal' is hereby conceptualized and coined in this study to mean interactions, associations and relationships between or among individuals, based on political interest and motives. Consequently, politico-personal conflicts appear as accounting for one of the main political conflicts in Nigeria when one considers how some individual politicians (often rich and influential) who had sponsored and possibly bank rolled candidates or contributed immensely to the electoral victory of candidates, engage in crises with their candidates as soon as such candidates win elections, because they (the benefactors) perhaps want to dictate governance to their beneficiaries. This trend, substantiates what Joseph (1996: 36) branded as *prebendalism* on one hand, and what scholars, political commentators and observers often describe as *godfatherism* on the other hand. These phenomena seem to have resulted in several violent political conflicts across Nigeria which stagnate Nigeria's political development. Joseph used the term *prebendalism* to describe the sense of entitlement that many people in Nigeria feel they have to the revenues of the Nigerian state. Perhaps drawing his insight from the *Catholic Encyclopedia* that conceptualizes a *prebend* as the "right of a member of chapter to his share in the revenues of a cathedral", Joseph describes and explains state offices as prebends that can be appropriated by officeholders, who use them to generate material benefits for themselves and their constituents and kin groups. Joseph laments:

Democratic politics and prebendal politics are two sides of the same coin in Nigeria; each can be turned over to reveal the other... The system of prebendal politics enables divergent groups and constituencies to seek to accommodate their interests... The system is often wasteful, unproductive... It contributes to the increasing affluence of the relative few, paltry gains for a large number and misery for the great majority of people. Since it is a self-justifying system which grants legitimacy to a pattern of persistent conflict, and since its modus operandi is to publicize ethnic, religious and linguistic differences, it serves to

make the Nigerian polity a simmering cauldron of irresolvable tension over which lid must regularly be clamped and just as regularly removed.

Prebendalism seems much prevalent in the political fabric of Nigeria. Apparently, this phenomenon is so stubbornly ingrained within the societies of Nigeria that little has been done to address it. Consequently, the extent of prebendalism's stranglehold on the Nigeria's political life is such that it prevents the nation from being able to practice democracy perfectly. Since the creation of the first Republic, because there have been a number of personality-induced political conflicts, which arose from prebendalism, and seem to have thwarted Nigeria's economic and political development. Obviously, a concomitant and direct consequence of prebendalism is *political godfatherism* which seems to have led to incidences of some politico-personal conflicts in Nigeria. The rate at which godfatherism in Nigerian politics appears growing has necessitated an empirical investigation of the phenomenon, as being reported by the Nigerian press. The influence wielded by individuals identified and recognized as political godfathers seems total and daunting. According to Okoye (2007: 1), the godfatherism phenomenon in the electoral process results from the commoditization of state power and the struggle to acquire it by the dominant political class. Using Nigeria as a reference, Okoye comments that the non-recognition of independent electoral candidates has made political parties a rare commodity to be bargained for by political aspirants. In his words, "those of them that are desperate to capture political offices they crave for, are often amenable to the conditionalities of those who possess the wherewithal to enable them achieve their political aspirations." In his commentary on political godfatherism, Ibrahim (2007:25), in Popoola(2011:81) describes the phenomenon as politics of sponsorship to political positions, control of political power, political patronage and the ultimate control of state treasury, personnel and resources. He exposes the characters of political godfathers by identifying them as men who have the power personally to determine both who gets nominated to contest elections and who wins in same elections. Ishiekwene (2004:3), in Popoola(2011:82), captures political godfatherism in Nigeria and declares, inter alia, that:

... Godfathers have in the most brazen manner hijacked the political machinery at all levels. It means then that what is called election in Nigeria is nothing but the expression of the narrowly defined will of a few dishonest individuals who feel that they have the power to manipulate the entire electoral process in favour of their anointed godsons.

Also, another form of politico-personal conflict is 'clash of interest' between or among individuals who may even belong to the same political caucus. It is a saying in the political realm that, "in politics, there is no permanent friendship nor enmity, the only permanent thing is interest." This implies that at any time, that there is harmony of interests,

there are bound to be peace, unity and tranquility. However, when interests collide, as inevitable in politics, what follows is conflict that may take several dimensions. In democratic Nigeria have been instances of politico-personal conflicts arising from the aforementioned factors, which appear plaguing the country's democracy when one considers the prominence of the parties involved in such conflicts, and the apparently sensitive positions occupied by such conflicting parties in government. Consequently, it is this brand of political conflict between the immediate former President of Nigeria, Olusegun Obasanjo and his Vice, Atiku Abubakar that this study seeks to examine how some newspapers in Nigeria reported.

STATEMENT OF PROBLEM

The power of the media in normal times, not to talk of situations of conflicts, has given rise to different perceptions of the mass media, especially in a developing society like Nigeria with disparate and competing interests. Media coverage of conflicts has, no doubt, drawn a spate of criticisms from various sections of the Nigerian polity. Elaborating on this, Pate (2002:141) remarks that over the years in Nigeria, there have been reported cases of unethical and professional misconducts among practising journalists and this unhealthy development which is not only peculiar to newspapers calls for serious attention. He laments that it is most disheartening today, that most of the so-called journalists are not practicing journalism of conscience but yellow journalism, which has been decried as "unethical and irresponsible brand of journalism given to hoaxes, altered paragraphs, screaming headlines, scoops, fraud and endless promotion of self". Pate states further that the press is known for "writing incomplete stories that do not cover sources, options and resolutions. Instead, they concentrate on conflict behaviour: 'who is doing what to whom with what effect'". Buttressing this point, Lee, Chan, and So (2004), in Isola(2008:51) posit that, journalists have been criticized for their tendency to merely juxtapose two competing claims without making any effort to look for the truth behind the claims. It is on this backdrop that this study is geared towards ascertaining the extent to which selected newspapers' reported politico-personal conflict between former president of Nigeria, Olusegun Obasanjo and his deputy, Atiku Abubakar. It is worth examining the reportage of the conflict because the media have the power to escalate conflicts with or without proposals for resolution and the way conflicts are reported sometimes, determines to a large extent how the audience will view and interpret the conflicts. If media contents promote conflict, what follows is public outcry which may result in violence and breakdown of law and order. Thus, democracy and national development will be truncated. For instance, when there is a conflict involving the president of a nation, or the governor of a state in Nigeria and another prominent individual

or personality, whose political formidability cannot be discountenanced, it is logical to see the president or the governor operating with political, emotional and psychological impediments and difficulties which may truncate development of the nation or state in various spheres and ramifications.

Politico-personal conflicts seem strong and potent enough to ignite and bring about other dimensions of political conflicts and even other types of conflict in Nigeria. Historically, as Babarinsa(2003:71) writes, the tumultuous crises in the old Western region of Nigeria had their antecedents in the catastrophic politico-personal conflict between Awolowo and Akintola. This conflict resulted in loss of many lives of the residents of the region as well as cataclysmic destruction of both public and private properties. Also, Babarinsa chronicled the political conflicts that took place in the south western part of Nigeria in the Second Republic. In his report, the personality-induced political conflicts between governor Ajasin and his deputy, Omoboriowo in the old Ondo State of Nigeria, as well as the conflict between governor Ige and his deputy, Afolabi, in the old Oyo State of Nigeria led to calamitous and tragic death of many people and devastating ruin of properties and belongings. Seemingly, the scars left by the political injuries inflicted by the conflicts, still mar and plague political contestations in the contemporary South-West geo- political zone of Nigeria. The political crises between the immediate former president of Nigeria Olusegun Obasanjo and his Vice Atiku Abubakar, both of the then ruling People's Democratic Party (PDP) of Nigeria, was seemingly almost becoming an ethnic feud between the Yoruba and Hausa ethnic people of Nigeria. Not only that, the face-off between the two political actors aggravated to the extent that the Vice-President decamped to another party called Action Congress (AC) which later became Action Congress of Nigeria(ACN) in June 2010. Atiku Abubakar contested on the platform of the party for the position of the President of Nigeria in the 2007 general elections. He failed at the polls. Even though, Atiku later returned to the People's Democratic Party (PDP) in 2010 so as to contest for the same position with the ticket of PDP in 2011 general elections, his decamping in the first instance was not without attendant effects. Perhaps intimidated by the political formidability and followership of Atiku Abubakar, the People's Democratic Party leadership with a said influence of the former president, was alleged of rigging and manipulating the 2007 general elections in Nigeria in favour of the ruling PDP. This implies that, political conflicts, consequent upon irregularities in 2007 general elections in Nigeria, were rooted in the Obasanjo — Atiku crises. In the commentaries of political analysts that appear not yet investigated empirically about the Obasanjo- Abubakar conflict, it is being posited that the two political actors, have literarily and practically instituted themselves as shadow parties in emerging political conflicts in Nigeria, so as to achieve their political goals and defend their political interest, thereby destructing the country's political order, in spite of the fact that both of them have relinquished political power. There are studies that have confirmed

media influence on effects of various kinds on the audience. Also, the media have been associated with violent behaviors among the audience in various settings. However, there is still a wide gap in knowledge on actual role of the media in political conflict situations, especially where it concerns politico-personal conflicts in emerging democracies. This study is aimed at filling part of this wide gap by focusing on the coverage of selected newspapers in respect of the Obasanjo and Abubakar politico-personal conflict in Nigeria.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

With a view to finding solution to the problems of this research, the following questions were formulated:

- (1) To what extent did the selected newspapers carry Obasanjo and Abubakar politico-personal conflict escalation stories?
- (2) To what extent did the selected newspapers carry Obasanjo and Abubakar politico-personal conflict de-escalation stories?
- (3) In what proportions were journalistic genres used for reporting the conflict?
- (4) Did the coverage of the conflicts vary in extent, categories, prominence and depth of treatment?
- (5) How socially responsible was the reportage of the conflict by selected newspapers?

PURPOSE, SIGNIFICANCE AND SCOPE OF THE STUDY

Given the above background, this study is aimed at widening the frontiers of knowledge with regards to media and conflict reporting. The purpose of this study is to critically examine the reportage of the politico-personal conflict between Obasanjo and Atiku by selected Nigerian newspapers. The study also seeks to ascertain how editorial items and journalistic materials were used in reporting the conflict. The study will also make conclusion on any relationship between reportage of politico-personal conflict and tendencies for escalation or de-escalation of the conflict. The study will also determine the importance attached to the reports in the dailies and also to determine the story approaches in which the reportage of politico-personal conflicts appeared more often.

It is being anticipated that the findings of this study will contribute to the body of empirical investigation on media and political conflict generally, and newspaper and

politico-personal conflict specifically. This study is imperative as it will produce a manual for journalists, media professionals, political commentators, political scientists, and peace and conflict scholars, among others, on how the press in Nigeria should report political conflict in socially-responsible manner.

There is no research work that is not without its peculiar limitations. The case to be studied is that of politico-personal conflict on the Nigerian political scene. This study is primarily meant to find how selected newspapers have reported President Olusegun Obasanjo and Vice-President Atiku Abubakar politico-personal conflict between 1999 and 2007 when the conflict took place in Nigeria. Five newspapers were selected for the study. These were *Nigerian Tribune*, *Daily Champion*, *Punch*, *Guardian* and *Daily Trust* newspapers. *The Nigerian Tribune* is the oldest surviving private newspaper in Nigeria. It was established in November, 1949 by Late Chief Obafemi Awolowo, a nationalist who hailed from Ogun State, in the South-West geo political zone of Nigeria. *Daily Champion* is a prominent Nigerian newspaper covering general news. It offers an insight into Nigerian politics and a host of other issues. This Newspaper was founded by Chief (Dr.) Emmanuel Iwuanyanwu, who hails from Imo State in the South Eastern geo-political zone of the country. The newspaper specializes in special coverage of issues in the eastern part of the country. *Daily Trust* newspaper is a private national newspaper based in Abuja; the seat of power and the proprietor hails from Katsina State, in the North-West geo political zone of Nigeria. *Guardian* is also a private newspaper based in Lagos. It gives national coverage of events. Owned by Alex Ibru, an indigene of Delta State, in the Sout-South geo-political zone of the country. The *Punch* is a private national newspaper based in Lagos. The paper gives a national in-depth coverage of news, issues and events; across the nation. The newspaper was established by Late Chief Olu Aboderin, who hailed from Oyo State, in the South-West geo political zone of Nigeria. It has made significant impact on the political and cultural scenes in Nigeria. It has been rated the mostly widely read newspaper in Nigeria. As expected of every research that is devoid of bias and sampling error, there is a strong rationale behind the choice of the five newspapers. First, even though the conflict between each pair of the principal actors on the Nigerian political scene was an irrefutable instance of personal vendetta, it is logical that any conflict involving individuals at apex of leadership and governance, which is grossly rooted in political interest, would have implications for societal peace, harmony, integration and development at large. Hence, newspapers to be chosen in this respect have to be national in their spread and circulation. This serves as the basis for the choice of the newspapers, which are rated as national newspapers by the Audit Bureau of Circulation (ABC), Nigerian Guild of Editors (NGE) and Nigerian Press Council. Also, in selecting the newspapers, the geo-political zones of Nigeria to which President Obasanjo and Vice-President Atiku Abubakar belong, as well as the ownership identity of the proprietors of the newspapers were considered. This was done with a view to

