Media, Conflict Audiences and the Dynamics of Information Dissemination in Plateau State, Nigeria: Is the Tail Wagging the Dog?

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Nancy N. Katu
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This dissertation titled
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by

NANCY N. KATU

has been approved for
the School of Media Arts and Studies
and the Scripps College of Communication by

Roger Cooper
Associate Professor of Media Arts and Studies

Scott Titsworth
Dean, Scripps College of Communication
ABSTRACT

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Media, Conflict Audiences and the Dynamics of Information Dissemination in Plateau State, Nigeria: Is the Tail Wagging the Dog?

Director of Dissertation: Roger Cooper

This study represents one of the first attempts to use grounded theory methodology to identify and explain, conceptually, the latent communication behavior of conflict audiences. Theoretically, the study expands current conversations that explore the interaction between the media and audience in conflict environments. Straussian grounded theory approach was utilized to answer the primary research question: “What patterns of communication behavior do conflict audiences in Plateau State engage and how does the behavior shape the information dissemination process? The study also identified factors that influence the communication behavior and the extent to which the behavior is shaped by opinion leaders and preexisting schemas of individuals.

The data were collected using focus group discussions and in-depth interviews with participants in Plateau State, Nigeria. Data analysis was conducted using open, axial, and selective coding. A conditional/consequential matrix was also utilized to examine the dimensions and properties of the categories generated in the study. Through coding, recoding, and regrouping, key categories (self-preservation and attack as defensive communication) that represented the communication strategies adopted by conflict audiences in Plateau State were analyzed in order to identify the relevant themes that could answer the research questions. The core category (main theme) of the study, “conflict audiences as ‘dissemiusers’ of information” suggests that people engaged in a
pattern of behavior that empowered them to (re)gain control of the information dissemination process in conflict situations. The findings also find that deep distrust for the media, lack of ethical and professional practice among journalists in Plateau State, religion, and the current indigene/settler dichotomy served as trigger factors for the behavior. Another significant finding is the role of mobile phone technology and Internet access in shaping this pattern of behavior. A theory of audience empowerment was thus generated around the core category to describe and explain the nature of the communication behavior and the interaction with both the media and conflict environment.

The study contributes to both media and conflict literature. The dissertation also offers a set of recommendations that includes applying different methodologies to provide empirical support for the relationships between media, the audience and conflict environment, as well as media reform and capacity building for journalists in Plateau State.
DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to God, my Father, for His faithfulness towards me. I also dedicate this work to my parents, Dennis and Lynne Katu through whom this beautiful life was given to me. And also to my husband, ‘Dayo’ Ogundimu, for being my pillar and support!
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Jos, the capital city of Plateau State, Nigeria has since 2001, witnessed violent communal and ethnic crises. The intermittent conflict has remained a sore point in Nigeria’s history of armed conflicts, which have spanned over 40 years. Unlike in other parts of Nigeria, the conflict in Plateau State remains one of the most volatile due to incessant violence between Muslims and Christians. Specifically, between 2001 and 2013, the state experienced several incidents of communal clashes in and around Jos city.

Even though there are diverse opinions about underlying causes of the conflict in Plateau State, there is a perception among residents that the media, particularly the state government-owned news media organization, has been a divisive force in the conflict. Rather than unite parties in the conflict, the government-owned radio and television stations are perceived by some residents of the state as creating tension through their representation of the issues and some parties in the conflict. This is significant for a conflict that has been highly polarized along religious and political lines.

Like in other conflict zones around the world, the role of the media during conflict is well documented. Most of these studies, which are framed from a media effects perspective, suggest a link between negative impact of media on conflict escalation (Besley & Burgess 2002; Bratic, 2006; DellaVigna & Kaplan, 2006; Enikolopov, Petrova & Zhuravskaya, 2008; Gerber, Karlan & Bergan, 2008; Ross & Alankus, 2010; Yanagizawa-Drott, 2010; Zvagulius, 2010). These studies have shown that the media have the power to influence the conflict behavior of the audience. For example, in 2011, an experimental study, conducted on 80 undergraduate students by
DellaVigna, Enikolopov, Mironova, Petrova & Zhuravskaya to measure the unintended effect of the media in inciting ethnic tensions in the Serbo-Croatian conflict, showed that short exposure to the Media have the potential of influencing the attitudes of people towards other groups in a conflict. The findings also show that unintended cross border media effects has the potential of inciting ethnic and nationalist tensions that could lead to violence.

While media and conflict framing research lay more emphasis on media effects arguments, the approach disregards the complexity of the decoding process among conflict audiences. Such research does not take into account the communication behavior of conflict audiences and the potential it has for shaping the mass communication process as a whole. ‘Conflict audiences’ are defined by Bratic (2006) as media audiences who live in conflict environments. They are ‘conflict audiences’ because their behaviors are shaped by both the media and conflict environment in which they are situated. For example, as a result of the fear and uncertainties that characterize most conflict environments, the need and demand for information increases. As such, in conflict environments like Plateau State where the media system is less diverse, the information need of the audience makes it more likely that individuals will seek out and depend on the media for information.

Even though dependence on the media have the potential of making the audience vulnerable to media influence (Bell-Rokeach & DeFleur, 1996), research has also shown that conflict audiences are not passive consumers of media information. They are people who actively and consciously select media content that meet their psychological and
situational needs (Slater et al., 2003). Given this complex interaction between the media and the audience in conflict environments, it is important to investigate the communication behavior of conflict audiences in Plateau State and its potential influence in shaping the information dissemination process.

Problem Statement

The relationship between armed conflict and the media is well documented in mass communication research. However, most of this research focused on the negative and in some instances, the positive impact of the news media in influencing the attitudes of conflict audiences while downplaying the position of the latter as crucial stakeholders in a communication process. To this end, this study examined the communication behavior of the audience and its potential impact on the information dissemination process in conflict environments.

An expanding literature has identified conflict audiences as consisting of “active individuals and groups with specific needs, whose personal attributes largely determines” their behavior (Bratic, 2006, p.5). Only recently have scholars begun to pay attention to how the underlying personal beliefs of individuals influence how they make sense of vast amounts of information they are being confronted with on a daily basis. Similarly, researchers have documented the role of individual frames in helping people to interpret and to process information (Ambe-Uva, 2010; Campbell & Docherty, 2004; Coleman, 2004; Kaufman, Elliot & Shumeli, 2003; Scheufele, 1999), but we lack a theory that conceptualizes how they respond to such information. The current study aims at expanding these conversations, pushing beyond analyzing the impact of media, opinion
leaders or individual schemas on opinions and attitudes, to investigating the underlying communication behavior of people in conflict situations.

Furthermore, while most studies identify the conflict behavior of the audience (violence) as contributing to the complexity of conflict, to my knowledge, no study has yet conceptualized the pattern of communication behavior of conflict audiences and the consequence in the communication process. Even so, most research on the Plateau State crisis have mostly focused on the structural determinants of the conflict, as well as the role of the media in escalating or deescalating the conflict (Akpan, Erin & Olofu-Adeoye, 2013; Asemah, 2014; Best, 2007; Danfulani, 2006; Ostein, 2009; Razaq & Mahmood, 2012). Thus, this study researched the interaction between the audience, media and conflict in Plateau State by conceptualizing the pattern of communication behavior of conflict audiences. The study also explored whether or not their communication behavior shaped the information dissemination.

Apart from a theoretical objective, this study seeks to fill a methodological gap. Based on the literature reviewed in this study, the primary approach of most media effects research has been quantitative. Empirical studies have deduced valuable strands of information regarding the cause-and-effect relationship between the media, audience and conflict. Many a quantitative research, for instance, has identified the media as having an impact on the attitudes and behaviors of the audience during conflict. Such studies do not, however, explain the nature of audience behavior and how it might contribute to the escalation or de-escalation conflict. This study, therefore, opts for an inductive approach
using the grounded theory methodology. The goal is to move beyond investigating empirical relationships to a more conceptual rendering of audience behavior.

To this end, grounded theory methodology is, therefore, suitable for this study because the approach allows the researcher to study the microcosm of the interaction between the media, audience, and conflict (Edmonds & Kennedy, 2013, p. 116). Finally, this study aims at advancing the arguments of individual framing models by inductively building and discovering a substantive grounded theory that will identify and explain the communication behavior of conflict audiences in Plateau State and similar sites. Consequently, the study aims to answer the questions: ‘What patterns of communication behavior do conflict audiences in Plateau State engage?’ and ‘How does this behavior shape the information dissemination process?’ These questions will allow the research to respond to the broader theoretical objective of this dissertation.

Significance of the Study

This study adds to the growing field of emergent scholarship that examines the audience decoding process within the context of conflict, enriching scholarship on mass communication research and conflict studies. Most studies have focused largely on examining conflict from a media effects perspective, while underplaying the roles of conflict audiences as critical stakeholders. Although most studies have focused largely on examining conflict from a media effects perspective, detailed analysis on conflict audiences remains scarce. Of particular relevance is the interlocking role that audiences play as co-producers, gatekeepers, disseminators and users of information. By utilizing the grounded theory methodological approach, the study expands the conversation by
conceptualizing the communication behavior of conflict audiences and its potential impact on the mass communication process.

This study also carries a meaningful implication for research on conflict audiences and the media in Nigeria and Africa as a whole. It adds to the number of existing research on media and conflict in the region. This dissertation also presents a non-western reading and rendering of the conflict in Jos, Plateau State, Nigeria through the perspective of an African scholar. Investigating these issues within this context can give valuable lessons for academics, policy makers, government, and the media for identifying how conflict audiences can be integrated into broader conflict transformation and peace building interventions in Plateau State and similar conflict sites.

Definition of Key Terms

Throughout this manuscript, the following terms were used with some regularity. The following definitions are therefore offered in order to assist the reader understand both the intended meaning and the scholarly context in which they were used.

- Conflict Audiences

The term refers to audiences who reside in violent conflict environments. These are people whose behavior towards the media is dictated by the extent to which they are impacted by a conflict. Since the information need in conflict situations tend to be high, it is more likely that people will rely on the media. The implication is that some individuals can become vulnerable to media influence. On the other hand, when the audience becomes highly involved with an issue, agenda-setting will have little to no effect, especially on ‘‘obtrusive’ issues-one that can be experienced without relying on media
contributions” (Bratic, 2006, p.4). This also implies that the level of audience involvement with conflict issues can determine the extent to which their attitudes and opinions are influenced by the media.

- Communication Behavior

The phrase describes an action that is communicated to a listener by the speaker. It has to do with the way that individuals “use verbal and non-verbal means to stimulate meanings in the mind of another” (Knapp & Daly, 2010, p.xxi). In this study, the term “communication behavior” is used to describe how conflict audiences seek out and distribute information. It also describes how they use communication strategies to mobilize support for their conflict agendas.

- Dissemiusers

The phrase is coined by the researcher to serve as a concept that identifies and explains a specific information sourcing and dissemination behavior that some conflict audiences in Jos, Plateau State engage in. The concept, which emerged as the core category of this study, is a merger of two words, ‘disseminators’ and ‘users’. This was coined by the researcher to describe how conflict audiences strategically use new communication technology to ‘disseminate’ and ‘use’ information to promote and mobilize public support for their different conflict agendas.

- Information-behavior

Information behavior is described as the “activities a person may engage in when identifying his or her own needs for information, searching for such information in anyway and using or transferring that information” (Wilson, 1999, p.249). In this study,
the phrase ‘information behavior’ is used interchangeably with ‘communication behavior’ to describe the information seeking and sharing behavior of conflict audiences in Plateau State, Nigeria, and similar conflict sites.

