RETRACTED: Newspaper Framing of Blasphemy Crisis in Northern Nigeria: A Study of *Daily Trust* and *the Punch* Newspapers

Yusuf Bolakale Suleiman[a], Akanbi Solomon Oladoyin[b], Surajudeen Dayo Ogunsola[c]* & Hamdalat Abubakar[d]

[a] Department of Information, Journalism and Media Studies, Faculty of Communication and Media Studies, University of Abuja, Abuja, Nigeria.

[b]Kwara State Civil Service, Ministry of Communications.

[c]Department of Broadcasting, Film and Multimedia Studies, University of Abuja, Abuja,

[d]Department of Broadcasting, Film and Multimedia Studies, University of Abuja.

*Corresponding email: ogunsolasurajudeendayo@gmail.com

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Abstract

Newspapers play a significant role in shaping public perception and discourse during conflict or crisis situations, particularly through their framing and reportage of sensitive issues such as blasphemy. This study examined the portrayal of blasphemy incidents in Northern Nigeria by national dailies, focusing on *Daily Trust* and *The Punch* newspapers. One of the key objectives of the study was to ascertain the various frames employed by the selected newspapers in their coverage of blasphemy incidents in Northern Nigeria, among others. Content analysis was the research method adopted, used to examine 54 editions of the two newspapers sampled between January and June 2022. A composite sampling technique was employed to arrive at the 54 editions 27 from each newspaper. This technique was applied consistently across each of the six months studied for both newspapers. Findings revealed that the selected newspapers did not provide adequate coverage of blasphemy incidents in the northern region during the study period. The dominant frames they employed were the condemnation frame, religious frame, and visible effects frame. Based on these key findings, the study concluded that the selected newspapers did not do enough to create awareness or sensitise the public to the menace of blasphemy, particularly in Northern Nigeria. The paper recommended, among other things, that the media should consistently sensitise the public to the dangers of religious crises in order to promote peaceful coexistence among Nigerians.

Keywords: Assessment, Portrayal, Blasphemy, Newspaper, Framing

Introduction

Newspapers have long held a prominent position within the journalism landscape. This status stems from their historical roots, often regarded as the foundation of modern journalism, which can be traced back to the invention of the printing press by the German printer Johannes Gutenberg in the 1440s (Roadman, 2016, as cited in Rabiu, n.d.). In addition to being the origin of journalism, Rabiu (n.d.) argued that although other forms of media provide news and information, newspapers distinguish themselves by offering more authoritative and informed reportage. Babatunde et al. (2022) highlighted that the primary function of newspapers is to disseminate

information deemed significant to the public. Emphasising the enduring relevance of newspapers, Adeniran (2023, as cited in Ikeme, 2023) described them as a traditional mass communication medium, comparable to magazines and television. Before the widespread adoption of internet technology, newspapers were particularly valued for their wide readership and influence.

Nigeria, a country characterised by ethnic and religious diversity, has experienced numerous crises, many of which have been sparked by accusations of blasphemy. Aswad et al. (2014) defined blasphemy as speech or actions deemed disrespectful or offensive to God, including ridicule of sacred figures or doctrines, thereby offending religious sentiments. A notable case is that of Gideon Akaluka in December 1994, who was accused of desecrating the Qur'an in Kano. According to Chiboh (2017), this incident where the accused was forcibly removed from police custody and beheaded by a mob marked one of the earliest and most prominent blasphemy-related crises in Nigeria. Since then, similar incidents have occurred predominantly in Northern Nigeria.

Adesanmi (2016) referenced a subsequent incident involving Isioma Daniel, whose article published in *ThisDay* on 16 November 2002 provoked national outrage. More recently, on 12 May 2022, Deborah Samuel, a student of Shehu Shagari College of Education in Sokoto, was killed by fellow students over alleged blasphemy against the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH). Less than a month later, on 4 June 2022, another individual a member of a vigilante group in Abuja was lynched and set ablaze over a similar allegation (Odeniyi & Sanusi, 2022). Such incidents, if not properly addressed, have the potential to incite widespread religious violence. However, Aliagan (2015) observed that many Nigerian newspapers tend to adopt reporting patterns influenced by religious or ethnic leanings, often driven by market considerations. This regional and ethnic partiality undermines journalistic objectivity. Oso (2012) also criticised the Nigerian media for often subordinating national interest to commercial or political considerations.