establishing any relationship that may exist between ownership of the newspapers and the reportage of the conflict. Using ownership identity as a variable, the newspapers were also chosen so as to reflect representation of all the geo-political zones in Nigeria. *Nigerian Tribune* was chosen from the South West, *Daily Champion* from the South East, *Guardian* from the South South, and *Daily Trust* from the North West. Unfortunately, there was no newspaper that was being circulated nationally in the North-Central and North-East geo-political zones of Nigeria to warrant any selection. Meanwhile, *Punch* newspaper was selected not because of the identity of its proprietor but because of the ABC and NGE rating that it is the most widely read newspaper in Nigeria.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Isola (2008:33), as cited in Popoola(2011:42), had searched the literature in respect of the role of the media in political conflicts in Nigeria. He discovered that the earliest studies within the continuum of media and political communication in Nigeria are those of Omu (1965; 1974; 1978; 1989 and 1996). In his first scholarly work entitled “*Press and Politics in Nigeria*, Omu, explores the role of newspaper as an organ of the press, in the pre-colonial, colonial and post colonial politics in Nigeria. This work and subsequent ones provide valuable insights into the contributions of newspaper to the political development as well as into the political pitfalls of the Nigeria nation. This study draws immensely from those insights to present a fresh insight into understanding the role of the press in politico-personal conflicts in Nigeria. Also in his work entitled: *House of War*, Babarinsa (2003) chronicles the bitter power struggles that culminated in the various political conflicts that plagued Nigeria right from pre-independence to the first and second republics. Through careful and meticulous observation, Babarinsa was able to capture historically some of the intrigues, political back-stabbing and shameful conducts of the local media which led to the massive killings and destructions that appear grossly rooted in personality-induced political conflicts in some states in the South- Western part of Nigeria. As an empirical study, Akinsanya (1981) carried out a content analysis of selected newspapers in Nigeria to ascertain their reportage of the 1979 elections. He discovered that most of the selected newspapers, except a few with little or no political affiliation, did not exhibit neutrality in the coverage of the elections. Many of the newspapers, whose contents were analyzed, favoured one or the other of the existing political parties, a discovery that runs contrary to the principle and tenets of a socially responsible press. Also, Adebani (2002), had explored the role of the print media in contestations for political power and in carving distinct identities for the ethnic nationalities that constitute the Nigeria nation state. He examines how meanings are deployed and mobilized in the press to nourish and sustain

power relations among the ethnic nationalities and in deflecting power domination by the various dominant ethnic groups in Nigeria. He concludes that any efforts directed at integrating Nigeria will be a myth until the smaller nations within the entity of the traditional states are ready to surrender some of their political identities towards building a cohesive Nigeria. Adebani's approach confers importance on textual analysis, which is the supplementary research method adopted in this study. Textual analysis proves valuable in unearthing and ascribing meanings to the contents of newspapers selected for this study. Literature is also replete with other related works which are of immense benefit to this study. The works of Anifowose (1982); Faleti (2002); Popoola (2004); and Isola (2008), among others, also address the problem of this study in some respects. These works expose the various cycles of violence that have accompanied elections in Nigeria; examine the myths propagated in the media about the conduct of violence-free elections in the country; explore historical events that often emerge in the processes leading to election; and recommend ways by which the media could exhibit responsibility as the Fourth Estate of the Realm.

However, all these related works seem to have focused on elections, electoral violence and the role played by the media in the escalation and de-escalation of the violent acts that accompany elections in Nigeria. It appears that there had not been any remarkable and substantial works on the reportage of personality induced-political conflicts in Nigeria. Irrefutably, such conflicts appear strong enough as catalysts for other political conflicts and their attendant violent acts. Also, these works did not adequately employ content analysis method of mass communication research, considering the research approaches used by the researchers. Consequently, by focusing on the reportage of politico-personal conflicts in Nigeria, using both content and textual analyses as research methods, this study will be able to come up with useful recommendations on how such conflicts can be reported by the media with a view to achieving a peaceful political process.

OBASANJO AND ATIKU POLITICO-PERSONAL CONFLICT: HISTORICAL ANTECEDENTS

The politico-personal conflict between former president of Nigeria, Olusegun Obasanjo and his Vice, Atiku Abubakar took place on the federal scene where both of them were serving the public. Vice-President Abubakar Atiku came to office through elections as the deputy to former President Olusegun Obasanjo who ruled Nigeria between 1999 and 2007. The President and his deputy, had and enjoyed good working relationship up to 2003. According to Nwagwu(2007:13), at his swearing in at the *Eagle Square* in 1999, Obasanjo had by his side, Atiku Abubakar, who, like his master, also took his oath as the Vice

President of the Federal Republic of Nigeria. Both men functioned as one person, in one accord, for the first four years, but after the re-election in 2003, things suddenly fell apart between them. When Obasanjo came to power in 1999, the relationship between him and his deputy was warm. In fact, Atiku was co-President. He was placed in charge of the Privatization project; he also chaired the Economic Planning Committee. People, within and outside the presidency, were afraid to report Atiku to Obasanjo, because they would be asked to repeat any allegation before Atiku. So many people were embarrassed in this manner when they called the President to report the shady deals of his trusted co-President to him. When the Nigeria Airways was to be sold, and it was under priced, Dr. Kema Chikwe, Minister of Aviation then, refused to allow it, she was scolded by President Obasanjo, who warned that any of his Ministers who failed to comply with Atiku on the Privatization should quit. Though, Babangida, a former military president, was instrumental to Obasanjo's election as President in 1999, Atiku also provided the political platform for Obasanjo. The People's Democratic Movement (PDM), formed by the late Shehu Yar'Adua had the likes of Tony Anenih, late Chuba Okadigbo, Dapo Sarumi, Yomi Edu, and Dr. Borishade as members. Anenih, fondly referred to in PDM as leader was fingered as a double agent. He shared his loyalty with Atiku and Babangida. In the commentary of Oduyela (2005:11) on the conflict between Obasanjo and his deputy, he writes that what Atiku failed to realize was that, though Obasanjo gave him free hands to operate, it was a grand set-up. Obasanjo already knew that Atiku was obsessed with wealth acquisition. It was also felt that the free-hand given to Atiku by his boss was a design to set Atiku against the rest of the north. Atiku is from the North Eastern Nigeria and the politics of Nigeria had ever been dominated by the North West that sees itself as the natural ruler of Nigeria. As soon as Obasanjo came in, Atiku started firing salvo against the North and by extension, North West. This turned the rest of the North against Atiku. Prominent northerners, especially the former Heads of State among them, and other leaders of the North became uncomfortable with Atiku's utterances. Atiku, apparently having fun then blamed the problem of Nigeria on the misrule of the north. This was seen by Babangida and others as a campaign preparation for Obasanjo's succession and they were ready to do anything to truncate his ambition. While Atiku created enmity for himself in the Northwest, Umar Ghali Na'Abba rose to the position of the Speaker of the House of Representatives, becoming the second most powerful northerner in Obasanjo's government. While Babangida and his allies liked it, Atiku was not comfortable with that. This is for simple reason that Na'Abba is from the North West and seen as a potential threat to his ambition come 2007. Na'Abba who came to the National Assembly as 'nobody' suddenly after succeeding the disgraced Salisu Buhari became a voice for the Northern opposition against Obasanjo. Atiku's utterances also pitched Obasanjo against the rest of the North and Obasanjo was portrayed as someone biting the finger that fed him. But by 2001, Atiku's PDM faced a serious political test, as

one of them, Chuba Okadigbo, the then Senate President, crossed Obasanjo's path by attempting to impeach the president. Unfortunately, because PDM was headed by a tactless Atiku, Okadigbo lost the seat. That was a big blow to PDM but Atiku did not see the handwriting on the wall. Towards the end of 2001, Chief Tony Anenih, a People's Democratic Party (PDP) stalwart initiated reconciliation between Obasanjo and Babangida. This was leaked to Atiku who did not like it and the relationship between Atiku and Anenih broke, causing another serious blow to PDM.

Oduyela(2005:13) documents further that the declaration of Obasanjo to run for second term was organized by Anenih. Atiku was not part of the plan and his picture was not in the programme pamphlet nor did it feature in the poster. Atiku was out of the country on that day. On the evening of that day after Obasanjo had declared to run for second term, he appeared on the Federal Radio Corporation of Nigerian (FRCN) Presidential chat where he told reporters that he has not chosen his running mate and will not do that until the party's primaries. But few days later, late Tunji Oseni, Obasanjo's Special Adviser on Media, issued a press release announcing Atiku as Obasanjo's running mate for the 2003 Presidential election. Unfortunately for Atiku, he (Atiku) had wanted to declare for the 2003 Presidency and to pre-empt him Obasanjo quickly announced him as his running mate. However, it did not end there. As reported by Oduyela(2005:14), President Obasanjo got to know of Atiku's amassing of wealth. In early 2001, he discovered that it was Atiku who bought a petroleum company known as AP, using Peter Okocha as front; just as he used Aliko Dangote as front to buy the Benue Cement Company. Obasanjo did not like it. Atiku also wanted to buy UNIPETROL but he was blocked. Atiku was also rumored to have funded the impeachment move against Obasanjo in 2002. The trust was dropping but Obasanjo maintained his cool because of the 2003 elections. To win the People's Democratic Party (PDP) ticket in 2003, Obasanjo had to beg Atiku. He struck a deal with him, though unwritten, and unfortunately Atiku fell for it. As soon as he won the election, Atiku began to see a different Obasanjo, the real Olusegun. He denied Atiku the privilege to nominate Bugaje, his former Special Adviser. Atiku also lost all rights as co-president and demoted to tenant in the Villa. Obasanjo had to approve his Advisers and Assistants. Between 2003 and 2006, five Advisers and Assistants of Atiku were fired by Obasanjo. Chris Mammah was the first victim because of his alleged role in the 2002 impeachment attempt. The latest victim was Mr. Adinoyi-Ojo Onukaba, former Special Adviser on Media. Before 2003, Obasanjo needed not see anything before it got out of the Villa, but that was history. As the conflict was brewing up, nothing got out of the Villa without Obasanjo's approval. Atiku was almost stripped of all his powers. He lost in the power game. The relationship between the president and his vice got sour and it eventually turned into rotten acrid odour that contaminated the land. In his interpretation, Nwangwu (2007: 18), notes that, Atiku, whose political machine was key to Obasanjo's ride into power in 1999 and

2003, was the leading stalwart who foiled the various efforts by Obasanjo and his supporters to enact an unprecedented, unconstitutional third term for Obasanjo. Since then, the president had conceived one plot or the other to tarnish Atiku's image and frustrate him from fulfilling his ambition to be the president of the country.

Perhaps, Atiku's political sin in the estimation of the hawks of the presidency and the ruling People's Democratic Party (PDP) was that he deployed the power and influence of his office and the strategic responsibilities given to him by Obasanjo to his own political advantage. At that time, what was initially uttered in muted tones had become a common song in the marketplace, that is, the president was not disposed to handing over power to his deputy. Vice-President Atiku who had not hidden his interest to succeed his boss fell out of Obasanjo's favour. The third term plot was also rearing its head at the time and Atiku seized the moment to alert the nation of Obasanjo's alleged self-succession agenda. The president in turn accused Atiku of disloyalty and there commenced a game that kept the presidency divided. Obasanjo and Atiku accused each other of corruption and abuse of government power. Obasanjo was fingered by his deputy, Atiku, in a loss of \$500m Oil Money. Vice President Atiku Abubakar alleged that over \$150 million of the money realised during the 2002/2003 oil licensing bids could not be accounted for by the authorities of Nigeria's government led by Obasanjo. The Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC) closed in on Atiku, narrowing it down to the Petroleum Development Trust Fund (PDTF) where as chairman; he was alleged to have misappropriated funds. Atiku countered the report, claiming that his boss who knew how every kobo was spent was more corrupt than himself. Towards the tail end of the tenure of the Obasanjo and Atiku administration, the brawl became more pronounced, particularly with the defeat of the third term agenda.