- Underlying Schemas

This term refers to a cognitive framework that helps show how information is interpreted and organized by an individual (Scheufele, 1991). Also referred to as ‘individual frames,’ schemas are drawn from personal experiences of people. The frames influence the behavior of conflict audiences towards the media and other parties in the conflict (Kaufman, Elliot & Shumeli, 2013).

Description of Dissertation Chapters

This dissertation was organized into six chapters:

Chapter one provides a brief introduction about media and conflict literature, the purpose of the study, statement of the problem, and the significance of the study.

Chapter two, which presents a comprehensive review of the literature, is organized into three broad sections. The chapter examines: (a) armed conflict theories; (b) mass communication theories, specifically, agenda-setting, two-step and framing theories. It also includes an examination of these theories within the context of the Nigerian media; (c) The chapter also examines the concept of conflict audiences, particularly in conflict environments like Plateau State, Nigeria, as well as the research questions.

Chapter three of the dissertation describes the methodology, which includes the rationale for conducting a Straussian grounded theory methodology research, the research
setting, recruitment of participants, participant’s demographics, and data collection process. Other topics covered in the chapter are: data analysis, such as open, axial, and selective coding, as well potential ethical issues and how they were addressed in the study.

Chapter four presents the results section. In this section, the key concepts that emerged from the study are discussed. The concepts are discussed and supported with verbatim quotes drawn from interview and focus group discussion transcripts. The chapter also presents how the grounded theory methodology was systematically applied to identify the core category of the study.

Chapter five is the discussion section. The chapter discusses the major findings of the study. The findings are discussed in relation to existing literature. The chapter also presents the substantive grounded theory proposed in this study, illustrated by a theoretical model.

Chapter six presents the conclusions and recommendations of the study. The chapter presents a brief overview of the research questions and key findings. It also discusses the implication of the study for theory and practice, as well as recommendations. In the last section of chapter six, the researcher presents a reflexive statement. The statement examines the personal and professional background of the researcher and reflects on how these experiences shaped (or didn’t shape) the dissertation research process.
CHAPTER 2: REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

Nigeria is not only the most populated country in Africa; it is also a major global oil producer. Nigeria prides itself as the ‘giant of Africa,’ and a key player in international and regional peacekeeping missions. Ironically, the country, which led Economic Community of West African States Monitoring Group (ECOMOG), a multilateral armed force to end the civil wars in countries like Liberia and Sierra Leone, faces, today, serious internal security challenges that threaten its corporate existence as a nation-state. From the Niger-Delta militancy in the South-South region to current secession threats led by the Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB), the terrorism threats posed by Boko Haram in the North-West and sectarian conflicts in Plateau State and some North-Central States, means that Nigeria is currently facing one of the greatest threats to its economic, social, and political stability. Like Liberia, Sierra Leone, Rwanda, Northern Ireland, East Timor, and Sri-Lanka, the violence situation in Nigeria adds to the growing number of international armed conflicts.

The rise in global armed conflicts raises fundamental questions about the causes; such as why and how individuals and groups engage in violence. As the number of wars and armed conflicts increase globally, so have human attempts to answer these questions. The search for answers led to the emergence of several theoretical and multidisciplinary frameworks that contribute to our understanding of conflict. One such framework is the merging of conflict theory and mass communication research.

Conflict research presents “conflict as a clash of interests…which could lead to outcomes that are either constructive or destructive” (Reuben, 2010, p. 46). Mass
communication research suggests the media set the public agenda and also shape the attitudes and behavior of the audience in conflict situations (Gilboa, 2009; Reuben, 2010). By merging these principles, contemporary media and conflict scholarship has shown that, while there might be different levels of explanation of the causes and dynamics of conflict, the media define the boundaries of conflict.

In conflict environments, access to information is crucial because it “makes the difference between life and death” for conflict audiences (Arsenault, Sheldon & Abbott, 2011, p.5). Apart from being a vital source of much needed information, the media also provide a platform for parties in a conflict to dialogue. As the important role that the media play during conflict increases, so does their ability to escalate or deescalate the level of violence (Besley & Burgess 2002; Chigozi, 2009; Dellavigna & Kaplan, 2007; Enikolopov, Petrova & Zhuravskaya, 2008; Gerber, Karlan & Bergan, 2008; Kaufmann, Elliot & Shumeli, 2003; Yanagizawa-Drott, 2010). Although the current debate on media and conflict has been helpful in explaining how the media shapes audience attitudes and behaviors during conflict, virtually all the arguments are presented through the lens of media effects perspectives, thus, neglecting the role of conflict audiences as a significant part of this discourse.

The aim of this chapter is therefore, threefold:

1. To examine the interdisciplinary link between media and conflict theoretical traditions. This will provide a framework for understanding the relationship between the media, audience and conflict in Plateau State.
2. To conceptualize conflict by examining the theoretical traditions into which the different categories of conflict could be situated. The chapter will also examine if the conflict in Plateau State is linked to any of these categories.

3. To examine some mass communication theories and identify the relationship between the media and conflict.

Theoretical Conceptualization of Conflict

Conflict is defined as a “situation in which interdependent human actors engage in verbal or non-verbal disputes about perceived incompatibility of positions and issues that are relevant to them” (Hemelink, 2011, p. 13). Armed conflict has become a popular topic in academic discourse due to the number of active armed conflicts in the world and the attention they receive from the media, both locally and internationally. Since World War II, there has been increased large-scale armed conflicts within states, with many framed as struggles against colonialism (Kenya, Angola, Cyprus, Vietnam, Algeria), violence for secession of regions (Angola, Nigeria, Mozambique, Congo, Uganda), and, most recently, ethnic, national, and religious conflicts (Chechnya, Indonesia, Sri Lanka, Kashmir) (Oberschall, 2010).

The Heidelberg Institute for International Conflict Research reports an increase in the global number of political conflicts. A breakdown of the figures shows 365 cases of conflict were recorded in 2010, 396 in 2012, 414 in 2013, and 424 cases in 2014. Among this, 223 are violent conflicts, 201 are classified as non-violent, and 46 are highly violent
conflicts (Heidelberg Institute for International Conflict Research, 2010, 2012; 2013, 2014). The increase in the rate of these violent and non-violent conflicts remains an issue of discourse among civil-war researchers, given the series of research aimed at examining the causes and impact of wars and armed conflicts. Different disciplines have offered varying definitions and theoretical approaches to understanding the phenomenon. While psychologists work on conflict in interpersonal relationships, economists understand the concept through game theory and decision making. Similarly, for political scientists, conflict has to do with intra-national and international disagreements or wars. Social science research, which provides the lens through, which this study is examined, views conflict from the perspective of status and class struggles (Axt, 2008; Oberschall, 2010).

Three sociological theoretical paradigms offer explanations on how society influences people and how people themselves influence society. These perspectives are: symbolic interactionism, which suggests that social progress and harmony are possible through interaction and integration and the functionalism perspective, which views the diverse parts of society as interdependent and functioning together to achieve stability and order (Farley, 2002; Henslin, 2013). The third, which is conflict perspective, identifies society as consisting of groups with competing interests, values, and access to power and wealth (Tittenbrun, 2013).

The Heidelberg Institute for International Conflict Research (2005) defined conflict as “the clashing of interests (positional differences) on national values of some duration and magnitude between at least, two parties (organized groups, states, groups of states) that are determined to pursue their interests and win their case” (p. 2). This
perspective, which draws its theoretical roots from Karl Marx, describes the society as divided into the ‘haves’ and the ‘have nots’ (Williams, 2003, p.36). This creates a situation where individuals subordinated to society and political systems, norms, values and beliefs, or ideologies of the society are controlled by the dominant group through coercion and oppression. Conflict is, therefore, influenced by basic economic determinism and perceived exploitation of dominant social groups in society. Proponents of this theory promote the idea that conflict is inevitable in any society where groups are in a continuous struggle over scarce resources, particularly when people see that their individual goal achievement is being threatened by others (Rogan, 2006). This study is premised on this perspective.

*The Conflict Perspective*

The primary assumptions behind this perspective are that conflict is inevitable due to structural differences and power imbalances in societies that comprise groups, with different unequal power and different self-interests competing for scarce economic and political resources (Sears, 2008). The assumption is that competing groups have needs that run contrary to each other, leading to situations where dominant groups protect their interests and use their power to control the social structure of society. Similarly, institutions in society are believed to be structured in a way to ensure the continuous domination and subjugation of oppressed groups.

These arguments differ from the functionalist and interactionist perspectives. Functionalists, for example, view conflict as operating through a process of negotiation and compromise. Functionalist theorists like Emile Durkheim argue that, although
conflict is inevitable in society, it is functional for society because negotiations ensure that some groups are not totally dominated by others (Farley, 2002; Henslin, 2013). Unlike conflict theorists, who see both social change and stratification as an outcome of power struggles between dominant and disadvantaged groups in society (Powers, 2010; Sears, 2008), the functionalist perspective focuses on differences in the structure of power. It also views stratification in society as normal and beneficial to people (Farley, 2002).

However, unlike the conflict and functionalist views on inequality in society, the third perspective, the symbolic interactionist approach views symbols as central to people’s interaction with the world and people around them. Proponents of this approach, like Charles Horton Cooley, believe people define themselves and their roles in society through interactions with other people and their perception of how people see them (Verma, 1998). Interactionists suggest that nothing is inherently equal or unequal in society. As a result, conflict is necessary to keep society “self-critical, viable, creative, and innovative” (p.1).

In a critique of structuralism, functionalism, and Marxian conflict perspectives, modern-day conflict theorist, Ralf Dahrendorf, argued that conflict is normal, inevitable, and a tool for social change in society. Like Marx, Dahrendorf argued that conflict is a social reality in society, but unlike Marx, he identified conflict as having a greater progressive change for society because it provides a level playing field for individual participants and groups to struggle and maximize their benefits (Williams, 2003; Powers, 2010). Dahrendorf criticized Marxian classification of the proletariat and bourgeoisie
(two-class class system), since the rise of joint ownership of stock companies does not reflect the concept of total ownership of economic means production in modern societies (Tittenbrun, 2013). He argued that the struggle in society is between those with power and those without, a sort of “command class” and the “obey class” (p.122).

Although these perspectives differ in arguments on the structure of society, together they present a framework for a more comprehensive understanding of the distinct phases of development in society. For example, these arguments show that every society experiences various phases of order, stability, and conflict. Similarly, during periods of stability, minority groups have the opportunity to succeed through hard work, while during conflict in society, the same group may also advance, but through protests and/or rebellions (Farley, 2000). Conflict is therefore useful and necessary for societal growth and development.

Conflict arguments proposed by theorists like Dahrendorf and Coser set the framework for the emergence of other contemporary conflict theories that are enriching the dialogic process with new arguments about how conflicts happen and why people, groups, and societies engage in one form of conflict or another (Coser, 1956; Powers, 2010; Williams, 2003). Conflict theories, such as greed/grievance theories and religion conflict model, explain the nature and causes of armed conflict in society. The models, which are specifically relevant to the conflict in Plateau State, are analyzed below:

**The Greed and Grievance Models**

Proponents of these models of conflict argue that greed and grievances are the underlying causes of wars and violence in societies. The greed model suggests that greed
is the underlying cause of civil wars in conflict-prone societies (Collier & Hoefffler, 2004). The greed argument suggests that wars and armed conflicts are driven by greed among rebel groups.

Collier (2000) conducted an empirical study to test risk of civil wars in 161 countries, using data sets across eight five-year periods between 1960 and 1999. The findings established that key factors, like diaspora support, military advantage, and availability of natural resources, provide great incentives for rebel groups to incite violence. In other words, the availability of military and lootable natural resources in some societies provides incentives for people to join. This model suggests that people are driven by greed rather than legitimate agitations. Collier (2004) also argued that combatants present grievances in an attempt to cover up their real motives and garner support for their rebellion. Even though the greed model offers substantial explanation for rebellion, it minimizes the importance of other existing agendas, such as underlying historical hostilities, scarce economic resources, or even political agendas, like the case of Plateau State and recently secession agitations by the Indigenous People of Biafra in South Eastern Nigeria.