Further highlighting the complexities of conflict coverage, Okunna (2019) noted that the Nigerian press is frequently perceived as partial in its reporting, with biases shaped by ownership structures, target readership, and proximity to the conflict areas. In a similar vein, Ehikioya and Alabelewe (2016) asserted that cultural and religious affiliations influence how newspapers cover sensitive issues, potentially framing them in a manner that either fosters sympathy or hostility. More directly, Jimoh and Abdul-Hameed (2017) contended that Nigerian newspapers have faced sustained criticism for perceived bias, incitement, misinformation, and sectarian reporting. In light of these concerns, this study seeks to investigate how newspapers frame blasphemy-related crises in Northern Nigeria, with specific attention given to two prominent national dailies *Daily Trust* and *The Punch*.

Problem Statement

The mass media wield significant influence in promoting harmonious coexistence among Nigeria's diverse religious communities. Conversely, they may also contribute to fuelling ethno-religious tensions through the ways they frame and report sensitive topics such as blasphemy (Ayansola, 2017, as cited in Itabiyi et al., 2019). Blasphemy-related incidents in Nigeria, particularly in the northern region, have triggered violence, resulting in loss of lives and extensive destruction of property (Bukar et al., 2024; Gusau & Shehu, 2019; Itabiyi et al., 2019). Although blasphemy is recognised as an offence under Nigeria's Penal and Criminal Codes, extrajudicial killings commonly referred to as jungle justice are not prescribed under the law. Section 204 of the Criminal Code defines blasphemy as an insult to religion and classifies it as a misdemeanour, punishable by up to two years' imprisonment. However, it does not stipulate capital punishment. In contrast, the Kano State Shariah Penal Code (2000), under Section 382, prescribes the death

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penalty for any public insult directed at the Qur'an or any Prophet through words, writings, or gestures.

Numerous studies have explored how the Nigerian press reports religious conflicts (Ayoola & Olaosun, 2014; Bukar et al., 2024; Chiboh, 2017; Gusau & Shehu, 2019; Itabiyi et al., 2019; Unaegbu, 2016). Nonetheless, there appears to be a gap in literature specifically examining how newspapers report blasphemy as a catalyst for conflict. Internationally, some research has addressed the subject of blasphemy in the media (Khushboo et al., 2021; Sadaf et al., 2020), yet domestic studies remain limited. Therefore, this study aims to fill the gap by focusing specifically on how Nigerian newspapers cover incidents of blasphemy. This investigation will help assess the extent to which media framing either exacerbates religious tensions or contributes to fostering peace among diverse religious groups in Nigeria.

Objectives of the Study

This study aims to achieve the following objectives:

1. To identify the various frames adopted by *Daily Trust* and *The Punch* newspapers in reporting blasphemy-related incidents in Northern Nigeria.
2. To evaluate the level of prominence accorded to blasphemy-related stories by the two selected newspapers.
3. To assess, using conflict-sensitive journalism indicators, whether the frames employed by *Daily Trust* and *The Punch* have the potential to promote peace or fuel conflict.

Research Questions

To realise the above objectives, the following research questions guided the study:

1. What frames are used by Daily Trust and The Punch newspapers in reporting blasphemy-related incidents in Northern Nigeria?
2. How much prominence is given to blasphemy-related stories by the two newspapers?
3. In what ways do the frames utilised by Daily Trust and The Punch either foster peace or intensify conflict?

Conceptual Clarifications

Newspaper

Scholars in communication studies have offered various definitions of the term "newspaper." For example, Okunna and Omenugha (2017) describe a newspaper as an unstapled printed publication issued at regular intervals, primarily composed of written information and occasionally supplemented with photographs. Babatunde et al. (2022) take a functional approach, viewing newspapers as instruments that present issues of public interest to diverse and wide-ranging audiences. They further assert that newspapers are published with the aim of disseminating information considered essential to the general public. Nwodu (2006, as cited in Nwodu, n.d.) defines a newspaper as an unbound, printed medium that provides reports on political, economic, educational, and various societal issues. Similarly, Ekweonu (2020) explains that newspapers are regular publications often daily or weekly consisting of folded, unstapled sheets containing news, commentary, features, adverts, and correspondence.