The crisis between the president and his deputy escalated and heated up the Nigerian political scene to the extent that, the People's Democratic Party (PDP), in support of, and under an alleged influence of Obasanjo, who had arrogated a lot of power to himself in the party, suspended Atiku on the ground of engaging in anti-party activities. Atiku protested this in the court of law, but the presidency appeared to have destroyed his political fortune and goodwill in the PDP. As 2007 general elections drew closer and the contestations for political offices gathered momentum, Atiku decamped with his political structures to another political party- Action Congress (AC) which later became Action Congress of Nigeria to seek a ticket as the presidential flag bearer of the party in the 2007 presidential election. The PDP and the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC), under a shadow influence of the presidency filed a suit in the court of law to disrobe Atiku of his position as the Vice-President since he clinched that position under the auspices of the People's Democratic Party (PDP). Luckily for Atiku, despite all pressure on the nation's judiciary to remove him from office, the final ruling was in favour of Atiku. The presidency continued to truncate Atiku's presidential ambition and the Vice-President apparently

weathered that storm and contested for the presidential position with Late Umar Musa Yar'Adua and General Muhammad Buhari who contested on the platforms of PDP and the All Nigeria People's Party (ANPP) respectively. Atiku failed at the polls and what followed was a spiral of silence in respect of his status and prowess in political machinations in Nigeria.

No sooner than the drumming and pulsation with respect to 2011 general elections began that Atiku's hope of becoming the president of Nigeria was again rekindled. Perhaps, Atiku and his advisers felt that a PDP presidential ticket was the strongest and surest ticket of clinching the coveted position and also that he was seen to have had the political stature to meet the yearning of the Northern part of Nigeria in retrieving presidency from Southern Nigeria since the untimely death of Yar'Adua had led to domiciliation of presidential power in the South again. Hence, Atiku sought a waiver from the PDP to return to the party. According to Sode(2011:8), the Presidency, under the political shadow influence of Obasanjo thwarted Atiku Abubakar's return mission by making sure no waiver was granted. Adamawa State Governor, Murtala Nyako, was alleged to have been instructed to truncate every move by Atiku to be re-enlisted as a member of the party as he might impede the chances of President Goodluck Jonathan's emergence as the PDP flag-bearer in 2011 presidential election. Expectedly, individualistic forces led by the former President Olusegun Obasanjo and former military president, Ibrahim Babangida, mounted pressure on Nyako to block Atiku's re-entry into the party. While Obasanjo fought for the emergence of Jonathan, Babangida equally tried to clear the path for his personal presidential ambition. Eventually, against all odds and in spite of road-blocks mounted by anti-Atiku forces, he was granted a waiver. At hurricane velocity, Atiku made a formal declaration of his presidential ambition. The waiver granted for Atiku's return was never any hindrance to Obasanjo and President Jonathan Goodluck, Obasanjo's political godson. Atiku's failure in the presidential primaries was plotted and the plot translated to reality. Atiku Abubakar, as well as other contenders, lost hopelessly to President Goodluck. Both Obasanjo and Atiku still occupy political strongholds which they use continually to function as shadow parties to emerging political conflicts in Nigeria.

MEDIA AGENDA-SETTING

Wimmer and Dominick (2003:408) comment that the notion of Agenda-Setting by the media can be traced back to the works of Lippman (1922), who suggested that the media were responsible for the "pictures in our heads". Forty years later, Cohen (1960), in McQuail (2005:81) articulated this idea when he argued *that the media may not always be successful in telling people what to think, but are usually successful in telling them what to*

think about. Mc Quail reinforces this notion by observing that “the mass media force attention to certain issues.....they are constantly presenting objects, suggesting what individuals in the mass should think about, know about, have feelings about”. He submits that the agenda-setting function defines the relation between media and public thinking.... and influence what people learn about their society. Severin and Tankard (1977), as cited in Daramola (2003: 60) attempted to explain the agenda-setting function of the media. They write *inter alia*:

In a sense, the newspaper is the prime mover in setting the territorial agenda. It has a great part in determining what most people will be talking about, what most people will think the facts are, and what people will regard as the way problems are to be dealt with.

Consequently, the mass media in Nigeria set agenda for national discourse and in performing a watch dog function, the Nigerian press also plays a significant role. The media agenda setting theory roles extend beyond news. Over time, life styles and values portrayed in the media can influence not just what people think about but what they do. Media attention lends legitimacy to events, individuals and issues that do not extend to things that go uncovered. This conferring of status occurs through the media’s role as agenda setters. On this, Mc Quail (2005:54) posit that audiences not only learn about public issues and other matters through the media, they also learn how much importance they should attach to an issue or topic from the emphasis the mass media place upon it.

In essence, to a large extent, the newspapers determine what issues are regarded as important in the society and the level of importance given to them. Even in conflict situations, they determine what would be reported and what the audience would know about the issues being reported. Thus, if these hypotheses are true of agenda-setting, it is obvious that media emphases (and more specifically newspaper emphases) can also be responsible for escalation and de escalation of politico-personal conflicts, consequent upon the coverage given to such conflicts by the newspapers. Put in another way, the agenda setting tenets and propositions create a context in which public opinions about Obasanjo and Abubakar politico-personal conflict as reported by newspapers, are created and crystallized. Thus, how positive or negative are these opinions, may be contributory to escalation and de escalation of the conflict.

METHODOLOGY

This study employed the use of two research methods: Content and Textual Analysis. The principal method was content analysis and this was used to answer the first four research questions. The supplementary method was textual analysis. This was used to address the last research question. Content analysis as a method of mass communication

research entails an examination of the manifest content of communication to discover the patterns existing therein". Explaining this method, McQuail(2005:76), writes that it is a technique for the systematic, quantitative and objective description of media texts, that is useful for certain purposes of classifying output, looking for effect and making comparisons between media over time or between content and reality. The reason for adopting this research method is to analyze the manifest contents of the selected newspapers in respect of their reportage of press reportage of the conflict. Textual analysis was adopted as supplementary research method to ascribe meaning to and interpret manifest contents of newspapers with a view to ascertaining the disposition of the newspapers to the conflict and more importantly to ascertain how socially responsible was the reportage of the conflict by the selected newspapers.

The population of this study consisted of all the editions of the selected newspapers published in Nigeria within the period of 1999 to 2007 when the conflict took place.

Thirty editions (issues) of each of the selected newspapers were chosen as part of the sample. Consequently, a total of 150 editions were analysed in the study. Actually, the latent, manifestation and escalation stages of the conflict were between 2002 and 2006, being a period of five years. Purposive sampling technique was used to select the editions of the newspapers that carried the conflict. The reason for using the purposive sampling technique was to meet the study objectives. Nworgu (1991:78) supports this method. He avers that, in purposive sampling, specific elements, which satisfy some predetermined criteria, are selected. Although the criteria to be used are usually a matter of the researcher's judgment, he(the researcher) exercises this judgment in relation to what he thinks will constitute a representative sample with respect to the research purpose.

The code sheet, which is the major instrument for content analysis was used for coding and organising the research data, and content categories were devised. The content categories were developed in order to determine and analyse the reportage of the conflict by the selected newspapers. The two principal content categories devised were:

Conflict escalation stories - Attribution

- (1) Conflict escalation stories
 - (A) Attribution
 - (i) Stories attributed to Atiku alone
 - (ii) Stories attributed Obasanjo alone
 - (B) Side-Taking Stories
 - (i) Support for Atiku against Obasanjo
 - (ii) Support for Obasanjo against Atiku
- (2) De-escalation of the conflicts
 - (A) Balanced stories
 - (B) Resolution

These content categories were analyzed using the following:

(1) Newspaper Identity

1. Nigerian Tribune (NT)
2. Daily Champion (DC)
3. Daily Punch (DP)
4. Daily Trust (DT)
5. Guardian (GD)

(2) Type of Story (editorial items)

1. Straight news
2. Features
3. Editorials
4. Opinions/ Columns
5. Others

(3) Placement of Stories

1. Front page
2. Back page
3. Inside page
4. Centre spread.

(4) Depth of Story

1. 1-5 paragraphs
2. 6-10 paragraphs
3. 11-15 paragraphs
4. 16-20 paragraphs
5. 21+

Descriptive statistical methods were used to present the content analysis data, while discursive analysis method of dialectical hermeneutics was used to analyse and present the textual analysis data.

PRESENTATION, ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

The main purpose of this study was to investigate the reportage of President Olusegun Obasanjo and Vice-President Atiku Abubakar politico-personal conflict by selected newspapers. Specifically, it sought to determine the extent to which the newspapers carried escalation and de-escalation stories as far as the conflict was concerned. The study, further, probed the slanting of the stories by the newspapers, as well as the somewhat disposition of the newspapers to the conflict between the two parties. In order to provide answers to the research questions raised in the study, some of the data collected were computer analysed using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) format while some others were

TABLE 1 DISTRIBUTION OF NEWSPAPERS FOR THE STUDY

	TYPE OF NEWSPAPER					Total
	TRIBUNE	DAILY CHAMPION	DAILY PUNCH	DAILY TRUST	GUARDIAN	
ESCALATION STORIES/	29	22	24	29	26	130
	85.3%	81.5%	70.6%	96.7%	89.7%	84.4%
DE-ESCALATION	5	5	10	1	3	24
	14.7%	18.5%	29.4%	3.3%	10.3%	15.5%
Total	34	27	34	30	29	154
	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

qualitatively analyzed using textual analysis. The findings are presented and discussed with a view to making inferences and drawing a conclusion.

Research Question I

To what extent did the selected newspapers carry Obasanjo and Atiku politico-personal conflict escalation stories?

The above question examines the quantity of the reportage that had the tendencies for escalating the conflict. This is important considering the paradigm that the media are capable of escalating conflicts based on the way and manner in which they report such conflicts as well as the perspective from which they report.

The above table shows the total number of newspapers that were content analyzed and the specific issues for each selected newspaper. A total of 154 editorial items from 142 editions of the selected newspapers were content - analyzed. Distributing these issues, 34 of them were in *Tribune*; 27 in *Daily Champion*; 34 in *Daily Punch*, 30, *Daily Trust* and 29 in *Guardian*. The table also shows the distribution of stories published by the selected newspapers. Out of a total of Thirty- Four (34) stories published by the Nigerian Tribune newspaper, Eighty Five point Three per cent (85.3%) were considered capable of further escalating the conflict. Thus, the vast majority of news reports published by the Nigerian Tribune newspaper were escalatory in nature. In the case of Daily Champion, out of a total

TABLE 2-DISTRIBUTION OF ESCALATION STORIES BY NEWSPAPERS

NEWSPAPER	ESCALATION
Tribune	29(22.3)
Punch	24(18.5%)
Daily Champion	22(16.9%)
Daily Trust	29(22.3%)
Guardian	26(20%)
TOTAL	130(100%)

of Twenty-Seven (27) stories, Eighty One point Five percent (81.5%) were escalation stories. Similarly, Seventy point Six per cent (70.6%) of stories by the Daily Punch were escalation stories. In the case of the Guardian, Eighty Nine point Seven per cent (89.7%) of stories were either capable of escalating conflict or emphasized the escalation period of the conflict while the Daily Trust also escalated the crises (96.7%) with its reports. In all, escalatory stories accounted for Eighty Four point Four per cent (84.3%) of reports by the five newspapers. Thus, all the selected newspapers carried escalation stories in respect of the conflict. Specifically, these findings reveal that the Daily Trust had the highest percentage of escalation stories (96.7%), followed by the Guardian newspaper (89.7%), and Nigerian Tribune (85.3%). The Punch on the other hand had the lowest percentage of escalatory reports of the selected newspapers. These findings suggest that of all the selected newspapers, Daily Trust carried more escalation stories than other newspapers. Also, the Guardian newspaper carried escalation stories considerably.

Table 2 shows the conflict and how the selected newspapers carried escalation stories. The aim is to identify trends specific to certain newspapers by analyzing how they reported the conflicts in relation to the other papers. Of all the escalatory stories, Tribune and Daily Trust's stories accounted for 22.3%, while Punch, Daily Champion and Guardian escalatory stories accounted for 18.5%, 16.9% and 20% of all the escalatory stories. Interestingly, the reportage of the conflict by the selected newspapers shows that the percentage of escalatory stories amounted to 84.4%. Therefore, it is concluded in this study that the selected

TABLE 3 DISTRIBUTION OF SUPPORT FOR CONFLICTING PARTIES BY NEWSPAPER

	TYPE OF NEWSPAPER					Total
	DAILY	DAILY	DAILY			
	TRIBUNE	CHAMPION	PUNCH	TRUST	GUARDIAN	
SUPPORT FOR OBASANJO	7	5	8	2	8	30
	20.6%	18.5%	23.5%	6.7%	27.6%	19.5%
SUPPORT FOR ATIKU	21	17	19	18	14	89
	61.8%	62.9%	55.9%	60.0%	48.3%	56.7%
BALANCED	6	5	7	10	7	35
	17.6%	18.5%	20.6%	33.3%	24.1%	22.7%
Total	34	27	34	30	29	154
	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

newspapers specifically devoted an overwhelming percentage of their reportage of the conflict to editorial items that were escalatory by nature. Further enquiry was however done in this study to understand the specific ways in which the newspapers tended to escalate the conflict. One major way identified was the use of their reports to support one of the conflicting parties at the expense of the other, hence, raising sentiment for or against the other party and thereby intensifying the conflicts and stimulating further hateful comments and actions. Table 3 examines the stories published by the newspapers in a bid to ascertain the level of partisanship or siding with certain parties in the conflict and the proportion of such stories to those which appear more or less balanced or neutral.