Meanwhile, some scholars say that rather than greed, grievances, such as injustice, marginalization, oppression, and underlying ethnic and religious hatreds among groups are the major causes of wars (Fearon & Laitin, 2003; Humphreys, 2005; Murshed & Tadjoeddin, 2007). The proponents of the grievance model suggest that civil wars or armed violence are likely to occur in societies where some people feel economically and politically marginalized or where there is ethnic or religious polarization. For example,
Humphreys (2005) criticized the greed/rebellion model’s exclusion of mechanisms, such as the greedy outsider, weak state's mechanisms and grievances. He argued that grievances become problematic when: (i) a country’s dependence on natural resources leads to unequal development; (ii) this dependence makes the country vulnerable to trade shocks; (iii) the process of extracting the resource lead to grievances; (iv) wealth derived from the resource is viewed as unjustly distributed.

The grievance model, particularly Humphrey’s weak states’ mechanisms argument fits into most of the conflict situations in Nigeria. The country’s dependence on oil has led to series of oil related conflicts since the early 1960s. Nigeria is the largest oil producing country in Sub-Saharan Africa, with about 32 percent of oil and 34.2 percent of gas reserves on the African continent. The country is also ranked the fifth largest oil exporting country in the world (Oyefusi, 2008). The Nigerian economy is heavily dependent on oil revenue. Like the grievance mechanism suggests, this dependence has led to unequal development, with the Niger-Delta area (the oil producing region) most affected. Although the region accounts for over 90 percent of the oil and gas reserves, it is the most backward in terms of infrastructural development (Oyefusi, 2008). Since the early 1990s, there have been on-going oil related conflicts for oil resource control between people in the region and the Nigerian government. The politics of oil resource control has also pitched the Niger-Delta region against other regions in the country. Corruption in the oil industry and unemployment in the Niger-Delta has created an enabling environment for militancy to thrive. Also, a cursory look at social media
postings of current agitators for the creation of Biafra nation out of Nigeria shows the link to oil resource politics.

Even though the conflict in Plateau State may be different, like the Niger-Delta, the underlying cause of the conflict is related to the struggle over economic resources. The state has low internally-generated revenue (IGR), with a high dependence on oil revenue from the Federal government (Hir, 2015). As a result, a fluctuation in global oil prices means low revenue for the state. While the conflict in Plateau State is not directly driven by oil, the crisis is a fight to control available economic and political resources, a consequence of the dwindling revenue status in the state. The agitation in the state can also be linked to relative deprivation, which Gurr (1970) described as the aspirations and achievements of people. In this situation, people have the potential to react violently if they perceive that they are being marginalized. From Plateau State, where the Muslim “settler” community feel economically and politically deprived by the Christian “indigene” community, to the Maoist insurgency in Nepal; perceived economic inequality and weakening political structures have proved to be major sources of armed violence (Nepal, Bohara & Gawande, 2011).

Although these issues remain at the center of the crisis in Plateau State, the problem can also be linked to arguments proposed by Tajfel (1979) and Oberschall (2010) that grievances are caused by economic and political marginalization, poverty and poor governance. A major cause of the Plateau State conflict is the indigene-settler debate, which led to accusations of marginalization by different groups in the state. This problem is not peculiar to Plateau State alone; it has been the cause of serious violence in

The problem of indigene/citizenship in Nigeria can be traced to the Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, which seems to promote the concept of ‘indigene’ more than it does that of the “citizen.” In principle, the constitution stipulates that all Nigerians are equal, but in practice, one’s citizenship is determined only by his or her “state of origin.” This means that no matter how long a Nigerian resides in a state other than their state of origin; they will always be regarded as “settlers” who will not be accorded the same rights with “indigenes” of the state; the indigene certificates determine easy access to employment in the state civil-service, political representation at the State and Federal government levels, scholarships, admission into secondary schools and universities, as well as lower school fees (Ojukwu & Onifade, 2010). It means that without an indigene certificate, ‘non-indigenes’ will not enjoy these basic citizen rights.

The current arrangement in Nigeria allows local government administrators to determine who is an indigene. In Jos North Local Government, indigene certificates are issued to “indigenes” of the state and “residence” certificates to those who are considered by administrators as “settlers.” Krause (2011) explained that “this arrangement opened the floodgates for the politics of labeling and the selective reciting of historical accounts that foster group boundaries to secure political control over local government areas” (p. 10). The implication is that both sides are using archival records to justify their claim to
the ownership of Jos and by extension, indigene rights. On one hand, the Hausa-Fulani claim they founded Jos, since the city did not exist when they settled in Plateau. The indigenes, on the other hand, argued that the city was founded on their land. Thus, refusal of the Muslim-Hausa community to collect “residence” permits and, by extension, their rejection of second-class citizen status in Plateau State has resulted in continued confrontation between the two groups.

Furthermore, in line with the social/psychological model of social identity and inter-group model proposed by Tajfel (1979), group membership and group identity symbols that promote the “indigene” and “settler” dichotomy in Plateau State has continued to raise tensions, rioting and violence between the two groups, particularly in Jos North, the most contested local government area in the state. The nature of this conflict and the dynamics of the relationship between ‘indigenes’ and ‘settlers’ also creates the tone for what has emerged as the communication behavior being investigated in this study.

While the greed/grievances debate continues, it is certain that this model does provide a context for understanding why armed violence or civil conflict occurs. It also allows for an understanding of the situation in Plateau State.

Religion and Conflict Model

The religion and conflict model, which focuses on the role of religion in contemporary conflict, can be categorized as reflecting environmental and religious arguments for armed conflict. The two perspectives are discussed below.
Environmental arguments. Proponents of this model suggest that changes in the international environmental structure are, to a large extent, responsible for the global rise of religious conflict (Fox, 1999). One of the most prominent proponents of this argument is Samuel Huntington. In his “clash of civilizations” thesis, Huntington (1993) predicted that the end of the Cold War would usher in a new form of conflict; that is, a clash between the ideologies of different civilizations, particularly between the Muslim East (Islamic civilization) and the Christian West (Western civilization).

At face value, one might say that recent global developments might be a validation of this hypothesis. The terror attacks by ISIL (Islamic state of Iraq and the Levant) in Syria and Iraq, the January 5, 2015, attack on Charlie Hebdo newspapers in France, the growing radicalization of young people from the West, seem to suggest that a growing anger and attack on the values of Western civilization. In Nigeria, tensions between Muslims and non-Muslims have resulted in several violent clashes, which have intensified in the last 15 years. The underlying cause of the latest violence in North East Nigeria has largely been the attempt by Boko Haram to establish Islamic rule in the country by attacking people and institutions they view as representing Western Civilization. Boko Haram, whose name means “Western Education is a sin,” has been responsible for several attacks on Christians, Churches, government buildings, and, of late, Mosques and Muslim leaders who they single out as siding with democracy and democratic institutions in the country. There have been over 6,000 civilian deaths in Boko Haram attacks since 2009, with 2,563 people killed by the sect in 2014 alone (Human Rights Watch, 2015).
However, the clash of civilizations theory has been criticized by some scholars for being very simplistic in its approach, particularly the attempt to downplay other factors that might instigate post-cold war conflict (Fox, 2003; Kirth, 1994; Ajami, 1993). Sajjad (2013), who conducted a non-western reading of the theory, argued that, while the hypothesis might hold true in some instances, factors such as the western policy and rhetoric on terror are major reasons for conflict between the West and other countries. Sajjad argued that the September 11 2001 attack on the United States was more of a response to policy rather than civilizational clash.

Hynes (1994) draws a connection between modernization and religious conflict, especially in the developing world. Hynes argued that modern technology has made it possible for religious groups to communicate with each other and expand their operations. The sophistication of ISIS recruitment through the Internet seems to support this argument. Marty & Appleby (1991) also suggested that religion is the basis for the restoration of individual and group identity among persons in traditional societies who are increasingly being dislocated by modernization. The lack of institutional frameworks to deal with these dislocations in developing societies like Nigeria makes it more likely that people will depend on religiously-inspired identities, resulting in religious fundamentalism.

Huntington’s theory also seems to have downplayed underlying classes and tensions existing in some societies. The experience in Nigeria shows that existing religious tensions are also influenced by economic and political factors, such as
marginalization, poverty, injustice, as well as ethnic disagreements between the different groups in the country.

Although there is no consensus on reasons for religious conflicts, the environmental model does certainly provide the context for understanding how existing political and economic structures in society allow contemporary religious conflicts to thrive. The arguments also highlight the broader role that religion plays in contemporary global armed conflicts.

Religious arguments. Perhaps one of the most fundamental arguments about armed conflict could be situated within the social-conflict approach that is rooted in Karl Marx’s critique of capitalism, where religion is viewed as an oppressive tool of the bourgeoisie. Religion helps to maintain the status quo and create a situation where the elite maintain control over fewer privileged groups, by promising those rewards in the after-life. Religion “is the sigh of the oppressed creature, the feeling of a heartless world, and the soul of soulless circumstances. It is the opium of the people…” (Boesche, 1996, p.241).

Hynes (2009) argued that religion is associated with several international and domestic conflicts and identified four reasons for this: (a). Religion has to do with absolute and unconditional beliefs, which produces totalitarian characteristics among adherents of different faiths such as Islam, Christianity, and Judaism; (b). This absoluteness leads to religious convictions that produce intolerance, fragmentation, and overzealousness, which are hostile to liberal democracy and pluralism; (c). Religion breeds aggressiveness and willingness to commit violence; (d) leaders of religious
organizations legitimize human rights abuse or misuse of power in the name of religion (p.54). Other forms of contemporary conflicts associated with religion include religious fundamentalism, which features groups that fight to preserve their identity against attacks (real or imagined) by non-believers and failed states (like Cambodia, Iraq and Somalia), with unstable environments and with weak that provide a conducive atmosphere for religious terrorism (Haynes, 2009).

While violence has been an intrinsic part of most religions, certain doctrines like the concept of jihad in Islam, “the defense of faith when faith is threatened” makes the religion more prone to violence than others (Toft, 2007, p.110). Building on Jack Snyder’s theory of nationalist outbidding, which argued that the political elite in societies outbid each other in order to build announce their administrative credentials to both local and global audiences, Toft said religious outbidding plays a critical role in moving religion from a marginal to a central issue during conflict. Civil wars are also more likely to become religious if one or all of the following factors exist within a society: government or rebel leaders caught in a conflict situation feel threatened; there is availability of rebel fighters, money, ammunition; and if there are pre-existing religious cleavages and divisions within the society, and the public access to information is controlled by the media (Toft, 2007).

Using a theory of religious outbidding to analyze why religion has been fundamental to some civil wars, Toft argued that, from 1940 to 2000, Islam has played a more critical role in current global wars. Out of 42 religious civil wars from 1940 to 2000, the involvement of one or two parties in the wars that were associated with Islam
accounted for 34 cases or 81 percent, while 34 (26 percent) of the wars had something to do with Islam. Christianity, on the other hand, was associated with 50 percent (21 cases) of the wars (Toft, 2007).

Even though Basedau, Strüver, Vüllers & Wegenast (2011) support these arguments, they suggested that religion provides a basis for conflict if religion is politicized or if conflict-prone religious demographic structures such as fractionalization, dominance of one religious group or polarization exist within a society. Testing what they called the “mobilization hypothesis”, to identify the impact of religious indicators on internal violence, Basedau et al. (2011) analyzed data drawn from the religion in Sub-Saharan Africa (RSSA), a database that covered 57 civil wars in Sub-Saharan Africa from 1990 to 2008.