According to Ekweonu, a standard newspaper is printed on newsprint, lacks a cover, is folded rather than bound, and is usually larger than 297 mm by 420 mm in dimension. It may also include supplementary materials, such as colour magazines or inserts tied to special reports or events (Okunna & Omenugha, 2017).Newspapers, owing to their generous space and structural flexibility, offer room for detailed analysis of current events, personalities, institutions, and social trends, often using layouts that increasingly incorporate visuals (Franklin, 2008, as cited in Tanikawa, 2017). Apuke and Omar (2020) also affirm that newspapers serve as a form of mass

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communication through which new and timely information is disseminated periodically. Given these qualities, scholars such as Ola and Ojo (2007) agree that newspapers remain essential sources of information that keep readers abreast of developments both locally and internationally. Moreover, with technological advancements, Koundal and Mishra (2018) argue that the newspaper has evolved beyond printed formats to embrace digital platforms, encompassing a broader range of multimedia formats.

Blasphemy

Nigeria has experienced various turbulent moments, with some of the most sensitive involving religious and ethnic dimensions. Religious-based crises often emerge when one group's expression or actions are perceived as irreverent towards another's sacred beliefs, with blasphemy being a recurring trigger. Gusau and Shehu (2019) define blasphemy simply as profanity or cursing. Contrary to the belief that blasphemy is an exclusively Islamic concern, Buka (2018) provides a broader perspective, describing it as any offensive speech or act directed at sacred figures, books, or symbols held dear by followers of organised religions especially within Islam and Christianity. From this standpoint, blasphemy encompasses actions or expressions that challenge the sanctity of religious symbols, potentially offending the sentiments of believers.Aswad et al. (2014) interpret blasphemy as irreverent remarks aimed at God or His messengers, which may provoke religious sensitivities. They further refer to statutes in the United States (Oklahoma) that describe blasphemy as the public articulation of disdainful words or actions toward God, prophets, Holy Scriptures, or any religion.

Similarly, the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom (2014) defines blasphemy as an expression of disrespect or contempt towards God or sacred entities. Thus, blasphemy can be understood as any statement or conduct perceived to undermine religious symbols or teachings revered by particular faith groups. In legal terms, particularly within Islamic jurisprudence, blasphemy is recognised as an offence. In Nigeria, some states include blasphemy as a criminal act under specific legal frameworks, especially within Sharia-based jurisdictions. Newspaper Coverage of Crisis in Nigeria Media attention to the coverage of crises or conflicts has increasingly become the norm. The role of the media in conflict situations particularly how news reportage influences both the progression of events and public understanding has attracted considerable scholarly interest (Abdulbaqi & Ariemu, 2017; Akpan et al., 2013; Basorun, 2015; Kugbayi, 2024; Mohammed, 2023). According to Popoola and Agoro (2010), this trend stems from the public's long-standing appetite for news items centred on crime, coups, divorce, violence, and other dramatic occurrences.

Ezegwu and Leman (2023) noted that anything unusual tends to make the news; thus, conflict-related events are frequently regarded as breaking news. This supports the often-quoted adage that "bad news is good news" for the media. Bamidele (2012, as cited in Ezegwu & Leman, 2023) contended that the media wield significant influence over conflicts and their outcomes. He argued that economic pressures and fierce competition within the media industry often compel news organisations to report in ways that inadvertently promote the escalation of conflict. Emphasising the media's powerful influence on the public, especially during crises, Talabi and Adefemi (2018) asserted that mass media are potent tools that can be wielded for either positive or negative outcomes due to their ability to shape audience behaviour through strategic use of language. In this context, media coverage particularly by newspapers can shape the trajectory of a conflict and its broader societal implications.Media analysts (Demarest et al., 2020) have concluded that journalists reporting on conflicts often do more than simply present facts; they also construct narratives that influence how audiences interpret events. Citing framing theory,

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Demarest et al. (2020) explained that frames serve as cognitive tools that guide public understanding of issues. In conflict situations, therefore, the news media can become a platform either for inciting aggressive responses or promoting peaceful resolutions. This implies that the media may, intentionally or otherwise, escalate tensions or foster reconciliation depending on the tone and framing of their coverage. The language and slant used in media reports can either heighten or defuse a crisis.Moreover, through their surveillance and watchdog roles, print media function as monitors that alert society to impending crises, often offering insights and solutions through editorials (Talabi & Adefemi, 2018).