Data gathered shows that in reporting the Obasanjo — Atiku conflict, all the selected newspapers showed much greater measure of support for Atiku over Obasanjo. Sixty-One point Eight per cent (61.8%) of Nigerian Tribune stories were deployed in support of Atiku while 20.6% were used to support Obasanjo, 62.9% of Daily Champion reports were also deployed in support of Atiku while 18.5% were in support of Obasanjo. On its part, the Daily Punch newspaper used 55.5% of its reports to support Atiku as against 23.5% for Obasanjo; 48.3% of stories by the Guardian were in support of Atiku while 27.6% supported

Obasanjo. The difference in measure of support shown for conflicting parties in this case was most accentuated by the Daily Trust newspaper with 60.0% of its reports supporting Atiku and only 6.7% in support of Obasanjo. Consequently, all the selected newspapers were in far greater support of the “godson” over the supposed “godfather” in the conflict. This suggests that most Nigerian newspapers are not favourably disposed to the idea of political “godfathers” (prebends) controlling their “godsons” who occupy public office or at least are not in support of external (unofficial) influence on political office holders. Furthermore, the findings suggest that all the newspapers selected also used the vast majority of their reports to support Atiku over Obasanjo. Thus, owing to the fact that Seventy Seven point Three per cent (77.3%) of all stories were either in support of one of the conflicting parties or the other with only about 22.7% being balanced, it is being posited here that there is the need for more balanced, neutral and objective reporting of conflict and a drastic reduction in the degree of partisanship exhibited in the print media in Nigeria. To buttress this position, the research undertook a textual analysis of the reportage of the conflict which is escalatory in nature.

DAILY CHAMPION NEWSPAPER

Months before the feud between the former President and his Vice started, discourse in *Daily Champion* was laden with incitements, giving an early indication of the direction in which the conflict could head. In effect, the polity was heated up and warmed up for the conflict and the dimension it would take. Among the stories that set the pace for the conflict include the below:

ATIKU: THE MAKING OF A HERO

The convoluted political peristalsis that is unfolding day by day in Abuja concretely lends credence to Gaius Julius Caesar’s famed verse of war. . . And squared up in the ring is President Olusegun Obasanjo expectedly joined by a platoon of recruits mostly from the Board of Trustees (BoT) of the party, the National Assembly and a few governors who must demonstrate allegiance to the *deity* even when their reason for doing so is as bovine as it is insipid. The President is poised against....who else...his deputy, Vice President Atiku Abubakar. (*December 16,2006, Page 11*)

This story gives a rhythmic account of what to be expected even when the conflict has not even manifested. Since the media were aware of early warning signals, they should have reported the issue in another way that would not prepare the battle ground for the conflict. This clearly shows irresponsibility and rather than serve as a mediator here for the intending conflict, *Daily Champion* set up the boxing ring for the conflict through reports like these.

OBJ, ATIKU IN FINAL SHOWDOWN

As Nigerians await the legal epic battle between President Olusegun Obasanjo and Vice President, Atiku Abubakar, many are wondering when and how the long-drawn feud is going to end. It appears that the daggers have been drawn. No doubt, an imminent and decisive showdown between the duo is unavoidable.

(Front Pg., December 31, 2006)

This story obviously set the battle ground for the two conflicting parties but since the media were aware of the early warning signals of the conflict, they should have played down the issue not ameliorate it, taking cognizance of the agenda-setting function. To show its importance, the story was on the front page with a screaming headline and the picture of the two conflicting parties.

ATIKU RIDICULES NATION, MALIGNS OBJ - PRESIDENCY. IT'S NOT TRUE — VP

The President yesterday accused Vice President Atiku Abubakar of waging a campaign of calumny aimed at discrediting the government and people of Nigeria before the international community. Vice-President Abubakar has, however swiftly denied ever writing a letter to the United States Government alleging that President Olusegun Obasanjo bribed members of the National Assembly.

(January18,2007, Front Page)

This story probably came on the heels of the atmosphere that have been set by previous stories suspecting that conflict may be brewing. However, the story featured the position of the two sides, it also featured the war of words between the two parties and capable of arousing violent sentiments between those in support of either parties. This is regarded in this study as unfortunate as the newspaper reported non-solution oriented reports and went on to concentrate more on the conflict which escalated the conflict. Though, conflict is an intrinsic news value in news reporting but for the sake of peace, the newspaper should have found another way of reporting this that would not have been presented in vehement outbursts of the conflicting sides.

OBJ, ATIKU AND WASHINGTON

Obasanjo and Atiku. The face-off between these two men continues to fester. Undoubtedly, the entertainment value of the tiff is very high.....This is because as at today, the two individuals, have really proved to be nothing more than two sides of the same coin.

(Back Page, Jan 22,2007)

ATIKU: HERO OF DEMOCRACY?

Obasanjo made a big mistake; He took his Vice-President, Atiku Abubakar for granted. He was so sure that Atiku would support his scheme that he failed even to discuss it with him. Atiku got to know from other sources, and he was clear in his mind what he must do; Oppose the plan. And to do so openly, no matter the cost. Obasanjo then decided that his Vice President was an enemy, a disloyal person, who must be crushed at any cost.

(February 4,2007, Page 3)

The above excerpts are from columns and they served to strengthen Atiku and slight Obasanjo in the conflict. This is clearly against the practice of journalism. The writers could have done better by interpreting the conflict into reconciliatory moves not being partisan or bias on the issue. This had the potential of aggravating the conflict by pitching the supporters of both parties against each other and promoting a culture of bitterness and enmity on the parts of the conflicting sides. The researcher believes that these columns out rightly supported Vice-President Atiku Abubakar and instead of playing the unbiased umpire in the issue, the paper threw its weight round the situation to determine who was right and who was wrong. This is clearly against the tenets of journalism.

OBJ VS. ATIKU.....AND THE WINNER IS....

Obasanjo in defending arguments being canvassed by Atiku at the court, explained that the Vice- President violated sections 143, 144, and 146 of the 1999 constitution , and so, is no longer fit to be the nation's number two man. Atiku in canvassing arguments against the move, equally told the court that his decamping from the PDP to the Action Congress (AC) has nothing to do with constitutional provisions for his removal from office, as the PDP is not known to the constitution.

(February 24 2007, Page 10)

This story is like a boxing ring for the conflicting parties. This should not have been published though the story did not show any bias by featuring the two sides, though it has some conflict fuelling phenomena in it and this could have escalated the situation. The story systematically profiled the conflicting parties and provided an ambience for systematic abuses that could have further led to the escalation of the conflict.

ATIKU: MY LIFE IN DANGER

Vice President Atiku Abubakar yesterday raised fresh alarm of plot against his life, urging Nigerians to hold the Presidency responsible should anything happen to him...

(26 Feb 2007, frnt pg)

For a conflict which has already escalated beyond a point, such a statement which appears ordinarily but not harmless could easily be interpreted to mean that the end has come for Atiku and the president should be prosecuted in case anything bad happens to him. Meanwhile peace journalism should not be about pointing accusing fingers at each conflicting party. Consequent upon the raging conflict, this story clearly shows some bias for Atiku and is conflict inciting and pointing accusing fingers at the presidency. As earlier mentioned, the presentation of this story served to show Atiku's grouse and it clearly found expression in this story.

HOW BRIBE MONEY ENTERED N/ASSEMBLY-ATIKU

Vice-President Atiku Abubakar yesterday gave insight into how bribe money entered the National Assembly. He alleged that President Olusegun Obasanjo used bribes to scuttle the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) choice of first Senate president, thereby destroying the unity and solidarity in the rank and file of the National Assembly. —

(March 23, 2007.Front Page.)

It is so obvious that this newspaper gave more coverage to Atiku Abubakar as against Obasanjo and one would have thought they would be repentant and desist from displaying blatant partisanship by making their stories more balanced in order to reduce the effect of the conflict on the polity but this seemed not to be the case even after they left power in 2007.

RUBBISH!

COUNT ME OUT OF ENERGY LOOT-ATIKU

Ahead of his planned disappearance, former Vice President Atiku Abubakar, yesterday declared that he has no question to answer in the probe of how former President Olusegun Obasanjo's administration spent \$16bn on power sector by the House of Representatives, committee on power and steel.

Atiku's assertion came as a non-governmental, Coalition Against Corrupt Leaders (CACOL) also yesterday urged the House probe panel not to spare anybody including Chief Obasanjo, involved in the award of contracts in the National Integrated Power Project (NIPP) from testifying in the open.

(Front Page, March 24, 2008)

The conflicting parties left power in 2007 but this story was published some months after. Even after they left power, it was apparent that the conflict had finished but what was in the mind of the media than to escalate the situation. The headline of this story in respect of the conflict is not only negative but the headline is also sensational in nature. The

presentation of this story was further emphasized with its placement on the front page with the “rubbish” in 72 points taking most of the page. It is not only negative, but capable of creating an atmosphere which is not only tense but could arouse another bout of conflict on the part of the conflicting parties. Since the issue had at least gone down a little, the newspaper by reporting like this obviously did not let sleeping dogs lie. This study considers this to be unfortunate and irresponsible.

DAILY TRUST NEWSPAPER

OBASANJO, ATIKU RIFT WILL NOT END SOON, DPP CHIEFTAIN

The feud between President Olusegun Obasanjo and Vice-President Atiku Abubakar will not end soon, the Democratic People’s Party (DPP) presidential running mate said. Prof. Timothy Uzodenma told journalists in his office yesterday in Abuja that the feud was deep-rooted. He said President Obasanjo is ‘vengeful’ and Atiku is ‘recalcitrant’

(February 8, 2007, Page 13).

To further escalate the situation, why should the newspaper publish a story that does not de-escalate the issue? Instead of writing reports that feature how the conflicting parties can be brought to the negotiating table, and highlight issues that can advance the interest of the society on this issue which affects the nation, Daily Trust decided to publish a story which ordinarily may be harmless but must have gone a long way to escalate the issue by calling the conflicting parties names and forecasting that the conflict will not be resolved soonest.

ATIKU SHOULD BE CELEBRATED NOT VILIFIED

Remain within and fight within is a popular maxim for those that are conversant with power struggle. The people calling on Vice President Atiku Abubakar to resign his position as the number two man got it wrong completely. If Atiku had long resigned as his position as some of his detractors are clamouring for, Nigerians would not have had the opportunity of knowing the man Obasanjo in his true colours....For a man who has risen against all odds and in most cases at his detriment and that of his family to fight for the entrenchment of democratic governance, Atiku deserves commendation, and not vilification. He is by all standards my own Man of democracy.

(February 13, 2007, Page 15)

The writer of this story was too emotionally attached to the issue and journalism frowns at editorialisation. The writer did not featurise any body’s opinion though to an extent, a considerable degree of freedom is allowed in writing opinions, it is however the position of the researcher that the writer did not do a good job in conveying his points to the

public. This is outrightly slighting the person and reputation of the unsupported conflicting side. This is definitely escalatory in nature. As a follow up to this story, the below was published and right from the headline, it showed some elements of bias.

I'M VINDICATED, SAYS ATIKU

The Vice President, Alhaji Atiku Abubakar yesterday said he has been "vindicated" by the ruling of the Appeal Court which he claims has cleared him of allegations that he misappropriated public funds in his care..... the five judges decided unanimously that President Olusegun Obasanjo has no constitutional right to declare the vice-president's seat vacant after Atiku decamped.....

(February 21,2007. Front Pg,)

This story obviously was in support of Atiku. The highlighted aspect gives credence to this as there was obviously no attribution to whoever said what. This translates to the fact that the paper took it upon itself to take a position in the matter. This speaks of partisanship, praising and encouraging Atiku thereby fanning the embers of disunity between Obasanjo and Atiku bringing into the scene other opinions such as the below that were published by *Daily Trust*.

ATIKU AS A CLEVER DIVERSION!

The malevolent concentration of needless energy on crucifying Vice President Atiku Abubakar by President Obasanjo and his minions now appears to be a pretext designed to cover up the inadequacies of his administration. —

(Feb 21,2007, pg 15)

ATIKU'S CHARMED LIFE

Atiku Abubakar, has a charmed life, yes he has.....The court has ruled that he can keep the VP's post in spite of Achilles' heels, Olusegun Obasanjo alias Baba Iyabo spitting bile and swearing that as long as he is at Aso Rock, Atiku must vacate his seat..

(February 22,2007, pg 14)

OBASANJO'S TRAGIC MISCALCULATION

With the way events have turned against Mr President in his ill-advised, self-declared war against Vice President Atiku Abubakar, it is certain that in his heart of hearts, President Obasanjo regrets his action.