A key finding of the study suggests that the politicization of some conflict-prone demographic structures trigger violence. Specifically, the study found out that societies with predominant Muslim populations are more prone to experiencing conflict, compared to countries with a dominant Christian population. Although the finding supports the mobilization hypothesis, the study does not necessarily explain how the presence of Muslims might constitute a major cause of violence.

Apart from Islam, Fox (1999) argued that other religions like Catholicism and Judaism have at different times incited or supported violence. Until the Protestant reformation, Catholicism was, since the Middle-Ages, the official religion that maintained the status quo and through the religion came the crusades and inquisitions (Fox, 1999).
In Nigeria, Muslims and Non-Muslims claim unconditional submission to the ideologies of their faith. The current Boko Haram problem in Nigeria is driven by this reason and operates within the context of the theory discussed above. For Boko Haram, western education is “Haram,” an abomination against their faith. Their understanding and belief of Islam as being the one true religion drives their concept of jihad to eradicate political and social structures they view as anti-Islam. One of the conditions they have given to the country for a ceasefire is the Islamization of Nigeria, the Institutionalizing of Sharia Law in the country and the Islamization of the country’s political leaders. The abduction of over 200 girls in April 2014 and over 168 women and children in December, 2014 by the Boko Haram from a boarding school in Chibok, Borno state, North East, Nigeria and attempts by the group to justify the abductions, confirms Hynes’ thesis about leaders of religious organizations legitimizing human rights abuse in the name of religion.

The situation in Plateau State is also complex; apart from political and economic grievances, the formal implementation of the criminal aspects of the Muslim Sharia legal code provided another reason for violence (Human Rights Watch, 2001). Between 1999 and 2000, about 11 states in Northern Nigeria passed the law sections of Sharia's code into law. The law imposed penalties, such as flogging, removal of hands and feet, and stoning for violations that include alcohol consumption, theft, and adultery. The demand by Muslims in Plateau State for implementation of the law served as a major trigger for the violence in Jos. A Human Rights Watch Report on the Jos crises reveals that anonymous letters and leaflets demanding Sharia’s law in Plateau State were circulated.
prior to the September 2001 raging conflict between Christians and Muslims (Human Rights Watch, 2001).


The theories discussed above conceptualize the recurrent armed conflict between Muslims and non-Muslims in Plateau State. Whether largely fueled by greed/grievance, or religion, the arguments embedded in these conflict theories assume that structural arrangements in most societies are fundamentally exploitive. These assumptions can be viewed in two ways: (I) The structured inequality axiom, which suggests that structures in society protect the interests of the more dominant in society to the detriment of the less powerful; (II) The intransigence axiom suggests that the powerful in society do not lose the grip of their exploitive control without being pressured to do so (Powers, 2010, p. 120). These arguments imply that conflict is inevitable because while the powerful, wealthy, and dominant class will always attempt to maintain the status quo, disadvantaged groups will continuously engage in a struggle to challenge and resist such domination.

In Plateau State, the economic, political, and religious grievances, has deepened the ideological differences and further polarized the people. Furthermore, these theories provide a context for understanding the characteristics of conflict audiences in Plateau State. Since the behaviors of conflict audiences are influenced by the extent to which they
are impacted by a conflict, the complex nature of the Plateau State conflict as reflected in the theories discussed in this chapter, suggest the existence of a multi-dimensional audience whose behavior also has the potential of shaping the conflict environment. Identifying the nature of these behaviors is important for understanding how the audiences, as crucial stakeholders, are shaping the conflict in Plateau State.

Impact of Media on Conflict

Apart from the structural determinants of conflict discussed in the previous section, the media complements these issues by serving as a platform for the ideological struggle between the elite and disadvantaged groups in society. Although the role of the media in supporting and expanding is acknowledged globally, several studies over time identified the media as having an impact on conflict escalation or de-escalation (Chigozi, 2009; Jan, et al., 2011; Kaufman, Elliot & Shumeli, 2003; Moaz, 2010; Reuben, 2006). Mass Communication research has shown that the media play a critical role in promoting in promoting salience of issues, influencing public attitudes and behaviors (Chong & Druckman, 2007; Iyengar & Kinder 1987; McCombs et al.1997; Putnam & Shoemaker, 2007). While on one hand, the media influence social change and development in societies, they are, on the other hand, agents that provide a platform for the control and subjugation of subjugate disadvantaged groups by the elite.

Williams (2003) acknowledged this role when he identified the media as helping to reinforce power structures in society. The news media also serve as catalysts for conflict escalation because of the power they have to influence public perceptions and behaviors. Media framing of conflict sometimes promote a dominant elite narrative,
which is sometimes, war or violence-oriented. By shaping the agenda, the news media in conflict zones like Plateau State, Nigeria, manipulate the legitimacy and credibility of a conflict (Lynch & McGoldrick, 2005).

The Media and Conflict in Nigeria

In order to appreciate the role of the news media in shaping the conflict in Nigeria, it is important to examine the unique history of the Nigerian media. After the country gained independence from Britain in 1960, Nigeria was, for over 30 years, under military rule. During that time, the media (the press and broadcast) was under state control until the early 1990s, when the Military under General Ibrahim Babangida moved to liberalize the broadcast market. The liberalization came into effect with the National Broadcasting Commission (NBC) Decree No. 38 of 1992 (Ariye, 2010). Although the history of the Nigerian press can be traced to pre-colonial time, it was not until the early 1990s that the military government set up the Nigeria Press Council through Decree No.85 of 1992 and the Nigeria Council (amendment decree no. 60 of 1999) to legislate on the press (Ismail, 2011). The biggest problem for Nigeria under military rule was the lack of media freedom. In 1993, the military government issued Decree No 4 of 1984 (Protection against false accusation), which made it an offense for the press to “publish or transmit any message, rumor, report or statement, which is false, in particular, that any public officer has in any manner corruptly enriched himself” (Ismail, 2011, pp.20). The decree empowered the Federal Government to revoke the license of any newspaper whose content is deemed to be detrimental to the interest of the country. Several
newspapers were shut down, and journalists were detained by the military government for violating the terms of these decrees.

Although military dictatorship gave way to a democratic government in May 1999, the freedom of the media in Nigeria remains under siege (Onwumechili, 2007). In 2004, the National Broadcasting Corporation began the implementation of a section of Decree No. 38 which allows the regulatory body to ban broadcasts it deems inimical to the national interest. According to Onwumechili, a “supposedly democratic administration is taking advantage of censorship laws that have been promulgated by the military dictators to curtail the benefits of liberalization (p. 131).

Though a developing country, the media industry in Nigeria can be described as a “fairly well-established” (Jibo & Okoosi-Simbine, 2003, p.182). The media system can be categorized as *democratic and regulated* in line with the classification of global Media systems proposed by Parks & Curran (2000). Nigeria has a diverse media climate with a mixture of both state and privately-owned news media organizations. Official reports from the National Broadcasting Commission website indicate that, there are currently 86 TV and 80 radio stations owned by the Federal and State governments, 15 TV and 26 radio stations are private-owned. There are also 22 University campus radio stations. The government has divested itself of most partnership stakes in the newspaper sector and the presence of private owners has, largely, led to greater diversity of viewpoints being represented.

Although the press and broadcast media environment is highly liberalized, the government still exerts a certain level of control and regulation through the NBC, the
National Press Council and the National Communications Commissions, thus, agreeing with neo-Marxists, that Media control is exercised through “structures and pressures within which Media organizations have to operate” (Williams 2003, p.72).

Many Nigerians have access to the Internet. The 2014 statistics show that there are over 67,101,452 Internet users in Nigeria, representing about 37.59 percent Internet penetrations in the country (Internet Live Statistics, 2015). The country is also experiencing a monumental growth in cell phone access and usage. Nigeria is currently largest mobile market in Africa with more than 125 million subscribers and market penetration of about 74 percent in 2014 (Internet World Statistics, 2015). Access to cheap smart or Internet-enabled phones has allowed more people in the country to have access to the Internet and social media sites. There are no legal restrictions to international news media and TV content. The implication of having a democratic and regulated media system in Nigeria can be viewed in two ways: (i). having a democratic media environment allows most Nigerians to have access to more media platforms; (ii). A regulated system, however, means that media freedom is limited since government controls the media environment both at the State and Federal levels.

The current media system allows the government and the elite to influence news media and thus set the agenda for the people. A qualitative study conducted by Okechukwu (2014) to examine media ownership and control in Nigeria found that information disseminated by the news media mostly reflects the views of the political class. The study also suggested that the pattern of media ownership allows particularly
the State and Federal governments, as well as wealthy Nigerians to own the media and influence the information being disseminated.

Another study by Olayiwola (1991) argued that, while the media set the political, social and cultural agenda in Nigeria, the government and elite, who serve as news sources, set the agenda. Agaptus (2014) also argued that “the necessary fallout of the media - elite complicity is the effective marginalization of the masses” (p. 97). While the media-elite relationship defines and shapes the structure of the media, this situation could even be more unpredictable for media audiences who live in conflict environments. Media systems in most conflict environments are undeveloped, thus, creating a situation where only very few news sources control information dissemination (Bratic, 2006).

In Plateau State, where this study was conducted, there are six radio stations. Three are owned by the Federal and State government, while the other four are privately-owned. There are 5 TV stations and, out of this number, 2 stations are also owned by the Federal and State governments. The Plateau State government also owns a TV station, a radio FM and AM stations. These stations also have the largest reach in the state compared to the other stations.

Although no study has documented the role played by the Plateau State government-owned media station, some newspaper publications reported the media organization as influencing news and editorial content during the conflict. Ajobe (2010) claimed that the government interference contributed to an escalation of violence in 2010. The Homicide section of the Nigeria Police Force in Abuja also investigated the state government-owned media organization for allegedly disseminating news that was biased
of one of the groups involved in the conflict. The police investigated the station for “conspiracy, incitement of public disorder and rioting during a sectarian crisis” and also “broadcasting in such a way to fan the embers of disharmony, strife, and igniting passions rather than promote peace in Plateau State (Ajobe, 2010). Even though Plateau Radio Television Corporation denied the allegation, there is no doubt that the role the organization played during the crisis was questionable. Some groups in the conflict also claimed that the media organization was biased against their positions in the conflict.

While news media coverage of the conflict might have played a large role in the escalation of violence in conflict zones like Plateau State, there are studies that suggest that the relationship media between the media and the audience is not necessarily linear and direct. A major drawback of media effects research is the media-centered approach in contrast to investigating the other variables that shape audience interaction with media and conflict. For one, there is also a strong evidence of a linkage between personal schemas and the behavior of the audience during conflict (Gardner, 2003; Kaufman, Elliot & Shumeli, 2003; Moaz, 2010; Moaz, & Blondheim, 2010). Also, since media agenda is sometimes diffused through inter-personal networks, some scholars raise questions regarding the role that interpersonal communication plays in facilitating the dissemination of agendas from the media to the audience. Does interpersonal communication contribute to the audience perception of media bias during conflict? Does the audience influence the news media in any way? Does interpersonal communication contribute to knowledge that people have about issues? How does interpersonal communication contribute towards the process more or less than the media? (Yang &

These questions are important for understanding the relationship between the media and audience members in societies with underdeveloped media systems, where interpersonal interaction might be the most preferred form of communication. It is even more critical in conflict-prone media environments, such as Plateau State. By answering these questions, we are also able to examine the extent to which the behavior of conflict audiences is shaped by the media and/or opinion leaders.