Conversely, newspapers can also serve as instruments of conflict escalation, influenced by editorial direction and ownership bias. Babarinsa (2003) highlighted the destructive role played by newspapers and other mass media outlets during the violent political struggles of Nigeria's Second Republic particularly among followers of Chief Obafemi Awolowo in Ondo State. The media's alignment with their proprietors' political interests significantly intensified the conflict, ultimately contributing to the collapse of the republic. The framing and partisan tone adopted by these newspapers acted as a catalyst for further escalation. This underscores the point that the Nigerian print media's role in conflict resolution through balanced reportage and editorial commentary cannot be overstated. Newspapers are crucial in shaping public opinion and drawing the attention of political leaders to pressing and sensitive issues. However, newspapers have also played a role in worsening conflicts through reckless or biased editorial decisions, particularly those rooted in political interests. Popoola (2018), in his inaugural lecture at Ajayi Crowther University titled "Media, Politics and Conflicts in Nigeria: The Fourth or Ruinous Estate of the Realm", explored this dynamic in detail. He identified a clear link between ownership interests, ethnic or regional bias, and the editorial tone of newspapers as significant contributors to the escalation of crises, including those witnessed during Nigeria's First, Second, and even the aborted Third Republics.

Empirical Reviews

Despite the volatile nature of blasphemy and its often devastating consequences, scholarly attention has largely focused on broader issues of conflict and media reportage. This gap in the literature provides a compelling justification for the current study. Nevertheless, this section reviews existing studies that have examined how the media have reported incidents related to blasphemy. Bukar et al. (2024) explored the language used by the press, with a focus on how Nigerian national dailies adhered to the principles of peace journalism when covering sensitive issues such as blasphemy. Their study, titled "Peace Journalism Practice in Nigeria: War Language and Blasphemy Conflicts", analysed 306 editions of the *Daily Trust* and *The Punch* newspapers. The study assessed the extent to which these newspapers avoided war-inclined language in their reportage of blasphemy. Using quantitative content analysis as the methodology and framing theory as the theoretical framework, the study found a high prevalence of war language, with *The Punch* recording more occurrences than *Daily Trust*. Of the three coded categories demonising, victimising, and emotive demonising was the most frequently used. The study recommended that Nigerian journalists covering ethno-religious conflicts should be trained in peace journalism. It also examined the frames prioritised in both newspapers and evaluated whether these facilitated peace or escalated tensions. In addition, the study considered the prominence given to blasphemy stories.

Similarly, Gusau and Shehu (2019) examined newspaper coverage of the blasphemy-related student unrest at Abdu-Gusau Polytechnic, Talata-Mafara, Zamfara State. Their content analysis focused on *Daily Trust* and *The Nation* newspapers, evaluating reportage of the incident on 22 August 2016, during which at least eight people died following alleged blasphemous remarks

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against the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH). The study revealed that the coverage was slanted, with discernible bias affecting perceptions of the institution, Zamfara State, Islam, and the broader northern region. Most frames used by the newspapers were condemnatory in nature. Itabiyi et al. (2019) explored how religious crises and security issues were covered in *The Guardian* and *The Punch* newspapers. The study focused on the depth of coverage and its implications for citizen security, using indicators such as prominence, slant, frequency, and media representation. Content analysis was employed. Findings revealed that news reports were the primary editorial form used in covering religious stories. While the study noted adherence to ethical reporting in sensitive ethno-religious contexts, it also highlighted that the stories published could potentially promote conflict among the public. Consequently, it recommended that regulatory agencies exercise greater oversight regarding media coverage of religion-related topics.

Other relevant studies were conducted outside Nigeria. Khushboo et al. (2021), for example, analysed how Pakistani newspapers framed the acquittal of Aasia Bibi by the Supreme Court of Pakistan. Their study, titled *Portrayal of Aasia Bibi Blasphemy Case: A Comparative Analysis of News Headlines in Pakistani Newspapers*, used content analysis grounded in van Dijk's model and framing theory. The unit of analysis was the headlines from four prominent newspapers: *Daily Dawn, The Nation, Daily Jang,* and *Daily Ummat* during the week of the verdict. The results showed considerable variation in the use of discursive strategies. *The Nation,* for instance, employed emotionally charged language and lexical devices to shape public opinion, whereas *Daily Jang* and *Daily Dawn* were more objective and measured in their headlines. Raza et al. (2012) studied the framing of the "war on terror" in *The Nation* and *Business Recorder*, two leading Pakistani newspapers. They found that both papers generally promoted peaceful resolution, using framing strategies that emphasised context, tone, and the social and economic effects of terrorism. The coverage frequently condemned Taliban activities and gave substantial attention to the broader societal impact of violent attacks. Teo (2000), in a study on racism in Australian news reporting, investigated how ethnic minorities were portrayed in *The Sunday Morning Herald* and *The Daily Telegraph*. The analysis revealed a systematic tendency to stereotype ethnic minorities, reinforcing racist ideologies embedded in the discourse of power relations between the white majority and ethnic minorities.