(February 23,2007 pg 15)

Though against the ethics of journalism, the fact that Atiku Abubakar is from the North does not give Daily Trust the creative license to be partisan in nature but one can obviously deduce from these opinionated articles that the paper gave much support to Atiku probably because he is from the north and Daily Trust is domiciled in the north. These write-ups served to put Atiku on a pedestal higher than Obasanjo by covertly or overtly condemning the actions of Obasanjo while giving full support to the other party. These could have further escalated the situation and may have generated replies from other quarters that are loyal to Obasanjo. This is against the dictum that expects the media to be an unbiased umpire in reporting conflicts of this nature. Obasanjo's position finds expression in the story below:

I'LL HAND OVER TO ATIKU, IF.....-OBASANJO

President Olusegun has finally said he would hand over to whoever wins the forthcoming presidential election in April.....Asked if he would relinquish power to whoever wins including Vice President Atiku Abubakar, the President said: "Of course anybody who wins the election will be the one I will hand over to..."

(Feb 25, 2007, Front Page)

Obviously, this is grossly irresponsible and the story aimed at opening another can of worms and further turns the back of each conflicting party to each other. The headline does not have anything to do with the lead and that is already at the peak just before the elections, the statement appears harmless, but could easily be interpreted to mean that the conflict is getting resolved when the otherwise is the case. The story was written perhaps, to heighten the situation. The effect of this report is better left unimagined. This is irresponsible and one would wonder what the newspaper was trying to achieve by publishing this and even putting it on the front page, perhaps to captivate people's attention and get people to buy the paper but the effect may have had a lasting effect that could have aggravated the already bad situation. This is using the media for gruesome ends. The story is escalatory in nature.

OBJ-ATIKU AND THE NAKED DANCE

In the four years or so since the Obasanjo-Atiku marriage has been fouled, Obasanjo has hurled darts which in essence truly hits not only at Atiku, the object, but our dear country, Nigeria. Never in the history of any country known on earth has sovereignty suffered invective perforations as Nigeria has these past four years — *February 25, 2007, Page 13*

In the midst of the confusion that followed the conflict, Daily Trust came out with this feature article in which it strongly criticized the conduct of the conflicting sides in the conflict especially Obasanjo who was at the receiving end of the condemnation from the

writer for fouling the order of democracy. The intent of this was probably to stimulate a subliminal hatred for the conflicting parties and leave them to arrive at a decision or form a decision about the government and the continued strife between the conflicting sides.

**SENATE C'TTEE: ATIKU DIVERTED \$145M PTFD FUNDS
... SAYS OBASANJO BREACHED THE LAW
IT'S A HATCHET JOB--VP**

Vice President Atiku Abubakar diverted \$145 million Petroleum Technology Development Fund (PTDF) funds, a Senate investigation said yesterday. It also said President Olusegun Obasanjo "breached laws" governing the fund. The panel said Atiku should be "sanctioned" but that Obasanjo should be advised to adhere strictly to the provisions of the laws establishing the PTFD. In a swift reaction, Vice President Atiku Abubakar described the report as 'a hatchet job' —

February 28, 2007, Front page

Though balancing news reports by the two conflicting sides doesn't speak of bias but featuring war of words between conflicting parties. This is not conflict sensitivity as the use of language conveys very strong conflict inciting statements and replies from each party. Instead of creating a platform for dialogue by facilitating problem-solving, this story emphasized the conflict aspects.

OBASANJO WARNS ATIKU OVER UTTERANCES

President Olusegun Obasanjo yesterday, warned that the full weight of the law will be brought to bear on Vice-President Atiku Abubakar if he resorts to behaviors capable of jeopardizing the elections. President Obasanjo, who said his deputy is desperate for power, further, questioned why the number two citizen is busying himself looking for excuses to justify his 'glaring' monumental failure.

April 13, 2007 front pg.

In the process of conveying other issues in the conflict, Daily Trust published this story at the peak of the conflict and served to further worsen the case rather than reduce the effect of the conflict that it has on the polity. Instead, such stories are put in the front page so that at least, they would be eye-catching. Taking advantage of their agenda-setting function, the story obviously would have created another issue to be discussed in the public sphere and in turn feature in write-ups, columns and even letters to the editors. The issue was overblown. This is unequivocally irresponsible and careless of the newspaper. Such reports culminated into stories like the one below:

OBASANJO SACKS ALL ATIKU'S AIDES — ORGN

The Presidency has sacked the Vice President's remaining staff at Aso Rock, the Atiku Campaign Organisation claimed yesterday.---

April 25, 2007, pg 5

Perhaps as a result of the threat that has been overblown, the events that followed climaxed into the action of the President to sack his Vice's aides and this report served to reinforce this but the intent of this reportage was to actually report a new trend in the conflict and to create an atmosphere of tension and helplessness and further heighten the already worse situation.

GUARDIAN NEWSPAPER

In an interview with Atiku Abubakar, just before he showed up at the convention of the Action Congress, Atiku Abubakar agreed to meet with *The Guardian* team at his residence.

"I HAD NEVER, ALL ALONG, BELIEVED IN THE CHARACTERISATION OF THE PRESIDENT AS UNFORGIVING, VINDICTIVE UNTIL NOW....."

The relationship between you and President Obasanjo has gone really bad. When did you two begin to fall apart?

It started before and shortly after the nomination process in year 2003. I had never, all along believed in the characterization of the President as unforgiving , vindictive until now..... I believe that the real point of departure between the President and I was over the issue of constitutional amendment.....

Dec 24, 2006, Page 11

From the above report, the Vice-President was already brewing a conflict which clearly finds expression in the interview conducted and there were so many records of rousing and uncontrolled contents that were published. These were suspected to have amplified the conflict which turned into a trend of accusations and counter-accusations between the two parties like the below:

OBASANJO, ATIKU FILE COUNTER SUITS AT APPEAL COURT

President Olusegun and Vice President Atiku Abubakar yesterday took their battle of wits to the Court of Appeal sitting in Abuja. While the President filed an application seeking a judicial pronouncement that Abubakar has ceased to hold the office of Vice-President, his embattled deputy wants a declaration affirming the validity of his continued stay in power.

(December 28, 2006, Front page,)

2006: A YEAR OF POLITICAL MIX GRILL

As year 2006 winds to a close, Nigerians at home and in diaspora may like to know from their president, Chief Olusegun Obasanjo whether he still “dey kampe”.by the end of the first quarter of the year, knife could slice through the tension created by the third term agitators even as the president at each turn dribbled the nation as to intentions.....Alleging that the third term agenda had been on the drawing board since 2002, Atiku had said that he came out to identify with the opposition to avoid the verdict of history. With him as the symbol of the struggle against “a return to fascism and dictatorship”

December 29, 2006, Page 26

WAR OF WORDS OVER OBASANJO, ATIKU FEUD

President Olusegun Obasanjo’s decision to declare the office of the Vice President vacant following Atiku Abubakar defection to the Action Congress (AC), where he was adopted as the party’s presidential candidate for the 2007 election is still raising dusts in the polity as leaders of the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) and the AC continue to throw tantrums on the issue.....also in a chat with reporters in Ado-Ekiti, the Ekiti State capital, Osuntokun said the Vice-President had by his action declared his office vacant for another person to grab. He said the nation could not tolerate a disloyal Vice President whose actions and pronouncements have continued to paint the Presidency black..... (*December 29, 2006, Page 8*)

PLOT TO IMPEACH OBASANJO THICKENS, SAYS REP

The row between President Olusegun Obasanjo and Vice — President Atiku Abubakar has taken a different twist with the national assembly members holding secret meetings to update a list of alleged impeachable offences of the President.... the lawmaker alleged that since the collapse of the tenure elongation project, the Presidency had been looking for an avenue to declare a state of emergency in the country and throw away the national Assembly so as to elongate the life of his current administration by six months in the first instance.....(*December 29, 2006, Page 4*)

As the year was going to an end, so many features were published in the same edition of the newspaper like the above and they served to give an overview of all that had happened in the course of the conflict so far and also, preparing a ground for the epic battle between the two conflicting parties in the forthcoming 2007 elections at that time. These forecasts served to further escalate the situation and create panic and anxiety on what should be expected come 2007 elections. The major topic in the different pages of the newspaper was about the conflict thereby attributing undue importance to it, creating a forum for discourse on the issue. Even in the new year, the conflict did not abate especially when they were

getting closer to the election period. The newspaper gave coverage to different issues in the conflict and amongst the most dangerous venoms, the conflict spiraled to a point where Obasanjo and Atiku began revealing secrets that they share. In the heat of the conflict, Atiku through the newspaper, accused Obasanjo of hijacking so many ministries within government and it was published thus:

ATIKU ACCUSES OBASANJO OF HIJACKING THREE MINISTRIES

The exchange of brickbats between Vice-President Atiku Abubakar and the leadership of the ruling Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) continued yesterday with Abubakar accusing President Olusegun Obasanjo of hijacking some juicy ministries for about seven and a half years and using some ministers as robots..... “When you people elected us into office, he called me and said VP, I said Mr President. He said you know, I am going to be the President, I am going to be the petroleum minister, I am going to be the defense minister, I am going to be the foreign affairs minister.

I said ah, all these for you? He said yes, anybody I put there will be a robot.....
(Emphasis mine)

(March 7, 2007, Page 3)

The following story published the next day likened the conflict between Obasanjo and Atiku to a play bit also sought to elicit opinions on whether they were just blowing issues out of proportion by going to the court to settle a matter which ordinarily should have not become public knowledge. While describing the situation, the newspaper instead of being a mediator, turned out to be an abusive opinion that could have whipped up unfavorable sentiments against the two parties.

DO NOT DEMYSTIFY OBASANJO

The recent ruling by the Abuja Appeal Court fills one with amazement! The Vice-President of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, Alhaji Atiku Abubakar sought and was granted several reliefs (concessions), which are unheard of in the annals of this great nation. In fact, the imbroglio between Obasanjo and his ‘deputy’ appears to have attained the status of a Nollywood epic. But is it not so much mere hype? Is the battle between the two “presidents” not similar to that between a common “husband and wife”, a battle that should be amicably settled between the couple itself, without the intervention of the third parties? But Obasanjo and Atiku have now gone to a court of law to wash their dirty linen in public. Every marriage has its ‘ups and downs,’ and Obasanjo and Atiku cannot be any different...

March 8, 2007, pg 6

SENATE'S PTDF PANEL QUILTS IN PROTEST
-MEMBERS INDICT OBASANJO, ATIKU
NNAMANI SAYS NO CRISIS

Discomforting tension pervaded the senate yesterday as well as members of the seven-man special review committee on the Petroleum Technology Development Fund (PTDF) resigned, despite having concluded their assignment.....the mass resignation notwithstanding, a member of the committee disclosed the kernel of its recommendations; Sanctions on both President Olusegun Obasanjo and Vice President Atiku Abubakar.

Obasanjo and Atiku have traded accusations over each other's management of fund, designated for the development of the nation's petroleum technology, but which both leaders say has been used to satisfy private needs.

(Front pg. March 21, 2007)

Still on the PTDF scandal, reportage on the conflict was also escalatory in nature with accusation, vehement abusive words by the parties to each other and since they have been summoned by the Senate to answer questions which ultimately made a downturn in their relationship as the meeting was divide and the conflicting parties traded accusations over each other's management of funds.

PUNCH

Even before the conflict became public knowledge, The Punch was already preparing a ground for the impending conflict with malicious contents thereby preparing the ground for the battle of supremacy between the conflicting parties. Some examples of stories written that could have escalated the situation are shown below:

OBASANJO HAS MADE ME REDUNDANT-ATIKU

Embattled Vice-President Atiku Abubakar on Friday said the lingering feud between him and President Olusegun Obasanjo had rendered him redundant as the president no longer gave him assignments..... "I am still the Vice-President. If he (president) gives me any work, I do it. If he doesn't, I keep quiet and stay at home and sleep because that is my work. PDP is a lawless party...

November 4, 2006, Page 9

In supporting Atiku, the newspaper's intent perhaps was to elicit compassion for Atiku but perhaps the major intent was to stir up sympathy and unfavorable sentiments against the person of Obasanjo deliberately or covertly. As a follow up to this situation, The Punch came out with the story below to explicitly show how bad the situation was and the direction the conflict is likely to head.