Agenda-Setting through a Two-Step Flow of Communication

The two-step model of communication may provide some answers to the questions posed above. The model explains to a large extent, the role that the opinion leader plays in the diffusion of media agenda (Katz & Lazarsfeld, 1955; Lazarsfeld, Berelson, & Gaudet, 1944). The model as reflected in Figure 1, suggests that the news media influence audience members through opinion leaders.

Katz & Lazarsfeld (1955) identified opinion leaders as individuals who hold positions in social networks have access to the media, more than the average person and by extension, receive media information in a more disproportionate amount than other people. They are also individuals to whom others turn to for advice and information, have more exposure to mass media, are more cosmopolitan and have higher socio-economic status than their followers (Rogers, 2003).

Some studies (Kelly & Berry, 2003; Watts & Dodds, 2007), however, propose that opinion leaders are not necessarily formal leaders. Watts & Dodds (2007), for
instance, defined opinion leaders are individuals who influence others because of their status as respected people in social networks. Kelly & Berry, 2003 described them as the millions of everyday people that shape opinions in society. Opinion leaders could also be family members, friends, or co-workers (Niesbet & Kotcher, 2009), or individuals who have influence over at least 4 peers (Merton, 1968), or over fourteen peers (Burson-Marsteller, 2001). In conflict settings, the elite who control the political and media agenda are also classified as opinion leaders (Wolfsfeld, 2004).

While the concept emerged from empirical research conducted in the United States, there are arguments about its applicability across all cultural contexts, particularly in developing countries. A test of scale of opinion leadership in eight countries carried out by Marshall and Gitsudarmo (1955) showed that the general conceptualization of opinion leadership could be applied across cultures. Weinmann (1994) supported this finding but argued that the concept of opinion leadership as obtained in the United States could be applied across various contexts with a few variations that need to be considered, such as the political, economic, and social structures of any given society.

Another study, which used the Roper ASW engagement model to measure opinion leadership in thirty surveys across various countries, discovered that, unlike the United States, opinion leaders in other countries were more engaged in social behavior and watched less entertainment television (Crispell, 2003). Opinion leaders in Germany and Israel, for instance, had low levels of television viewing and high levels of magazine and newspaper use (Weinmann, 1991; 1994). Though these studies suggest that the concept of opinion leadership can be applied across varied cultural contexts, some
scholars cautioned against accepting these conclusions. Niesbet (2005) argued that, while countries with similar characteristics, such as good infrastructure and high media exposure would have the same results with the United States, there could be a disparate outcome for others. He argued that political, economic, and cultural structures in different countries can shape how people communicate with each other.

Niesbet’s study has important implication for our understanding of opinion leadership in Nigeria. The lack of good media infrastructure, the media system and cultural structure provide an interesting framework for analyzing the concept of opinion leaders in the country. As far as I know, very few studies have been conducted on opinion leadership in Nigeria and even at that, most of these studies have focused on health-related issues (Ahonsi, Salisu, Idowu & Agini, 2012; Goldberg, 2014). One of the studies conducted by Goldberg (2014) defined opinion leaders as religious, political, traditional leaders and alternative medicine providers. Ahonsi, et al. (2012) also expanded the list to include heads of national legislative houses, leaders of civil societies and those of social marketing organizations. The opinion leaders identified in the two studies have power within the social system. The hierarchical structure of traditional and formal leadership makes it convenient for Nigerians to recognize these people as leaders who shape and influence public opinions. Although no study has specifically investigated the concept of opinion leadership within the context of armed conflict, political, religious, ethnic, community and traditional leaders in Nigeria are often recognized as the formal opinion leaders.
Since audiences in conflict environments are fragmented and increasingly distrustful of the media (Kelly & Berry, 2003) and in some situations, formal opinion leaders (Salawu, 2010), this study relied on conflict audiences (study participants) to identify individuals they view as their opinion leaders. The goal is to determine if their conceptualization supports or disagrees with the definition proposed by literature. The approach was also used to investigate if levels of media, economic, and political development in conflict environments such as Jos, Nigeria, play a role in determining how conflict audiences conceptualize opinion leadership. This is bearing in mind that lower media penetration during conflict mean individuals are less likely to rely upon the media as the source of information and more likely to use interpersonal discussion as the most useful information-seeking and sharing tool (Niesbet, 2005; Bratic, 2006).

This study examined three key issues: (i) whether opinion leaders are individuals with more access and more literate understanding of the media than other conflict audiences; (ii) whether interpersonal communication with opinion leaders shaped, in any way, the perception of conflict audiences about the media in Plateau State; (iii) if this interaction shaped the communication behavior of the audience in any way.

![Two-step flow model](image)

*Figure 1 Two-Step Flow Model: Mass Media to Audience (Katz & Lazarsfeld, 1955).*
Framing the Conflict Agenda

Like the two-step flow theory of communication, the framing model also shapes how the audience thinks and makes sense of events happening around them. Framing is defined by Vraneski & Richard (2012) as “a psychological trait and a cognitive process that enables us to receive and organize information in patterns, which resemble cognitive maps” (p.5). As second level of agenda-setting, framing influences how people think and talk about issues (Scheele, 1999). Frames provide the framework through which journalists classify and present information. The media select “some aspects of perceived reality and make them more salient in a communicating text in such a way as to promote a particular problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation and/or treatment recommendation” (Entman, 1993), p.52). How the media present events does not only influence the way the audience understand the issues, it also impacts how they interpret the message. In other words, frames also play an important role in the decoding process of audience members.

In conflict environments, frames provide the lens through which individuals gather and analyze information. It helps to define their attitudes and behavior in a conflict situation by highlighting disagreements, tensions and incompatibilities between parties (Putnam & Shoemaker, 2007). Depending on the situation or the agendas, framing could be applied systematically, to manipulate people to commit violence or mobilize them for peacebuilding.

Although the media play a critical role in framing conflict, frames can originate outside the news organization. Journalists’ reliance on index sources for information
allows the media to be used as a conduit through which the personal frames of disputing parties can be promoted (Bennett, 1999). Similarly, in a two-step flow of communication, opinion leaders could influence audience interpretation of media, particularly when they act as independent sources by sharing with the audience, information that agrees with their personal convictions about an issue (Visser, Holdbrook & Kronsnick, 2008).

Apart from the news media frames, another concept of framing, audience frame or individual framing also affects how individuals process and interpret information. In making this distinction, Entman (1991) describes media frames as “attributes of the news itself” and individual frames as “information-processing schemata of individuals” (p.7). Entman’s classification of the two concepts of framing shows that audience understanding and interpretation of issues are shaped by a multi-layered level of interaction of both media frames and preexisting schemas of individuals. These personal schemas for example, have the potential of shaping how conflict audiences perceive the media, their position in a conflict and those of other parties (Elliott, Kaufman, Gardner & Burgess, 2002; Cheldin, Druckman, & Fast, 2003; Kaufman, Elliot & Shumeli, 2013).

**Individual Framing of Conflict**

Literature on media effects notwithstanding, research has shown the audience is actively involved during the formation or production of frames. Their attitudes, beliefs, values and experiences of influence how they make sense of world or new information they get from the media (Borah, 2011; Cheldin, Druckman, & Fast, 2003). Individual frames or schemas influence their perceptions and reactions to news presented by the media (Elliott, Kaufman, Gardner & Burgess, 2002; Kaufman, Elliot & Shumeli, 2013).
These frames allow audiences to make sense of the diverse and, sometimes, complex information they are confronted with during conflict. Since frames could emerge from underlying beliefs, experiences, and values of individuals, it could affect the intractability of conflict because it influences individual perception of events and other conflict disputants (Kaufman, Elliot & Shumeli, 2013).

Apart from the dominant arguments on the impact of media conflict framing on violence escalation, some scholars identify pre-existing schemas as playing a critical role on the way the audience understands and responds to media messages about conflict (Cheldin, Druckman, & Fast, 2003; Elliot, Gray & Lewicki, 2003; Entman, 1993; Kaufman, Elliot & Shumeli, 2013; Lewicki, Gray & Elliot, 2003; Scheufele, 1999;).

Though previous research have demonstrated that news frames influence the attitudes and beliefs of audiences, individual frames or schemas, which are shaped by personal experiences of the audience can also affect how they perceive the news media. These frames are also influenced by both global political views of or and short-term, issue-related frames of individuals (Scheufele, 1999). At different stages of conflict, individual schemas influence the way people view their personal or group identities, as well as personal experiences and history with a conflict (Tajfel, 1981). The schemas of people can be activated when they feel that their identities are threatened in any way. For instance, self-schemas of individuals or groups in a ‘religious’ conflict can be triggered if they feel their religious identities are being threatened. The schemas therefore become the lens through which these people view the media, other parties, or even their position in the conflict.
Individual frames shape how people interpret events, rationalize their interests in the conflict, build coalitions, strategically choose outcomes and attempt to convince broader audiences about their positions on the conflict (Elliott, M., Gray, B., & Lewicki, R., 2003; Kaufman, Elliot & Shumeli, 2013). They influence audience perception, particularly individual judgments and bias against the media (Brussell & Greenberg, 2000). This means that media frames can influence the opinions of conflict audiences, particularly if the information presented supports their views or opinions about an issue. The audience is also likely to develop a biased perception of the media if the information does not agree with their views (Chong & Druckman, 2007; Vallone et al., 1995). In other words, “individual issue schemas could enhance or limit media framing effects as news frames become consistent or inconsistent with the schemas” (Shen, 2004, p. 411).

Understanding the way individual framing impact on how conflict audiences in Plateau State interpret and respond to media messages is critical for getting deeper insights into their behavior during the conflict. Conflict audiences perceive, understand, and interpret issues through frames, which evolve from their personal beliefs, experiences and those produced by the media. They use these frames to decide how best they fit into the conflict, and why and how they can respond (Gardner, 2003). Some of these frames, identify and characterization, are important not only for conceptualizing and interpreting conflict, but also for understanding how people are manipulated or convinced to take sides on issues (Kaufman, Elliot & Shumeli, 2003).

Identity frames have to do with the way groups or stakeholders describe themselves and their roles in the conflict. This involves language, phrases, and statements
that describe who they are and what their vested interest is in the conflict (Campbell & Docherty, 2004; Gilboa, 2002). Individuals in conflict environments have several identities, which shape the way how they see themselves and their roles in the conflict. Individuals also frame a conflict through the lens of these identities. These frames influence how they behave, particularly when they perceive that these identities are being threatened in any way. Violence can erupt when people perceive the identities are challenged or threatened (Gardner, 2003, Kaufman, Elliott & Shumeli, 2003; Ambe-Uva, 2010). Ambe-Uva (2010) attributed the recurrent escalation of the ethno-religious conflict in Plateau to identity frames produced through group identification among Christians and Muslims in the state. He said:

As grievances built over time, both sides, to manipulate popular emotions and eventually to inflame the situation at a level where it could no longer be controlled, appealed to religious sentiments. Christians and Muslims, indigenes and non-indigenes both became perpetrators and victims (p.44).

When people resort to violence, they also ignore information and perspectives that contradict their identity, while negatively characterizing people outside their group. In doing so, they increase their affiliations with people or groups who think like them and have the same belief system (Kaufman, Elliott & Shumeli, 2003). This conceptualization is critical for understanding among other things, how frames are formed, how and audiences interpret and respond to frames that are produced during conflict.

Characterization, another crucial frame, describes how conflict audiences view other stakeholders in the conflict. These frames are in some instances promoted by the media through blaming stories, coverage and propagation of hate speeches. Characterization frames emphasize group differences that increase the incidence of
violence (Reuben, 2009). Negative characterization frames especially undermine group legitimacy and justify violent actions of conflict audiences (Campbell & Doherty, 2004). Audiences participate in the framing of conflict informal discussions; they proactively seek information, even though underlying experiences and beliefs interact with and often affect their response to news media information and, by extension, their attitudes to conflict (Borah, 2011). Identity and characterization thus provides a framework for understanding the way conflict audiences portray and interact with each other.