Taken together, these studies suggest that the media's approach to reporting sensitive religious issues directly influences public perception. In a pluralistic society like Nigeria, where blasphemy and religion-related crises are recurrent, examining media coverage becomes vital. This study is therefore both timely and relevant, as it critically assesses how blasphemy-related news is framed, particularly in relation to Johan Galtung's tenets of peace journalism (Bukar et al., 2024).

Theoretical Framework

This study is anchored in framing theory**,** which, according to Asemah et al. (2017), can be traced to the foundational work of Goffman (1974). The theory posits that meaning is constructed primarily through media content. Its relevance to the present research lies in its focus on how journalists shape stories by highlighting particular elements while omitting others. As Ferman (2013) explains, framing encompasses the journalistic decisions that influence which aspects of an event are emphasised and which are downplayed or ignored. The selection and construction of these frames shape how audiences interpret and react to news content. Volkmer (2009) and Ferman (2013) both argue that this selective emphasis has a direct impact on audience perception, especially in relation to complex or sensitive issues. Sometimes considered a second-level agenda-setting theory, framing theory maintains that the media not only tell the public what to think about but also influence *how* to think about it. Asemah et al. (2017) further explain that frames function

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as interpretive structures, allowing media to situate events within broader fields of meaning. Entman et al. (2009) define a frame as both the colouration given to a news story and the framework through which it is reported and interpreted. For example, when news is presented with a positive slant, audiences are likely to develop favourable attitudes towards those being reported on (Unaegbu, 2016).The connection between this theory and the present study lies in the assumption that the way media frame incidents of blasphemy significantly influences public perception. Consequently, the media's representation of such sensitive issues has the potential to either foster peaceful coexistence or fuel discord within Nigerian society.

Method

This study employs a quantitative research design**,** with content analysis as the primary method of data collection and analysis. Wimmer and Dominick (2011) define content analysis as a widely accepted method used across disciplines including linguistics, journalism, communication studies, psychology, and sociology to examine the overt content of media. These contents may include news stories, editorials, cartoons, feature articles, and other media forms. The method is particularly suitable for this study due to its reliability in analysing manifest media content and producing accurate, dependable results. The study population comprises 362 editions of two Nigerian national dailies *Daily Trust* and *The Punch* published between January and June 2022, representing 181 editions per newspaper. To derive the sample size, the composite sampling technique was applied. This yielded a total of 54 editions, comprising 27 editions from each newspaper. Composite sampling was applied to select representative editions for each week of the six-month study period. The table below presents the sampling framework used for this selection.

Table 3.1: Sampled Editions

S/N	Months		Weeks/	Days			Total
		Week 1	Week 2	Week 3	Week 4	Week 5	
1.	January	Sat 1	Sun 2	Mon 10	Tue 18	Wed 26	5
2.	February	Thur 3	Fri 11	Sat 19	Sun 20	Mon 28	5
3.	March	Tue 8	Wed 16	Thur 24			3
4.	April	Fri 1	Sat 9	Sun 10	Mon 18	Tue 26	5
5.	May	Wed 4	Thur 12	Fri 20	Sat 28	Sun 29	5
6.	June	Mon 6	Tue 14	Wed 22	Thur 30		4
							27x2 = 54

In this study, the units of analysis comprised editorial materials, including news stories, editorials, opinion/column articles, features/analyses, letters to the editor, and photographs. The content categories focused on blasphemy frames, nature of the story, story placement, and tone. These variables were clearly outlined in the coding sheet developed for data collection. Both a coding sheet and a coding guide served as the data collection instruments. The coding guide provided explicit instructions for accurately recording each item into the coding sheet, thereby ensuring the validity of the research. To enhance reliability, the researchers meticulously adhered to the agreed template throughout the coding process. Data generated were presented using frequency distribution tables and simple percentages to enhance clarity and understanding.