HURDLES BEFORE ATIKU

At last, the die is cast, the battle line is drawn and the stage is set for an epic political battle between the President and Vice President, Atiku Abubakar. For the greater part of their presidency in more than seven years, they have lived like sworn enemies. The Vice-President seems the more bruised. For instance, the President has covertly succeeded in routing Atiku out of the Peoples Democratic Party that produced their joint ticket since 1999... Both leaders are now set for the political battle of their life. They are set to prove who enjoys the confidence of Nigerians. While the President will be relying on the power of incumbency to determine his successor, Atiku will be required to provide convincing explanations to the various controversies surrounding his office..... — *November 26, 2006, page 43.*

Stories like the above, certainly served to reflect the intention of the newspaper not really of the conflicting parties but the way the article has been presented, lends voice to the perceived direction of the conflict with the deliberate use of conflict-inciting and descriptive language that probably can do enormous damage to negotiation by locking the conflicting parties into narrow mindsets while leaving the readers to take a decision on which conflicting party to support or cast aspersions on. The real battle which had started manifesting, found expression in the following story:

OBASANJO DENIES ATIKU USE OF PRESIDENTIAL JET

The row between President Olusegun Obasanjo and his deputy, Alhaji Atiku Abubakar, took a new turn on Thursday as the president allegedly denied Abubakar the use of his official jet. ‘Obasanjo latest action has further exposed him as a man who has debased our democracy by his illegal conduct and autocratic style’

— *22 December, 2006, Front page*

Rather than move the parties towards peace, attention was shifted to the manifestation of the conflict. Punch was bent on emphasizing the differences between the parties in this political feud. The use of language was also faulty. It is another presentation capable of whipping up sentiments between the parties and the readership audience. The Punch became a fuelling ground for partisanship and gave more space and attention to Obasanjo as against the role it ought to have played in ameliorating the situation and has this role has been jettisoned, rather, the public were fed more destructive reports about the conflict and this further inflamed the existing conflict. More of the conflict escalatory stories are shown below:

ATIKU REMAINS SACKED — PRESIDENCY

The Presidency on Saturday reaffirmed his stand that Alhaji Atiku Abubakar was no longer the Vice-President of the Federal Republic of Nigeria.

Jan 7, 2007, pg 15.

In a bid to convey the situation, perhaps, the newspaper was not aware of the fact that their presentation goes a long way in determining how each party will be perceived as the conflict generated intense discussion in the polity and in the political environment and even led to more reports that featured the destructive, irresponsible verbal exchanges from the President and his Vice like the ones below as the conflict reached the height when the Presidency declared the office of the Vice President vacant while his tenure was yet to expire.

ATIKU MUST GO, PRESIDENCY INSISTS

The Presidency has asked the court to stop Alhaji Atiku Abubakar from parading himself as vice-president.

(In a counter-claim in the same report),

Abubakar had requested the court to, among other things, stop the Presidency from declaring his office vacant.....

-----Jan 15, 2007, pg 6

ATIKU IS CORRUPT — OBASANJO

President Olusegun Obasanjo on Thursday said that his deputy, Alhaji Abubakar was corrupt. Obasanjo broke his silence on the disagreement with Abubakar at a session with editors from about 10 frontline media organizations from the United States at the State House in Abuja.

(Still in the same story, Obasanjo was quoted as saying) “The number-two man in the country, the Vice-President, is currently fighting the fight of his life because of corruption around and about him”----

Jan 26, 2007, pg 2.

The aftermath of the type of stories presented above capped into outright replies by the conflicting parties through the media, and in response to Obasanjo’s threat Atiku replied Obasanjo through the media and it was reported thus:

YOU CAN'T ARREST ME-ATIKU DARES OBASANJO

Vice-President Atiku Abubakar on Friday dared President Olusegun Obasanjo to order his arrest saying that the Peoples Democratic Party was afraid to face him at the polls.-, *24 February, 2007, Pg 8*

PTDF: ATIKU FAULTS OBASANJO DENIAL

Vice-President Atiku Abubakar has described as unfortunate the denial by President Olusegun Obasanjo that he gave him, (the vice president) the approval to place \$20m Petroleum Technology Development Fund investment in the Trans International Bank. A statement from the Atiku Campaign Organization on Tuesday quoted Abubakar as saying that the denial was another confirmation that in the President's desperation to scandalize his deputy, he would abandon all official decorum.---

March 21, 2007, Front page

From the above reports, Atiku was trying to defend himself but in reporting this, The Punch newspaper failed to take cognizance of the statements attributed to conflicting sides which were orchestrated by the reporters. The influence of these inciting contents that were published were suspected to have increased and out blown the scope of the political conflict with more conflict- stirring stories like the below:

OUR EIGHT YEARS, A DISASTER-ATIKU

It was a strange declaration on Saturday at Onikan Stadium, Lagos Island when the Vice-President and the Action Congress presidential candidate, Atiku Abubakar, stated that the present administration, which he is a member was a disaster..... Justifying his ratings of the current government, Atiku said: "Obasanjo is an ex-convict, either rightly or wrongly, and wouldn't have had the right to contest the election in 1999, but myself and other Nigerians met Abdulsalami Abubakar, a military man, and begged him to pardon him so that we could present him to Nigerians. The same man is now the one barring people from contesting election". (*Emphasis mine*) —

April 8, 2007, page 12

Though Atiku was expressing his grievance, The Punch explicitly highlighted ridiculous statements and utterances by Atiku which could have been edited for the sake of peace and harmony over conflict and celebrating this utterance such as the above did not help to reduce the effect of the conflict rather, it upgraded the conflict from its mediocre level to the highest peak in view of the anxiety likely to have been generated among the public and by highlighting the kind of utterance above, the newspaper conferred undue attention and importance to a conflicting side against the order which no doubt, could have

definitely escalated the situation.

**PTDF: SENATE CLEARS OBASANJO, INDICTS ATIKU
PRESIDENT HAS BEEN VINDICATED-OSUNTOKUN
-IT'S A SHAME, SAYS VP**

The Senate on Thursday absolved President Olusegun Obasanjo from complicity in the mismanagement of the Petroleum Technology Development Fund. It, however, said that the approval of funds by Vice-President Atiku Abubakar was illegal---

In the same story, the Vice-President retorted:

But the VP said the Senate's verdict was a "sad, shameful and dishonorable last act of the legislative body" ...

May 11, 2007, Page 2

In the above excerpt, both conflicting sides made veiled references to each other on the controversial Petroleum Trust Development Fund and it was published featuring their corrupt deals and the outcome of the Senate meeting was the above. They should have at least quoted some authoritative sources if they had to report the issue not taking it upon themselves to confer irrelevant and unneeded attention on the issue. There was no conflict analysis or even efforts to reduce the intensity of the conflict. The controversy must have aroused conflict because of the inciting and reckless statements attributed to the conflicting sides.

NIGERIAN TRIBUNE

In the stand-off between the President and his Vice, the newspaper started a trend that featured the reportage of conflict stories like the one below which were suspected to have increased the scope of the violence. Such stories served to provide insight into the already pervasive conflict situation and this found adequate expression in the contents of the newspapers.

OBASANJO WITHDRAWS ATIKU'S AIDES, CARS

The stand-off between president Olusegun Obasanjo and his deputy, Alhaji Atiku Abubakar assumed an irredeemable twist weekend, following the withdrawal of the security aides of the vice president and his official privileges like his cars by the Federal Government on the directive of the president.-----

December 24, 2006, page 6

Perhaps the most poisonous of the publications came on the heels of Atiku's sack by the Presidency whose stage had already been set by the story published the day before and

it found expression in the following story:

OBJ SHOPS FOR ATIKU'S REPLACEMENT

President Olusegun Obasanjo and the leadership of the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) are now at a final stage of selecting a new vice president----

December 25, 2006, front page

Obviously, this story was targeted at Atiku as the headline bespeaks conflict. The story did not have to do with Atiku directly as he was not referred to in the lead but perhaps, the story was orchestrated to further escalate the situation and generate sentiments from the public and create ill-feeling, helplessness on the part of Atiku as the President used his veto powers to forcefully push him out of office. In view of this, the newspaper published this opinion below to give insight into the fresh page in the conflict but in doing this, they became another nerve centre of destructive conflict language which found expression in the opinion below:

UNDERSTANDING THE ATIKU SAGA

The story is not entirely new, but fresh pages are being opened in what has become an eternally sore relationship between President Olusegun Obasanjo and Vice President Atiku Abubakar. The presidential naked dance in the marketplace, which blew into the open in the second half of last year, had taken several dimensions that it can now be described as having reached the hilt. Atiku had flagged off the battle after, according to his aides, he has sucked in so much underhand pressure, pushing and shovings from the camp of President Obasanjo---

30 Dec, 2006, pg 7.

OBASANJO IS A DICTATOR, ATIKU INSISTS

The presidential candidate of the Action Congress (AC), Vice President Atiku Abubakar, has described President Olusegun Obasanjo as a dictator, saying he is the most powerful democratically elected president in the world.

13 February, 2007, Inside page

OBASANJO HAS FAILED NIGERIANS-ATIKU

The Vice-President and presidential candidate of the Action Congress, Alhaji Atiku Abubakar, on Friday assessed the eight years of President Olusegun Obasanjo's rule and came out with a damning verdict: Obasanjo has failed Nigerians in terms of his promises to provide electricity, roads, water and other social amenities and infrastructure----- 24 February, 2007. Pg 3

OBJ IS SUFFERING FROM “DISENGAGEMENT TRAUMA”-ATIKU --RECOMMENDS PSYCHIATRIC TEST FOR LEADERS

Vice President Atiku Abubakar has described as totally untrue and a symptom of disengagement trauma, claims by President Olusegun Obasanjo that he bribed legislators to impeach the president and that he had been engaged in speculations about death and the president. Reacting to what he described as president Obasanjo’s “bizarre and ludicrous allegations” against him on a national television programme on Sunday, Vice President Abubakar said Obasanjo was economical with the truth, adding that he (the president) had consistently distorted and twisted facts and events....

22 May, 2007, front page

As follow up to all the slighting stories published about him by his boss, Atiku retorted through Tribune with so many violence laden, destructive abuses to his boss which ordinarily should not have found space in the media. This further escalated the situation to the extent of Atiku recommending a psychiatric test for the number one person in the country. However, some retired Generals ganged up against Atiku on his political ambition in order not to outwit their colleague Obasanjo who is also a retired general. Their grouse found expression in this story:

HOW RETIRED GENERALS GANGED-UP AGAINST ATIKU

Strong indication has emerged that some retired army Generals ganged up to kill the political ambition of Vice- President Atiku Abubakar, as a way of showing him that he cannot rubbish their colleague, President Olusegun Obasanjo----

April8, 2007, inside page

However, the paper took it upon itself to explain what they have gathered and without any attribution while trying to cover up Obasanjo’s misdeeds. The researcher opines that this is grossly irresponsible. In furtherance of the conflict, the newspaper published an opinion article some months later after the court ruled in favor of Atiku on his defection to another party which found expression in the story below. The opinion sought to take sides with a party while slighting the other.

OBASANJO’S HYPOCRISY AND ATIKU ABUBAKAR’S VINDICATION

God is finally dealing with former President Obasanjo, exposing his hypocrisy and bogus patriotic credentials. Truly, the mill of God grinds slowly, which is why General Obasanjo’s skeletons are falling apart from the tightly guarded cupboard -----

-Feb 3,2008, page 7

Table 4 DISTRIBUTION OF DE-ESCALATION STORIES CARRIED BY THE NEWSPAPERS

NEWSPAPER	DE-ESCALATION
Tribune	5(21%)
Punch	10(45%)
Daily Champion	5(21%)
Daily Trust	1(5.2%)
Guardian	3(13%)
TOTAL	24(100%)

Research Question 2

To what extent did the selected newspapers carry politico-personal conflict de-escalation stories?

The above question examines the extent to which the selected newspapers carried de-escalation stories.

Obviously, the newspaper which had the highest percentage of de-escalatory reports was the Daily Punch (45.0%), it was followed by the Daily Champion and Tribune with Twenty One per cent each (21%). Unfortunately, Daily Trust published very marginal and negligible de-escalatory stories. It is therefore concluded that all the selected newspapers carried less de-escalatory stories compared with the percentage of reportage of the escalatory ones. More importantly, it is being posited here that the margin observed between the percentages of reports that were escalatory and those that were de — escalatory was too

wide and consistent across all the newspapers. Thus, the results suggest that it is a trend in reporting by Nigerian newspapers to emphasize conflict over peace and harmony. These results suggest that generally, the selected newspapers tended not to de — escalate the conflicts; rather they escalated these conflicts through their reports. Such coverage pattern negates the principles of peace journalism in which the media is expected to play a mediatory role in conflicts and between conflicting parties rather than stirring up sentiment and publicizing hateful comments and arguments. It is opined in this study that the results are a clear indication of the need for peace journalism to be adopted as well as a call for newspapers in Nigeria to exhibit a greater measure of social responsibility in reporting conflict in general, and specifically politico-personal conflicts in Nigeria. To buttress this point, the researcher in this study did a textual analysis in which discursive analysis was used to analyse the excerpts of de-escalatory reports. Most of the stories published on the different conflicts in the selected newspapers were mainly escalatory as against solution oriented stories which would seek to de-emphasize the conflict and transform the conflict into reconciliatory stories and these accounts for the scarcity of de-escalatory stories. The following are excerpts from each of the newspapers which provided a few solutions to the conflicts thus reducing the intensity of the war of words between the conflicting parties.