Two studies conducted by Moaz (2010) and Moaz & Blondheim (2010) revealed that underlying schemas and personal experiences of audiences, rather than media frames, influence the way they respond to and interpret news media information. For example, Moaz (2010) gauged the perceptions and emotions of respondents to a public television interview with a female Palestinian suicide bomber in Israel and examined how their ideological biases affected their responses to the interview. The finding revealed that individual frames of study participants, rather than media frames, influenced their interpretation of the media content. This is relevant to this study it shows that the ability of media audiences to interpret and respond to information is determined to a large extent, by personal schemas that could be activated by a range of individual, social, political and cultural factors.

Some scholars also identify audiences as having biased responses to media messages due to individual mental frames that color their interpretation and response to media content (Vallone et al., 1985; Gunther and Schmitt, 2004; Ariyanto, Hornsey & Gallios, 2007; Reid, 2012). Theoretical explanations for the perceived bias model identify
partisan involvement, perceived reach and credibility in the media as critical predictors of the phenomenon. In this situation, individuals are more likely to perceive the media content as biased, when they doubt the credibility of the source (Vallone et al., 1995; Ried, 2012). Similarly, individuals feel less likely to be biased when the source of information is a member of their group or someone who shares their views and opinions on an issue. Reid (2012) said “out-group membership of a source appears to be a necessary condition for partisans to charge media bias” (397).

Another factor that could trigger the perception of bias among the audience is the broad reach of the mass media and the source of a message. Gunther & Schmitt (2004) conducted three experiments to test the hypothesis that information presented through a mass media channel is more likely to arouse biased media perception among the audience than information presented through a non-mediated source. Results of the experiment showed that the respondents viewed information presented to them through a media source as biased and considered the same information as neutral when it was presented through a non-mediated medium. Gunther & Schmitt (2004) argued that the findings do not point to the culpability of the mass media; rather, they suggest that schemas influenced how the audience viewed the media and other people in the communication process.

The individual framing and perception of media bias arguments also have implications for this study. Apart from debunking the direct media effects hypothesis, these studies identify key variables that moderate the relationship between the media and audience. First, individual framing literatures suggest experiences and beliefs of people
shape how they interpret news and their behavior. Furthermore, audience perception of media bias has important consequences as “it undercuts the potential of the news media” to provide information for the public and also reduces agenda setting on especially people who do not trust the media (Peffley, Mark, Avery, & Glass. 2001, p.2). Similarly, the finding suggests that perception of bias is more likely to be higher when news is presented through the mass media than non-mediated channels point to the important role of interpersonal interaction in the mass communication process.

For a conflict environment like Plateau State, the recurrence of armed violence in the past fifteen years means it is most probable that conflict audiences will develop their own frames. Similarly, the low media penetration in the state and the current political structure makes it probable that interpersonal discussions will be an important information seeking and sharing tool (Niesbet, 2005). It is therefore, a significant part of this study to understand if bias occurs within a two-step communication process, particularly if the interaction between conflict audiences and opinion leaders in Plateau State shapes their communication behavior. Another issue is the relationship between schemas and audience perception of media bias. Does individual framing have important consequence for the communication behavior of conflict audiences? If it does, a new question arises: What kind of behavior do conflict audiences express? How does this impact upon the mass communication process during conflict?

*Conflict Audiences in Plateau State*

The Oxford English Dictionary defines audience as “the action of hearing: attention to what is spoken.” This definition views the audience as content or message
(what is spoken), and a process of transmitting and receiving a message (the action of hearing). The audience is also the receiver of a “particular symbolic message” (Sullivan, 2013, p.3). McQuail (1997) suggested that the audience can be viewed from two perspectives: first, as products of a social context, with shared understandings, informational needs and interests that respond to a specific pattern of the media; second, as a group that can be defined by place (such as local or national media), by medium (like technology), or by gender, age appeal or political belief.

In the context of conflict, the people who reside in violent conflict environments like Plateau State, Nigeria, can be referred to as ‘conflict audiences.’ The concept of conflict audiences can be traced to World War 1, when scholars viewed the media as a means of influencing society. Supported by very little empirical research, scholars painted the picture of a monolithic, vulnerable audience passively absorbing media messages (Bratic, 2006, p.7). Mass society, urbanization, migration, mass production in industry after World War 1, created a new type of society that prompted arguments that “mass media stimuli could control and induce entire audiences to behave in a uniform way” (Bratic, 2006, p.3). This idealistic belief promoted by Lippmann (1922) in his public opinion study, and Lasswell’s 1928 propaganda analysis, led to their conclusion that propaganda could be positively used by responsible elite in society. For example, Lippmann (1922) referred to the masses as a “great beast” and “bewildered herd” that needed the guidance of specialized class of experts, specialized and bureaucrats.

Lazarsfeld, Berelson & Gaudet (1944) challenged the argument about the direct effect on the media on the audience. Some empirical studies conducted to examine the
direct effect of media on voters: *The People’s Choice* (Lazarsfeld, Berelson, & Gaudet, 1944), *Voting* (Berelson, Lazarsfeld, & McPhee, 1954) and *Personal Influence* (Katz & Lazarsfeld, 1955) revealed that opinion leaders with more access to the media pass media messages to audience members in their social networks (Lazarsfeld, Berelson & Gaudet, 1944; Katz & Lazarsfeld, 1955). These limited effect arguments presented yet another concept of the audience as people who are selective in their choice and use of the media. Katz and Lazarsfeld argued that for this kind of audience, the behavior is more deliberate because they tend to select messages that support their preconceptions about issues.

Theoretical models like uses and gratification also build on this argument as more studies investigate why people choose one media over another and what gratifications they receive from it (Ruggiero, 2000). The argument also gave rise to current debates about the “passive” or “active” audience. The concept of the audience as a whole has different connotations among scholars and practitioners (Webster, 1998). For example, while McQuail (1997) acknowledged the universal acceptance of audience, the advent of the Internet, technological developments and emerging intellectual arguments are shaping the media landscape is re-defining the way people view and define the audience.

One of these classifications proposed by Webster (1998) categorized the audience into three spheres: audience-as-mass, audience-as-agents, and audience-as-outcome. These are discussed below.

*The Audience-as-Mass*

This model presents the most common way of thinking of the audience; as a mass of people who exist across space and yet have no knowledge of each other (Webster,
The model does not focus on the active choices and decisions that the audience takes in the communication process, rather the key questions they attempt to answer are: What media do people consume? How many people is the audience? What types of people are they? How might specific groups of people respond to a particular issue or policy? (Webster, 1998, p.193; Sullivan, 2013, p. 6).

Sullivan (2013) suggested that the audience under this model is aggregated in order to reveal patterns and responses, which are often times, predictable. As a result, scholars and practitioners rely on quantitative measurement techniques, such as audience rating research and surveys to understand mass responses to content or policy issues (Webster, 1998). Although this model provides a framework for contemporary audience studies, advancement in new media technology, which empowers people to be receivers and senders of information, question the notion of a 'mass audience.' Napoli (2008) argued that the convergent media environment has led to both media and audience fragmentation and the disintegration of “mass audiences.”

The Audience-as-Outcome

This model identifies the audience as “being acted upon by the media” (Sullivan, 2013, p.6). It suggests the power of the media to affect people in a way that is detrimental to them (Webster, 1998). Researchers and practitioners who promote this model view the audience from an outcome perspective while attempting to answer the question, “What do media do to the people media?” Although deeply entrenched in academic studies, the model has been criticized for positioning audience members as passive and unaware of
the impact of the media on them. According to Webster (1998), the audience-as-outcome model provides a pessimistic view of individuals.

Thompson (1990), for example, suggested these new developments in the media environment requires that future research focus on conceptualizing the audience within a "relational and interrelational construct" where “texts are located and understood as part of, indeed as agents in practices of people’s daily lives” rather than a struggle between the media and audience (p.14).

*The Audience-as-Agents*

This model classifies the audience as free to have the capacity to choose the media they want to consume. The model suggests that the audience brings “in their interpretative skills to the texts they encounter, making their own meaning and generally using the media to suit themselves” (Sullivan, 2013, p.8). Audience-as-agents model suggests that audiences are not acted upon by the media; rather, they take active decisions to participate in the communication process. Although the model repositions the audience, it does not necessarily mean they are not influenced in a sense by their social and cultural environment (Webster, 1998). Uses and gratification theory, which draws its arguments from this model, credits the needs of the audience as influencing what type of media people consume and why. The uses and gratification theory identifies with the concept of the active audience who take purposeful decisions to interact with and consume media.
Which of the Models do Conflict Audiences in Plateau State Fit into?

Since the direct impact of a conflict on individuals influences the behavior of people, conflict audiences in Plateau State, Nigeria, can be viewed as operating within the audience-as-outcome and audience-as-agent models proposed by Webster (1998). As an outcome, the fear and uncertainty that pervades a conflict environment “makes audiences more vulnerable to media influence,” thus, increasing the strong agenda-setting power over the media (Bratic, 2006, p.4). Conflict audiences are also agents when they consciously take the decision to choose or reject information they view as not conforming to their beliefs or opinions about the conflict.

Although there are debates over which of these models best describes the characteristics of the audience, Webster (1998) suggested that future scholars of audience studies apply a multidisciplinary approach to investigating the audience and also to “explore enlightened empiricism – one that makes room for a number of methods, each compensating” (pp. 200-201). While stressing the need for scholars to abandon the passive/active dichotomy arguments, Webster advised researchers to view audiences in terms of agency and structure because “human agents” are capable of acting freely, they are typically located within institutional and social structures that shape and are shaped by individual actions” (p. 202).

This dissertation follows this approach; the study examined the behavior of audiences during conflict within the framework of agency and structure. Like other media audiences, the behavior and actions of conflict audiences are shaped by the institutional and social structures in which they are located. In this study, the communication behavior
of conflict audiences in Plateau State is examined within the framework of the existing media, political, cultural and economic environment in the state, all of which constitute structures that have the potential of shaping the behaviors of audience members.

Specifically, this study investigates how the communication behavior of conflict audiences in Plateau State is shaped by both the media system and the conflict environment (religious, political and economic interests), which are elements of social and institutional structures. The study also examined if agency, such as membership of religious, ethnic, political groups, played any role in shaping the experiences with the conflict in the state.

Summary of the Literature Review and Implication for the Present Study

This review examined the interdisciplinary approach to understanding the relationship between the media and conflict. The chapter examined the concept, with a specific focus on some contemporary theories of conflict (greed/grievances and religious models), with a view to identifying how they are connected to the sectarian crises in Plateau State, Nigeria. The review identified the link between media and conflict by examining current scholarly arguments about the role the media play in facilitating violence. After a review of some studies, this study acknowledges that media effects studies provide empirical evidence of correlational relationships between news media coverage and violent escalation in two very distinct ways:

On one end of the spectrum, the media, particularly news media frames have been shown to be powerful, with massive influence upon the attitudes and behaviors of conflict audiences (DellaVigna, Enikolopov, Mironova, Petrova & Zhuravskaya, 201; Moaz &
Blondheim, 2010; Moaz, 2010; Yanagizawa-Drott, 2010). In this model, the relationship between the media and audience is viewed through the lens of media effects scholarship, where the focus is on understanding how media frames are shaping the behavior of conflict audiences.