Data Presentation

The primary aim and objectives of this research were to examine the portrayal of blasphemy incidences in Northern Nigeria by the two selected newspapers. To achieve this, fifty-four (54) editions of *The Punch* and *Daily Trust* newspapers were sampled, covering the period from January to June 2022.

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Table 1: Frequency of Newspaper Reportage of blasphemy incidences in Northern Nigeria

Newspaper	Frequency	Percentage
The Punch	28	52.9 %
Daily Trust	25	47.1%
Total	53	100%

Source: Researchers' field work

As shown in Table 1, the total number of stories on blasphemy incidences in Northern Nigeria in the selected newspaper editions was 53 stories. *The Punch* newspaper had higher stories with a total of 28 stories representing 52.9%, while *Daily Trust* newspaper had 25 stories representing 47.1%.

Table 2: Genre of stories used for reportage of blasphemy incidences in Northern Nigeria

Unit of Analysis	The Punch	Daily Trust	Total
News	16 (57.1%)	19 (76%)	35 (66%)
Features	1 (3.6%)	0 (0%)	1 (1.8%)
Columns	4 (14.3%)	2 (8%)	6 (11%)
Editorials	2 (7.1%)	1 (4%)	3 (5.7%)
Pictures	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)
Interviews	3 (10%)	1 (4%)	4 (7.5%)
Cartoons	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)
Letters	2 (7.1%)	2 (8%)	4 (7.5%)
Total	28 (100%)	25 (100%)	53 (100)

Source: Researchers' field work

From table 2, it is obvious that most of the stories on blasphemy incidences in Northern Nigeria in the selected newspaper editions were straight news (66.0%) interspersed with few editorials, letters and opinion columns. However, there were no pictures or cartoons and very few feature articles.

Table 3: Prominence of stories on blasphemy incidences in Northern Nigeria in the selected newspapers

Story Placement	The Punch	Daily Trust	Total
Front Page	4(14.2%)	3(12%)	7(13.2%)
Inside Page	22(78.6%)	21(84%)	43 (81.1%)
Back Page	2(7.1 %)	1(4%)	3(5.7%)
Total	28 (100%)	25 (100%)	53 (100)

Source: Researchers' field work

Table 3 reveals that most of the stories on blasphemy incidences in Northern Nigeria were placed on the inside pages of the selected newspapers (81.1%). This implies that the subject matter was not given serious prominence, which could have elevated the placement to the front or back page.

Table 4: Frame/Tone of reportage of Blasphemy in the selected newspapers

Unit of Analysis	The Punch	Daily Trust	Total
Condemnation	10 (34.4%)	11(45.8%)	21(39.6%)
Solution	5(17.2%)	0(0%)	1 (1.9%)
People Oriented	0(0 %)	1(4.1%)	1(1.8%)
Invisible Effect	0(0 %)	0(0 %)	0 (0%)
Visible effect	4(13.7%)	2(8.3%)	6 (11.3%)
Ethnic	2 (6.8%)	0(0 %)	2(3.7%)
Religious	7 (24.1%)	1(4.1%)	8 (15%)
Elite-Oriented	1 (3.4%)	1(4.1%)	2 (3.7%)
Total	28 (100%)	25 (100%)	53 (100)

Source: Researchers' field work

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Table 4 presents eight distinct frames condemnation, solution, people-oriented, invisible effects, visible effects, ethnic, religious, and elite-oriented constructed to categorise the data. Each article was classified exclusively under one of these frames to establish the similarities and differences in how *Daily Trust* and *The Punch* framed blasphemy controversies in Northern Nigeria. The results show that out of the 53 articles analysed, the condemnation frame which denounces mob lynching as unfortunate, un-Islamic, illegal, immoral, and contrary to civilised values, while advocating for the prosecution of perpetrators was the most prominent, accounting for 39.6% of the total. *Daily Trust* and *The Punch* contributed 20.7% and 18.9%, respectively, to this frame. This was followed by the solution frame**,** which explored the causes and proposed remedies to the conflict, comprising 24.5% of the total frames 15.0% from *Daily Trust* and 9.4% from *The Punch***.** This suggests that the newspapers largely focused on condemning the violence, identifying its root causes, and proposing solutions to a conflict that has claimed lives, destroyed property, and undermined peaceful coexistence among Nigeria's diverse ethnic, religious, and political groups.