CHAMPION NEWSPAPER

ATIKU IS SAFE-OBJ

President Olusegun Obasanjo has described the alleged threat to the life of Vice President, Atiku Abubakar, as a mere rumor, assuring that his life was not in danger because the Presidential Villa is well secured. —

21 November, 2006 Front Pg

This story was published in the heat of the conflict, it was de-escalatory in nature as it is devoid of outbursts by the conflicting party though it does not mediate between the conflicting parties.

ANGLICAN BISHOPS: OBJ, ATIKU FEUD BAD FOR NATION'S IMAGE

Anglican Bishops have called on President Olusegun Obasanjo and his vice, Atiku Abubakar, to exercise restraint and display maturity saying their feud has impacted negatively on the country's image. — *15 January, 2007, Front Pg.*

The first story de-emphasised the escalation of the conflict as violent laden words were absent as that Atiku was assured safety by the other party even though the conflict had reached the peak when Atiku made statements that had to do with holding the Presidency responsible for any threat to the life. The story served to reduce the intensity of the conflict.

The second story was also de-escalatory in nature as opinions from religious leaders were sought and this shrunk the scope of the conflict.

DAILY TRUST NEWSPAPER

TMC URGES OBASANJO, ATIKU TO END FEUD

The president of the Muslim Congress (TMC), Engineer AbdulGaniyy Sadiq Atitebi has urged President Olusegun Obasanjo and Vice President Atiku Abubakar to call a truce in their ongoing face-off in the spirit of statesmanship.

Feb 6, 2007 pg 9.

This story also tried to find solution to the conflict by featuring the opinions of a respected personality in the society urging the parties to resolve the conflict.

GUARDIAN

ENAHORO MAY WADE INTO PRESIDENT, DEPUTY FACE-OFF

There were indications yesterday that elder statesman, Chief Anthony Enahoro, may intervene in the feud between President Olusegun Obasanjo and Vice President Atiku Abubakar.....Enahoro, who heads PRONACO, has, therefore, resolved to make wide consultations on the role he would play in ending the feud at the national convention.....

(December 28, 2006 front pg,)

This story was also de-escalatory in nature. It featured speculations that a respected statesman may wade into the conflict to dissolve it which basically sought to create an intervention in the raging conflict.

PUNCH

KUTIGI HEADS S' COURT PANEL TO HEAR OBASANJO-ATIKU CASE ON THURSDAY

The Supreme Court has constituted a seven-man panel to hear the case filed by Vice-President Atiku Abubakar seeking to stop President Olusegun Obasanjo from declaring his office vacant. The apex court will also hear the case on Thursday

January 23, 2007, Page 3

This does not feature any strife but sought to give a balanced hearing to the two parties in the conflict rather than fuelling it.

TABLE 5 DISTRIBUTION OF JOURNALISTIC GENRES FOR THE REPORTAGE

	TYPE OF STORY					Total
	HARD NEWS	FEATURES	EDITORIALS	OPINION S/COLUM NS	OTHERS	
ESCALATION	72	24	1	18	4	130
	55.4%	18.5%	0.8%	13.8%	3.1%	84.4%
DE-ESCALATION	11	9	0	3	1	24
	45.8%	38.0%	0%	12.5%	4.2%	15.6%

NIGERIAN TRIBUNE**WE'RE TOUCHED BY OBJ'S NEW CONCERN FOR ATIKU- TURAKI VANGUARD**

The Turaki Vanguard said on Monday that it was touched by the show of compassion by President Olusegun Obasanjo to Vice-President Atiku Abubakar over the injury sustained by the vice president on Sunday. *March 13, 2007, Page*

On different occasions during the conflict, the papers published few de-escalation stories that featured the opinions of mediators in the conflict, though they were not much but they tended not to escalate the situation as many of them were urging and were trying to proffer solutions to the Atiku and Obasanjo conflict. This particular story did not intensify the conflict rather it shows the opinion of a person lauding Obasanjo for his concern when Atiku sustained an injury in the midst of the enmity between them.

Research Question 3

In what proportions were journalistic genres used for reporting the conflict?

The question is directed towards examining how the various journalistic genres were used by the various newspapers for escalation and de — escalation stories on the conflict under study.

These results show that Fifty-Five point Four per cent (55.4%) of all hard news stories

by the selected newspapers were escalatory by nature, Eighty Nine point Five per cent (89.5%) of all features also tended to escalate the conflict, while Fifty Five point Six per cent (55.6%) of the editorials were also escalatory. Furthermore, all stories classified as column/opinion (100%) were found to be escalatory, while Seventy Five per cent (75%) of other journalistic genres were escalatory in manner. In the use of the various journalistic genres for de — escalation, Twenty point Two per cent (20.2%) of all hard news stories were de — escalatory of the conflicts, Ten point Five per cent (10.5%) and Forty Four point Four per cent (44.4%) of features and editorials respectively were used to de — escalate the various conflicts. Furthermore, no story in the opinion/column genre was used to de — escalate the story, Twenty Five per cent (25%) of stories/reports classified in other journalistic genres were de-escalatory. Consequently, it is being opinionated here that these findings may be indications that greater levels of introduction of opinion and individual perspective may actually result in production of news reports which do escalate rather than de — escalate conflicts in society, especially those which occur in the political realm. This is based on the fact the two journalistic genres which are grossly opinionated in nature, i.e. features and opinions/columns, were found to be more escalatory of the conflict to a greater than any of the others. This observation may perhaps be explained by Owens — Ibie's (2002) comment that conflict is hard to talk about without engaging the emotions of the discussant; this according to him, makes objective, balanced and resolution directed reporting a difficult task. On the other hand, the relatively high level of usage of editorials to de — escalate the various conflicts may be due to the fact that editorials, rather than reflecting individual opinion, mirror the perspective, opinion and position of a media organization on issues of national importance, hence the need ensure that to an extent, it is presented in a responsible and solution — oriented manner.

Research Question 4

Did the coverage of the conflicts vary in extent, categories, prominence and depth of treatment?

This multi — dimensional question delves into the nature of reporting on the conflicts by the various newspapers, by specifically examining attributes of the reports published by these papers. These attributes involve the length/depth of stories, placement (as a means of determining the prominence conferred upon an issue or a story), and the point size used for headlines that were cast for the stories. The question is directed to gaining a wholesome view of the reportage of the conflict by the various newspapers through multi — dimensional examination using a number of different but unique parameters.

TABLE 6 DISTRIBUTION OF NEWSPAPER BY DEPTH OF STORY

		DEPTH OF STORY					
		1-5	6-10	11-15	16-20	21+	Total
TRIBUNE	Count	4	3	3	7	17	34
	Percentage (%)	11.7%	8.8%	8.8%	20.6%	50%	100.0%
DAILY CHAMPION	Count	0	6	5	7	9	27
	Percentage (%)	0%	22.2%	18.5%	25.9%	33.3%	100.0%
DAILY PUNCH	Count	3	7	7	8	9	34
	Percentage (%)	8.8%	20.6%	20.6%	23.5%	26.5%	100.0%
DAILY TRUST	Count	1	6	9	4	10	30
	Percentage (%)	3.3%	20.0%	22.6%	13.3%	33.3%	100.0%
GUARDIAN	Count	2	3	8	6	10	29
	Percentage (%)	6.9%	10.3%	27.6%	21.0%	34.5%	100.0%
Total	Count	10	25	32	32	55	154
	Percentage (%)	6.5%	16.2%	20.8%	20.8%	35.7%	100.0%

DEPTH OF STORY

This refers to the length of a news story and this was measured in paragraphs. The depth is an important attribute and confers a certain degree of importance on an issue, considering that increased length often entails more extensive or in depth treatment of an issue or event unlike obtained in short stories where space may only permit inclusion of the very necessary details with no description, explanation or interpretation.

The above table shows the length/depth of stories published by the various newspapers; Folarin (1998:56) notes that this is also a method through which news media attach prominence to such issues and stories, thereby setting agenda for public discourse. The length is thus an important attribute by which the importance attached to a story as well as the depth of treatment can be ascertained as a short story may not be able to contain as many details as a much lengthier report. Data contained therein shows that news reports

ranging from 1 — 5 paragraphs in length accounted for Eleven point Seven per cent (11.7%) of stories published by the Nigerian Tribune newspaper, those between 6 and 10 paragraphs long and 11-15 paragraphs in length accounted for Eight point Eight per cent (8.8%) each of the newspaper's stories. Furthermore, Twenty point Six per cent (20.6%) of the newspaper's stories were 16 to 20 paragraphs in length while reports that were longer than 21 paragraphs accounted for Fifty per cent (50%) of its stories.

This entails that majority of stories published by the Nigerian Tribune newspapers were more than 21 paragraphs in length, this was followed with a significant number of stories falling between 6 and 10 in length. In the case of the Daily Champion, there were no stories ranging between 1 and 5 paragraphs of the newspaper's reports, those ranging between 6 and 10 paragraphs in length accounted for Twenty Two point Two per cent (22.2%) of stories, while Eighteen point Five per cent (18.5%) of its stories were between 11 and 15 paragraphs in length. Furthermore, Twenty Five point Nine per cent (25.9%) of stories were between 16 and 20 paragraphs in length while reports longer than 21 paragraphs accounted for Thirty-Three point Three per cent (42.2%) of the stories by the Daily Champion. The situation was different for the Daily Punch newspaper as majority of its reports (26.5%) were above 21 paragraphs in length. This was followed by reports that were 16-20 paragraphs long (23.5%) while Twenty point Six per cent (20.6%) of stories by the newspaper were between 11 and 15 paragraphs and 6-10 paragraphs in length.

Stories between 1 and 5 paragraphs accounted for Eight point Eight per cent (8.8%) of reports. This coverage pattern suggests that majority of stories by the Daily Punch were either relatively short or of medium length compared to reports by the other newspapers. For the Daily Trust newspaper, stories between 6 and 10 paragraphs in length accounted for Twenty per cent (20%), stories longer than 21 paragraphs also accounted for Thirty Three point Three per cent (33.3%), reports between 11 and 15 paragraphs constituted Twenty Two point Six per cent (22.6%).

Stories within the category of 1 - 5 and 16 - 20 paragraphs accounted for Three point Three per cent (3.3%) and Thirteen point Three per cent (13.3%) of reports respectively by the Daily Trust newspaper. It thus appears that the Daily Trust newspaper had the bulk of its stories falling between 21+ paragraphs in length. A sizeable portion of its stories also fell between 11 and 15 paragraphs. Similarly, Thirty Four point Five per cent (34.5%) of stories by the Guardian newspaper were longer than 21 paragraphs, Twenty Seven point Six per cent (27.6%) between 11 and 15 paragraphs in length and while Ten point Three per cent of its stories were 16 to 20 paragraphs long. In this case also, the majority of stories published by the newspaper were more than 21 paragraphs in length with another fairly large portion of stories between 11 and 15 paragraphs long.

Specifically, Tribune newspaper had the largest percentage of stories longer than 20 paragraphs, followed by the Guardian and Daily Trust Newspapers. Thus, this study posits

that by depth of reports, the Tribune, Guardian and Daily Trust (in descending order) gave the conflict prominence more than the other newspapers. On the other hand, the Daily Punch had the largest percentage of stories between 1 and 10 paragraphs, thus they had the largest portion of relatively short news stories and hence, could be said to have given the conflicts less prominence than the other newspapers by way of depth of reports. In all, the greater portion of stories were longer than 20 paragraphs, accounting for Thirty Five point Seven per cent (35.7%) of all reports, stories in the categories of 6 to 10 and 11 to 15 paragraphs constituted Sixteen point Two per cent (16.2%) and Twenty point Eight per cent (20.8%) respectively while also, Sixteen point Two per cent (16.2%) Twenty point Eight per cent (20.8%) of all stories were between 16 and 20 paragraphs long.

PLACEMENT/POSITION

According to Folarin (1998:57), positioning is one of the methods through which the print media perform the agenda setting role, hence, the location of a story goes a long way in determining the measure of importance attached to it by the publisher, and inadvertently, by the audience as well. In terms of positioning, it is normally expected that majority of stories should be on the inside pages since the front and back pages provide very limited space and are only used to feature the most important and captivating news items. Similarly, the bulk of stories published by the five newspapers fell into the category of inside pages.