Within the framework of this model is the limited effect argument, which suggests that the media set public agenda-setting through a two-step flow of communication (Berelson, Lazarsfeld, & McPhee, 1954; Brosius & Weinmann, 1996; Katz, 1957; Katz & Lazarsfeld, 1955). The model suggests that information flows from the media to opinion leaders, usually a small group of people with more access to the media, who interpret and pass the information across to other members of the public through interpersonal discussions or interactions.

Even though the media effects studies provide a significant contribution to research, the arguments conceptualize a more vulnerable media audience. There is a lack of understanding of factors that shape audience interpretation of information and behavior during conflict.

At the other end of the spectrum, some studies suggest that audiences are not only motivated and selective in use of media and content (Fry & McCain, 1983; Rubin, 1993; Ruggiero, 2000), they are also “active within structures” (Cooper & Tang, 2009, p. 415). In conflict situations, audiences are known to actively choose to reject or receive information they perceive as being biased to their views and opinions. The implication is that the attitudes and behavior of the audience attitudes toward the media and conflict are influenced by their perception of bias. These arguments support individual framing
literature, which examine how audiences receive and interact with media frames, how it shapes their experiences, and the “degree to which these decoding are shaped by the complex interactions of media frames and personal experiences” (Carragee & Roefs, 2004, p. 216). Individual framing arguments suggest that pre-existing beliefs and experiences of people interfere with their interpretations and understanding of specific issues. In this model, people are viewed as having a biased response to news media messages due to individual mental frames and attitudes that color their interpretation and behavior (Moaz, & Blondheim, 2010; Shen, 2004).

Although these divergent theoretical arguments differ in their conceptualization of the interaction between the audience and media, particularly within the context of conflict, the arguments acknowledge two key issues. One, there are multiple frames in a conflict environment. Two, the interaction between the media and audience is necessary and important for understanding the dynamics of information flow in conflict environments. This is even more crucial when we consider that, in conflict environments, availability and access to the media infrastructure is limited (Bratic, 2006).

What is important, yet missing from literature, is a model that examines the role of conflict audiences as critical stakeholders play during the communication process. Although emerging research using the individual framing model suggests that underlying beliefs and schemas shapes how people interpret media messages, it is vital to study factors that influence their interpretation process. It is equally necessary to examine the complexity of the interpretation process, how that shapes the communication behavior of conflict audiences and the contribution to information dissemination during the conflict.
Apart from a theoretical gap, this chapter also identified a limitation in methodology. Even though positivist approaches have demonstrated that the media have a powerful influence on the conflict behavior of the audience through agenda setting and framing, most of these studies mostly focus on measuring media effects. By opting for a qualitative study, this dissertation explored the phenomenon from an audience perspective. The study also utilized grounded theory approach to identify and explain conceptually, the latent communication behavior of conflict audiences in Plateau State. In order to achieve these objectives, the study was guided by one primary and three secondary research questions.

Research Questions

The primary question is:

1. What pattern of communication behavior do conflict audiences in Plateau State engage in and how does this behavior shape the information dissemination process?

The secondary research questions are:

a. What factors shape the communication behavior of conflict audiences in Plateau State?

b. To what extent is the behavior shaped by their preexisting beliefs about the media?

c. To what extent is the behavior shaped by the two-step flow of communication between conflict audiences and opinion leaders in Plateau State?
CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

Grounded Theory Approach: A Brief Overview

Grounded theory approach “is an inductive, theory discovery methodology that allows the researcher to develop a theoretical account of the general features of a topic while simultaneously grounding the account in empirical observations or data” (Martin & Turner, 1986, p. 141). Grounded theory (GT) is important for “interpreting complex phenomena” and for understanding “socially constructed experiences of participants” (Jones & Alony, 2011, p. 2).

Grounded theory is centered on two basic concepts. The first is constant comparison where the researcher is simultaneously collecting and analyzing data. The second is theoretical sampling, a process which determines the kind of data that can be collected by the researcher (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Constant comparison involves simultaneous data collection and analysis. In this situation, the data collected by the researcher helps to determine subsequent data collection. Initial data collection and analysis also guide the second important grounded theory concept, which is theoretical sampling. This process involves recruiting participants who have diverse experiences of the phenomenon. This allows the researcher to explore the various perspectives on the phenomenon being studied (Cho & Lee, 2014).

Although developed initially by Barney Glaser and Anslem Strauss, the two have proposed two different schools of GT - the Glaserian School and theStraussian School. While there are similarities, the major differences could “impact in the direction and
execution of the primary research” (Jones & Alony, 2011, p.5). The Glaserian school, for example, suggests that:

The research in a Grounded Theory study is not a statement that identifies the phenomenon to be studied. The problem emerges and questions regarding the problem emerge by which to guide theoretical sampling…out of open-coding, collection of data by theoretical sampling, and analyzing by constant comparison, emerges a focus for the research (Glaser, 1992, p. 25).

The implication is: (i) researchers are not required to conduct literature review on the topic area; (ii) the literature review can only be completed during the sorting and writing stage during the study (Thai, Chong & Agrawal, 2012).

Another major difference is, while the Glaserian approach also requires that the researcher goes to into the field with no preconceived idea of the phenomenon, the Straussian model suggests the need for the researcher to have a general idea of where to begin, while allowing the theory to be guided by structured questions that emerge from the literature (Thai, Chong & Agrawal, 2012).

Since this study is being guided by research questions, and given the prior knowledge that the researcher has about the phenomena (conflict in Plateau State), through research, personal, and work experience, the Straussian grounded theory model is more appropriate for this dissertation.

Chicken or the Egg? The Role of Literature in this Grounded Theory Methodology Study

The open-mindedness of the researcher should not be mistaken for the empty mindedness of the researcher who is not adequately steeped in the research traditions of a discipline. It is after all; not very clever to rediscover the wheel, and the student or researcher who is ignorant of the relevant literature is always in danger of doing the equivalent (Coffey & Atkinson, 1996, p. 157).
This quote encapsulates the importance of conducting a literature review in a substantive area before data collection and analysis. Although engagement with existing literature is a critical component of any research, it is a contested issue in grounded theory research. Some scholars argue that, although ignoring literature review contradicts most methodologies, doing so allows the theory to emerge from data, while isolating the researcher from potential bias posed by “extant theoretical frameworks and associated hypotheses” (Dunne, 2011, p. 114). However, the Straussian school, upon which this study is grounded, advocates earlier review of related literature. The benefits of conducting an expansive literature review in this study are:

1. The review helped to provide a rationale for the study.
2. It helped the researcher to identify existing lacunae in knowledge.
3. The review helped the researcher to contextualize the study.

By reviewing relevant literature, the researcher deepened her knowledge of the topic being investigated and, in the process, enhanced her theoretical sensitivity, which is a critical requirement in grounded theory research (Strauss & Corbin, 1998; Dunne, 2011, p.116; Thai, Chong & Agrawal, 2012).

*Straussian Grounded Theory Methodology*

This study employed Straussian grounded theory methodology to investigate the communication behavior of conflict audiences in Jos, Plateau State, Nigeria. The decision to use the methodological approach was taken after the researcher conducted the first phase of data collection. After an initial analysis of the data, the researcher observed that existing theoretical models were limited in the arguments about the role of conflict
audiences in the information dissemination process. Apart from not providing a suitable framework upon which the overall research would be based, there was the need to extend the arguments of these models by identifying a substantive model that will conceptualize the communication behavior of conflict audiences and the role in the information dissemination process.

1. The decision to apply the Straussian grounded theory methodology to this study was driven by four key reasons:

2. The limited or lack of research on audience behavior in the context of armed conflict environments.

3. The need to respond to this gap by investigating the communication behavior of conflict audiences at different stages of conflict.

4. The need to develop a substantive theory that expands on the arguments of individual framing model by investigating the interaction between the audience and the media as a framework for acknowledging the critical role they play during conflict.

5. Since the researcher has prior knowledge about the subject area through the literature review and personal experiences, the Straussian grounded theory research provides a more realistic approach for conducting this study.

6. This chapter presents how the methodology was applied throughout the study. Specifically, the chapter presents: (i) the research setting; (ii) sampling and recruitment of participants; (iii) data collection; (iv) data analysis; (v) ethical issues and research permission; (vi) establishing credibility.
Research Setting

Plateau, one of the states in North-Central Nigeria, was selected as the site for this research because of its long history of armed conflict. Although different regions in Nigeria have been affected by conflicts, the large-scale violence in Plateau State is one of the worst in the country. Krause (2011) estimated that over 4,000 people have been killed since the outbreak of violence in 2001. Jos, the capital city of Plateau State, was the most affected by the crises. According to Segun & Jegede (2013):

Jos, the state capital appears to be the epicenter of the much insecurity and the worst site of the violence in the state….episodes of mass killing and destructions of lives and property seems to have started from 2001 and continued to 2010, but after 2010, there has been quite a number of episodic violence till date (p.1).

Jos North and Jos South Local Government Areas were therefore chosen as the appropriate research setting for this study. Jos was divided into two local government areas for administrative purposes. These areas were also most affected by the crises compared to other local government areas in the state.

Sampling and Recruitment of Participants

Purposive, snowball sampling methods were used to select participants for the study. Theoretical sampling method was also applied in line with the guidelines for grounded theory methodology.

Purposive Sampling

Purposive sampling, also referred to as criterion sampling, involved identifying and selecting individuals who meet certain predetermined criterion for a study, such as age, gender, religion, status, etc. (Given, 2008). These are categories that could help answer research questions or serve as a starting point for a study (Patton, 2002).
In order to investigate the communication behavior of conflict audiences in Plateau State, the researcher began with a purposive selection of an open sample, which consisted of individuals who met the following requirements: (i) they are residents of Plateau State; (ii) they experienced the conflict at one time or another.

The researcher was introduced to the first set of participants by an acquaintance, an instructor at the Youth with a Mission Program (YWAM) program in Miango, Plateau State. Having worked as an instructor with YWAM for a couple of years, the researcher contacted the man (in his early 30s), who, for the purpose of this research, will be referred to as “Harry”, to assist in the recruitment of participants for the study. Harry has worked with the program for several years. He has also participated in several peace building interventions in the state. His interaction with people of different faiths allowed him to gain the trust of Muslims and non-Muslims (some of whom became participants of this study).

The researcher first contacted Harry through phone calls while she was still in the United States to discuss the research and solicit his assistance in helping with recruitment. The researcher met with Harry in Jos, a month later, where he facilitated a meeting with four potential participants. These were two Muslim and two non-Muslims. The four also include one student of the University of Jos, a primary school teacher, a civil servant, and a journalist.

The first meeting was convenient because it presented the researcher with the opportunity to discuss the research and canvas for support. The researcher began the meeting by introducing herself and explaining the nature of the research. The meeting
also allowed the researcher to answer questions, some of which the researcher found particularly interesting. For example, one potential participant asked if the study was being funded by the government or any international agency. They wanted to know how much they would be paid for the study. A participant informed me he received compensation for most research projects he has participated in and asked if the researcher would provide such incentive. Another participant expressed her concerns about the researcher who she feared might be a government informant.

These concerns were legitimate because while the researcher was meeting them for the first time, it was obvious that they recognized the researcher as a journalist with the Plateau Radio Television Organization and also a former Press Secretary with the Plateau State Government. The researcher anticipated that these issues might be raised by participants. In an earlier study conducted in 2010, the researcher was confronted with similar questions. This meeting was therefore crucial in gaining the trust of participants.

In responding to the issues raised, the researcher took time to, once again, explain the exercise was an academic study. She also showed her University Issued Identification card and the Institutional Review Board approval letter. The meeting continued after that and the researcher was able to get the four people to participate in the study and also recommend other people.