Both newspapers, however, paid minimal attention to the invisible effects of the conflict or the perspectives of ordinary citizens. Only *Daily Trust* featured this frame (4.1%), while *The Punch* did not use it at all. Conversely, the visible effects frame appeared more prominently, accounting for 13.7% of *The Punch***'s** coverage and 8.3% of *Daily Trust***'s.** The elite-oriented frame accounted for 3.7% across both newspapers, appearing once in each. Marked differences emerged in their use of ethnic and religious frames. The religious frame featured seven times in The Punch**,** representing 24.1% of its total framing, but only once in *Daily Trust* (4.1%). Similarly, the ethnic frame which emphasises the victim's ethnic or regional identity and fosters an 'us versus them' mentality was used in 6.9% of *The Punch*'**s** coverage and not at all in *Daily Trust***.**

Discussion of Key Findings

From the analysis, eight frames were identified in the selected newspapers' coverage of blasphemy-related incidents in Northern Nigeria. These frames can be broadly divided into two categories: those that promote peaceful conflict resolution and those likely to intensify tensions. The data indicate that peace-supportive frames (66%) outnumbered conflict-exacerbating ones (33.9%), aligning with Entman et al.'s (2009) assertion that framing involves moral judgement. This suggests that the newspapers exhibited some degree of sensitivity to the volatile nature of blasphemy, particularly in a region with a predominantly Muslim population. However, Itabiyi et al. (2019) found that certain frames used by *The Guardian* and *The Punch* in their coverage of religious and security crises had the potential to inflame ethnic and religious tensions. This highlights occasional lapses in adhering to the ethical standards of peace journalism.

Prominence in news publication reflects the editorial value attached to a story. In this study, blasphemy-related incidents in Northern Nigeria were generally given low prominence, suggesting an editorial decision to downplay such stories possibly as a strategy to reduce escalation. This aligns with findings by Itabiyi et al. (2019), who also observed that religious conflicts were often relegated to the inner pages. However, this contradicts Onuegbu's (2012) study, which found that religious crisis stories were given significant prominence during the study period. Among the conflict-sensitive journalism indicators used condemnation, solution, people-oriented, invisible effects, visible effects, ethnic, religious, and elite-oriented the condemnation frame was most dominant. It aimed to discourage mob justice under the guise of blasphemy. This was closely followed by the solution frame, echoing the peace journalism model advocated by Johan Galtung. The results corroborate Bukar's (2018) findings, which emphasised the prevalence of peace-

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oriented framing in newspaper coverage. They also align with the findings of Raza et al. (2012), who reported similar trends in Pakistani newspapers.

In contrast, a more recent study by Bukar et al. (2024) analysed the language used by *Daily Trust* and *The Punch* in their coverage of blasphemy incidents. It found that *The Punch* frequently employed inflammatory language that could intensify tensions, whereas *Daily Trust* exercised greater restraint. This contradicts the conclusions of Akpan et al. (2013), who argued that the media generally fuel conflicts and hinder reconciliation efforts. Their view is further supported by Teo's (2000) study on ethnic stereotyping in Australian newspapers. On a general note, the findings of this study are consistent with the assumptions of Framing Theory, the study's theoretical underpinning. A key premise of this theory is that media outlets focus on particular aspects of events and embed them within specific fields of meaning. Therefore, *Daily Trust* and *The Punch* framed blasphemy incidents according to their respective editorial orientations, geographic bases, and target readerships.

Conclusion

Based on the analysis and key findings presented, it is evident that the Nigerian press specifically *Daily Trust* and *The Punch* did not adequately fulfil their social responsibility roles in reporting blasphemy incidents in Northern Nigeria during the study period. This shortfall is particularly noticeable when comparing the limited number and low prominence of such stories against the widespread public concern they typically generate. In light of these findings, it is recommended that media outlets avoid sensationalist framing when reporting on sensitive issues like blasphemy. Rather, they should adopt the principles of peace journalism and refrain from using provocative or inflammatory language that could escalate religious tensions particularly in conflict-prone environments such as Nigeria.

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This article has been retracted at the request of the authors following their disclosure of a publication ethics concern identified after publication. Upon review, the Editorial Board of TSUJCMS determined that the issue warranted retraction in order to maintain the integrity of the scholarly record.

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