Table 7 shows that Thirty Seven point Nine (37.9%) of all stories by Nigerian Tribune newspaper were front page stories, Three point four per cent of all stories by the newspaper were placed on the back page while Forty Eight point Three per cent (48.3%) and Ten point Three per cent (10.3%) of its stories were placed on the inside and center - spread pages respectively. This means that slightly more than half of the stories published by the newspaper were inside pages, about one tenth of its stories were center spread stories while about one third of its reports were on the front page. Back page stories constituted only a marginal percentage of reports by the news paper. In the case of Daily Champion, Thirty Six point Four per cent (36.4%) of stories were on the front page, No story was on the back page, Fifty per cent (50%) were on the inside while Thirteen point Six per cent (13.6%) of its reports were situated on center spread pages. In this case, a sizeable portion of stories were located on the front pages, however, the bulk of stories were on the inside. Unlike the Nigerian Tribune, only a marginal percentage of stories by the Daily Champion were placed on the center spread. Eight point Three per cent (8.3%) of stories by the Daily Punch were on the front page, No stories on the back pages, Ninety One point Seven per cent (91.7%) of its stories were on the inside while none of its stories were situated on the center spread page. In this case, the vast majority of stories were on the inside pages while a relatively lower percentage of reports were on the front page. Similarly, Twenty Four point One per cent (21.1%) of stories by Daily Trust newspaper were on the front page, Six point Nine per

Table 7 CROSS TABULATION OF NEWSPAPER, POSITION OF STORY AND ESCALATION FOR THE CONFLICT

Newspaper	Front Page	Back Page	Inside Page	Center Spread	Total
Punch	2 8.3%	-	22 91.7%	-	24
Nig. Tribune	11 37.9%	1 3.44%	14 48.3%	3 10.3%	29
Daily Champion	8 36.4%	-	11 50%	3 13.6%	22
Guardian	10 38.5%	2 7.7%	13 50%	1 3.8%	26
Daily Trust	7 24.1%	2 6.9%	23 79.3%	-	29
Total	38 29.2%	5 3.8%	80 61.5%	7 5.4%	130 100%

cent (6.9%) of its reports were on the back page, Seventy Nine point Three per cent (79.3%) of its stories were on inside pages. The newspaper also did not have any center spread stories. These results indicate that the newspaper had higher percentage of Inside page stories than Daily Punch but lower than the other newspapers sampled. The case was not different for the Guardian newspaper as more than half of its reports on the conflicts were

inside page stories. Specifically, front page stories accounted for Thirty Eight point Five per cent (38.5%) of its reports; Seven point Seven per cent (7.7%) of its stories were placed on the back page. Fifty per cent (50%) of its stories were on inside pages while Three point Eight per cent (3.8%) were located on center spread pages. These findings reveal that by way of positioning on front pages, the Guardian and Tribune newspapers gave the conflicts the greatest measure of prominence of all the newspapers. Daily Trust also had the greatest percentage of back page stories along with the Guardian while Nigerian Tribune and Champion newspaper had the vast majority of center spread stories, hence, could also be said to have given prominence to the conflict because of the premium placed on the centre spread.

In all, front page stories accounted for Twenty Nine point Two per cent (29.2%) of reports by all three newspapers, back page stories (3.8%), stories on inside pages (61.5%) and center spread reports (5.4%). Thus front page stories constituted almost one third of all stories by the selected newspapers. Consequently, by way of general placement of stories, the newspapers gave prominence to the conflict along with those on the inside pages. This indicates that by way of placement, on the front and inside pages, the newspapers gave prominence to escalatory reports on the Obasanjo Atiku conflict.

POINT SIZE

Point size is also an important parameter by which to judge and ascertain the measure of importance attached to any given news report by a newspaper. It refers to the size of the lettering used in the headline of stories and is important, considering that greater size of font/lettering often means more attention being drawn to a story more than other with smaller font sizes, i.e. the bigger the lettering (especially of the headline) is, the easier and faster attention is drawn to such a story. Thus, stories which the media consider as being more important than others on the same page often have headlines with relatively larger lettering; this is done so as to draw the attention of the reader first to such stories. Most importantly, use of heavy/large lettering in headlines is one of the major strategies which the media use in setting agenda for public discourse through their reports.

Table 8 shows the font sizes of headlines used by the selected newspapers in reporting the conflicts as a measure of the importance they attached to the conflicts. The table shows that Fourteen point Seven per cent (14.7%) of headlines by the Nigerian Tribune were between 18 and 24 point, Forty Four point One per cent (44.1%) were between 36 and 48 point, Twenty Nine point Four per cent (29.4%) were between 54 and 60 point while Eleven point Eight per cent (11.8%) were larger than 72 points. This shows that the bulk of headlines used by the Nigerian Tribune newspaper were between 36 and 48 points in size. Furthermore, Eighteen point Five per cent (18.5%) of headlines by the Daily Champion were between 18 and 24 points, Forty Eight point One per cent (48.1%) were between 36

TABLE 8 CROSSTABULATION OF POINT SIZES BY TYPE OF NEWSPAPER *

	POINT SIZES				Total
	18-24	36-48	54-60	72+	
TRIBUNE	5 (14.7%)	15 (44.1%)	10 (29.4%)	4 (11.8%)	34 (100.0%)
DAILY CHAMPION	5 (18.5%)	13 (48.1%)	4 (14.8%)	5 (18.5%)	27(100%)
DAILY PUNCH	15 (44.1%)	17 (50)	0 (.0%)	2 (5.0%)	34 (100%)
DAILY TRUST	18 (60.0%)	10 (33.3%)	1 (3.3%)	1 (3.3%)	30 (100%)
GUARDIAN	25 (86.2%)	4 (13.8%)	0	0	29 (100%)
Total	68 (44.2%)	59 (38.3%)	15 (9.8%)	12 (7.8%)	154 (100.%)

and 48 points, Fourteen point Eight per cent (14.8%) were between 54 and 60 points while Eighteen point Five per cent (18.5%) of headlines by the newspaper were larger than 72 points. Essentially then, the bulk of headlines by the newspaper were between 36 and 48 points in size. In the case of Daily Punch, only Five point Nine per cent (5.9%) of its headlines were larger than 72 points; Fifty per cent (50%) were between 36 and 48 points while Forty Four point One per cent (44.1%) were between 18 and 24 points. The newspaper did not use any headline with point size between 54 and 60. Thus, the greatest portion of its headlines had point size ranging between 18 and 48 points while those larger than 72 points constituted only a marginal percentage of headlines.

Majority of headlines by the Daily Trust newspaper were either between 18 — 24 points (60.0%) or 36 — 48 points (33.3%) in size. Those between 54 and 60 point and 72 points constituted only Three point Three per cent (3.3%) respectively. That of Guardian newspaper was most dissimilar as Eighty Six point Two per cent (86.2%) of its headlines were between 18 and 24 points while Thirteen point Eight per cent (13.8%) was between 36 and 48 points in size. In essence while only a marginal percentage of Daily Trust's headlines were larger than 48 points, none of the headlines by the Guardian were greater than 48 point size. These results suggest that by way of point size of headlines used by the selected newspapers in reporting the conflict, the Nigerian Tribune gave the greatest

measure of prominence, followed by Daily Champion. On the other hand, the Guardian and Daily Trust had the highest percentages of headlines with point size between 18 and 24, hence could be said to have given the least measure of prominence to the conflicts. In all, the bulk of headlines (44.2%) used by the selected newspapers fell between 18 and 24 point, this was followed by those between 36 and 48 point size (38.3%); headlines between 54 to 60 points and larger than 72 points accounted for only a marginal percentage of headlines used by the papers.

Research Question 5

How socially responsible was the reportage of the conflict by selected newspapers?

While the social responsibility theory accepts the basic principle of press freedom, it however also sees the need for media to perform certain obligations to society, i.e. put public interest above personal interest, and should not short change the public in the disclosure of information. Nkwocha (2003:41) and Okoye (2007:21) posit that freedom without responsibility is dangerous. Moreover, they assert that bitter rivalry and partisanship of media owners and the quest for objectivity on the part of media professionals could create problems for the society. They add that the press in any country should be responsive to the wishes, yearnings and feelings of the public. Essentially then, social responsibility entails that the media must balance their tremendous power and capacity to mould public opinion with their commitment to societal interest through reporting on issues in a way that is beneficial to society rather than in a destructive manner. It also emphasizes the need for discretion on the part of the mass media especially in reporting issues which are delicate and sensitive, such as conflict. Such issues are capable of destabilizing/disintegrating or enhancing a more stable, integrated and cohesive society depending on the way in which such issues are handled. In reporting the Obasanjo and Abubakar politico-personal conflict, it is submitted in this study that the selected newspapers to a large extent did not exhibit sufficient social responsibility; specifically, many of the reports by the newspapers were escalatory, capable of inciting further conflict. The reportage was largely imbalanced and clearly partisan. Indisputably, an overwhelming percentage of the reportage of the conflict was escalatory. This does not align with the tenets of social responsibility as reporting in such a way, especially when it involves individuals who occupy sensitive political positions, is capable of destabilizing the society. More importantly, the bulk of escalatory stories were placed conspicuously on the front, back or center spread pages and given great measure of prominence compared to the de — escalation stories. It thus appears that the newspapers were engaged in glorifying the conflict and presentation of conflict themes in such a way as to promote conflict value in society rather than establishing the dangers of such conflict and highlighting peaceful alternatives. Furthermore, partisanship and expression of support

for conflicting parties was observed in about eighty(80) percent of the reportage of the conflict by the selected newspapers. This shows that the selected newspapers took sides in the conflict, an act in which one of the conflicting parties is exalted at the expense of the other, and is liable to result in intensification of conflict. The fact that all column/opinion stories of the selected newspapers were escalatory of the conflict goes a long way in showing that the newspapers' coverage ran foul of the expectations of socially responsible media. The textual analysis of the reportage shows that the selected newspapers tended to escalate the conflict by reporting verbatim, provocative statements and utterances and description of happenings which could have been left out in the interest of the conflicting parties and society at large. The way in which some of the statements and happenings were also published or represented seems to suggest that the newspapers took interest in presentation of the conflicts in unsuitable ways, using inappropriate language. This thought is in consonance with Isola's (2010:85) observation that "the press has an enormous potential for peace building and for transforming conflict, but it often delights in encouraging and, sometimes, in inciting various forces in the society against one another for its inherent benefits."

SUMMARY, RECOMMENDATIONS AND CONCLUSION

This study has investigated newspaper coverage of the politico-personal conflict between a former President of Nigeria Olusegun Obasanjo and Vice President Atiku Abubakar between 1999 and 2007. The study examined the reportage of the conflict quantitatively and also interpreted the manifest reportage of five selected newspapers, namely Daily Trust, Nigerian Tribune, Daily Champion, Guardian and the Punch. Specifically, the study examined the manner of coverage of the incident by the newspapers including the number, length of stories and dimension of reports published. Without doubt, several authorities and previous studies have established the general and the obvious role of the media in political conflicts. However, the searchlight of this study was to assess the extent to which newspapers reports tend to escalate and de-escalate politico-personal conflict in Nigeria, using the Obasanjo-Atiku feud as a case study. It was discovered that newspapers churned out more escalation stories than de-escalation stories in their reportage. Thus the newspapers through their reports determined the violent dimension the conflict took. Even the de-escalation stories were not deliberate efforts by the newspaper to broker peace between the conflicting parties but were by concerned individuals who felt there was a necessity to do so. Consequently, the newspapers did not report the conflict within the framework of the development media theory. The newspapers also displayed elements of bias, partisanship, violence laden, destructive and spiteful languages while taking sides with

the conflicting parties all which tended to escalate the conflict. Upon the conclusion of this research, the following recommendations are put forward:

That conflict reporting and peace journalism as a course should be instituted into the curriculum of students of journalism in all tertiary institutions in the country. This would no doubt furnish them with the necessary skills to report conflicts when they get into the industry. It is hoped that this will provide them with the expertise germane to demonstrating neutrality and a sense of balance in reporting such conflicts.

That reporters and correspondents working in media houses should undergo training and attend regular workshops on how to report conflict issues as this would enable them go about their day to day reporting by valuing peace as a news value over conflict. This can be done through making a deliberate editorial policy and house style that will guide against escalatory stories in prebendal political reporting.

That in politico — personal conflict reporting, the language used should be played down a lot as this will serve effectively to reduce the intensity of the conflicts and act as mediators in the conflict rather than being conflict fuelers but balancing the concepts of objectivity, fairness and balance with conflict analysis and conflict transformation thereby raising conflict to the plain of discussion with proposals for resolution.

That, when it is obvious that a conflict is brewing, the media should churn out early warning signals on the conflict and this can be emphasized by the surveillance function so as to detect early and take proactive measures by guiding against the intending conflict.

That, conflicting inciting advertorials and opinions should be filtered as the revenue generated through these should not stand in the way of peace and mediation which should be paramount in order to lead the society into development.

That a body which would see to researching on the reports on conflict from time be established so as to monitor the performance of the media in reporting conflicts. This it is hoped will allow for media houses to see if they are in tune with preventive conflict reporting that would not escalate any conflict situation.

That conflict resolution should be the paramount thing on the minds of editors, reporters, correspondents, columnists in reporting or writing about conflict. This will ultimately lead to peace building as building peace destructive or negative communication patterns need to be transformed or replaced by constructive or positive interaction patterns. This stresses the need to transform the disputing parties by empowering them to understand their own situation and needs, as well as encouraging them to recognize the situation and how it affects the country.

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