*Snowball Sampling*

This method was also effective for “locating rich key informants for the study (Patton, 2002, p.262). Each of the four participants recruited for the study during the first meeting were asked to recommend people to be interviewed. The researcher went
through the names they suggested and drew up a list of potential participants. Some of the people they identified were also asked to recommend other participants and “by asking a number of people who else to talk to, the snowball” got “bigger and bigger… and possible sources converge” (Patton, 2002, p.263).

At the end of the exercise, the researcher came up with a list of twenty-five potential participants. Out of the twenty-five people contacted for the study, sixteen agreed to participate in the focus group discussions. Nine of them declined, citing scheduling conflicts. After an exchange of several phone calls with the sixteen potential participants (8 Muslims and 8 non-Muslims), a venue and date for the discussions were agreed upon.

The researcher did not encounter many problems recruiting non-Muslims participants. It was, however, a different experience working with the Muslims. Due to mistrust among Muslims and non-Muslims in the state, only two out of the eight Muslim participants showed up for the focus group discussion. To address this problem, the researcher contacted a professional colleague, a Muslim Journalist working with a private media organization in the state. The colleague, Tasiyu (pseudonym) is also a leader of the Hausa-Muslim community in Jos. Tasiyu, in turn, recruited his son, Aliyu (pseudonym) to assist the researcher by initiating contacts with some members of the community. Aliyu, in his late 20s, is also a leader in one of the Muslim youth organizations in Plateau State.

Aliyu arranged a meeting with ten people at a popular in Jos. During the meeting, the researcher answered questions about the research and other personal concerns raised
by the participants. The meeting helped to erase suspicions that some members of the community had about the researcher and the study. With Aliyu’s assistance, the researcher was able to recruit six people for focus group discussants. The other four opted to participate in the in-depth interviews.

*Theoretical Sampling*

This sampling method was also applied in line with the guidelines for grounded theory methodology. Theoretical sampling is a process of data collection where the researcher collects, “codes and analyses his data and decides what data to collect next and where to find them, in order to develop his theory as it emerge” (Glaser & Strauss, 1967, p.45). The method can also be defined as a theoretical sampling procedure that “dictates that the researcher chooses participants who have experienced or are experiencing the phenomenon under study” (Thompson, 2011, p.48).

While the method requires the researcher to identify ‘experts’, selection of participants is a process, which evolves from emerging categories and patterns through iterative data analysis (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). In theoretical sampling, the researcher constantly compares data to verify different categories, concepts or perspectives of the issues being studies. The goal is to ensure that subsequent interviews lead the researcher to get a deeper understanding of the issue.

In this study, purposeful selection of participants was used at the beginning of data collection and a theoretical sampling approach was applied when theoretical concepts began to emerge during data analysis.
After the first set of interviews and focus group discussions were collected, an iterative data analysis was conducted. Thompson (2011) defined iterative analysis as “a process in which the researcher moves back and forth through the data in order to find, compare and verify patterns, concepts, categories, properties, and dimensions of the phenomena” (p.48). During data analysis, the researcher narrows the research focus and samples key informants whose views will help to provide in-depth understanding of the emerging categories, test the validity of the categories and their relationships (Chenitz & Swanson, 1986). The researcher identified and interviewed participants until saturation in data collected was reached. Strauss & Corbin (1998, p.212) said theoretical saturation occurs when:

1. No new or relevant data seems to emerge regarding a category
2. The category is well developed in terms of its properties and dimensions, demonstrating variation.
3. The relationships among categories were well established and validated

In qualitative studies, there are no rules for sample size since the “size depends on what you want to know, the purpose of the enquiry, what is at stake, what will be useful, what will have credibility and what can be done with available time and resources” (Patton, 2002; p.242). In grounded theory, sample size is also defined by theoretical saturation. This means that the data will dictate the size of the sample.

**Gatekeepers**

The researcher also relied on other gatekeepers to recruit participants for the study. These included community and religious leaders, leaders of professional
organizations like the Nigerian Union of Journalists, the Nigerian Civil Service Union and the National Association of Nigerian Students. In a traditional research setting, the gatekeeper is the go-to-person with whom the researcher negotiates access to study participants (Sanders, 2006). In conflict environments, the loss of lives, property or livelihood means that study participants could present as victims, perpetrators of a conflict or both (Hobbs, 2006). This means the fieldwork in this environment can sometimes be dangerous for both the researcher and participants. Access to participants therefore becomes a very complex process.

Gatekeepers are therefore important during the research process. They are people who have a psychological and emotional connection with the participants. Gatekeepers have access to the private spaces of the participants (Hobbs, 2006). To ensure the safety of the researcher and the participants, it is important to maintain a harmonious working relationship with the gatekeeper. The involvement of gatekeepers is therefore necessary for the duration of the research process.

The gatekeepers the researcher interacted with in Jos fit into these categories. The interaction with Aliyu demonstrates the important role of gatekeepers in the research process. The researcher turned to Aliyu when the first set of Muslims participants contacted for the focus group discussions failed to show up. The initial experience with these participants and subsequent interactions with Aliyu taught the researcher two valuable lessons.

One, the researcher learned the importance of identifying gatekeepers with stronger ties to study participants, especially in conflict environments. Access to Muslims
in Jos was made possible by a Muslim who was trusted by members of his community. Although Harry (the first person the researcher contacted) had Muslims in his network of friends and family, his connection was not enough to gain the trust of some members of the Muslim community. Furthermore, during the preliminary meeting with potential participants, two Muslims, who were introduced to the researcher by Harry, withdrew their participation. Although they cited scheduling conflicts, Aliyu attributed their actions to existing tensions between Muslims and non-Muslims in the state. He said most participants raised concerns about the researcher’s faith and the real intent of the study. Gaining access through him proved to be more effective.

After the researcher was introduced to Aliyu, a meeting took place at a Mosque in Jos, a location that was safe for participants. Trust was therefore very important at this point. The researcher, a non-Muslim, had to trust that Aliyu had her safety guaranteed at the Mosque and that the participants allowed the researcher to enter their space, a sacred religious space.

There was also the reliance on other gatekeepers identified earlier in this section. As a member of Nigerian Union of Journalist, a former member of the Nigerian Civil Service Union and a current faculty member at the University of Jos, access to participants through these organizations were easier for the researcher.

Another lesson was the potential ethical issues with recruitment through these established gatekeepers and how to navigate the thin line. The willingness to recruit and provide access to participants presented the possibility of gatekeepers influencing the process, particularly in conflict zones where the manipulation of information is
commonplace (Bratic, 2006). The researcher counteracted the potential power issue by holding meetings with participants to explain the researcher and answer their questions. The meetings achieved two goals: (a) it provided the researcher with an opportunity for full disclosure of her research agenda, thus creating the enabling environment for reciprocal exchange of information; (b) the question and answer session facilitated an atmosphere of trust and allowed the researcher to examine the suitability of individuals for the research. The exchange also facilitated the decision of people to participate (or not) in the research.

**Study Participants**

A total of forty-nine people participated in this study. The number includes interview respondents and all focus group discussants. The study participants aged 19 years and above, were ‘conflict audiences,’ who are resident in Jos North and South Local Government Areas of Plateau State. The number consists of thirty males, twenty-two females. There were also thirty-two non-Muslims and thirty Muslims. Table 1 below shows presents a breakdown of participants for in-depth interviews and focus group discussions. Pseudonyms are used in identifying participants where needed. Below is a breakdown of the participants.
Table 1

**Breakdown of Participants**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Study Participants</th>
<th>Data Collection</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>3 Students (two people were</td>
<td>In-depth interview</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>interviewed twice)</td>
<td>In-depth interview</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 Civil Servants</td>
<td>In-depth interview</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 School Principals</td>
<td>In-depth interview</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 Journalists</td>
<td>In-depth interview</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 Media Managers</td>
<td>In-depth interview</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 Religious Leaders</td>
<td>In-depth interview</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 Political Leaders</td>
<td>In-depth interview</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8 Muslims</td>
<td>Focus group discussion</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8 Non-Muslims</td>
<td>Focus group discussion</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7 Muslims and 9 non-Muslims</td>
<td>Focus group discussion</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Description of Key informants/Participants*

**Students.** The student participants were drawn from the University of Jos, The Plateau State Polytechnic and Plateau State University Bokkos. The students, aged between 19 and 24 years, participated in the in-depth interviews and focus group discussions.

**Civil servants.** The civil servants who participated in both focus group discussions and in-depth interviews are public officials employed by the Plateau State Government.

**School principals.** Two principals were interviewed. One, aged 45, is head of the public high schools in Jos. The second, aged 36, is principal in one of the high schools belonging to the Muslim community in Jos.
Teachers. Two teachers participated in the focus group discussions. While one of the teachers works with a public secondary school in Tudun Wada in Jos North Local Government area, the second teacher is employed by a private secondary school located in Bukuru, Jos South Local Government Area.

Journalists. Eight journalists age 32-40 participated in the in-depth interviews and focus group discussions. The journalists, Muslims and non-Muslims, were drawn from government and private media organizations in Plateau State.

Media managers. The media managers interviewed for this study are responsible for the editorial decisions in their different media organizations. The two managers interviewed in this study, with over ten years of work experience were drawn from both government and private-owned media organizations in the state.

Religious leaders. Like community leaders, these people are respected by their followers. They are also considered critical stakeholders in the conflict. They have been visible since the conflict began in 2001. For this study, two leaders drawn from the Christian Association of Nigeria and Jama’atu Izalatul Bid’ah Walqamatul Sunnah (JIBWIS) were identified and interviewed.

Political leaders. As leaders in their different communities, the views of political leaders are important. For this study, one leader each from Jos North and South Local Government Areas were interviewed.
Data Collection

Data for this study were collected using focus group discussions and in-depth interviews with participants drawn from Jos North and Jos South Local Government Areas in Plateau State. Both methods are discussed below:

Focus Group Discussions

Although the interview is the most commonly used data collection method in grounded theory research, data collection in this study began with focus group discussions. Focus group discussions allowed the researcher to have a general understanding of the conflict in Plateau State from the different viewpoints of conflict audiences. The discussions were important as the first step of data collection because group interaction “produces data and insights that would be less accessible without interaction found in a group” (Morgan, 1998, p, 12). A focus group was conducted to allow for self-disclosure among participants who shared something in common and in this instance, their experiences with the conflict in Plateau State. The goal was to identify the dimensions of the conflict across religious and age groups. Apart from providing the researcher with valuable insights into conducting in-depth interviews with other research participants, focus group discussions were also organized to gather information the study participants (conflict audiences) in regard to the following outcomes:

1. To understand how they gained access to information during the conflict in Plateau State.

2. To understand the role of opinion leaders play during the conflict.
3. To understand if interpersonal communication with opinion leaders and conflict audiences shaped their behavior in any way.

4. To understand the experiences of people during the conflict and examine if this played any role in shaping their behaviors during conflict.

Participant Demographics (FGDs)

Thirty-two participants took part in three focus group discussions. A total of nineteen male and thirteen females (consisting of seventeen non-Muslims and fifteen Muslims) participated in the discussions. A breakdown of the number shows the following:

- 18 students ages 19 and 27 years.
- 8 of the students were from the University of Jos, 4 were students of Plateau State Polytechnic while 4 were students of the Plateau State University, Bokkos.
- The group also consisted of 4 civil servants ages 30 to 37 years. The civil servants are employees of the Plateau State government.
- 4 journalists ages 32-35 years (2 of the journalists work with the state-government owned media station while the other 2 journalists are news correspondent of some privately-owned national newspapers).
- 4 traders ages 33-36 years
- 2 teachers ages 28-32 years old
- The 2 teachers work in two mission schools in the state (one Muslim, one Christian).
Research Location for FGDs

All focus group discussions were held at locations the participants felt most comfortable and safe. The sessions with Muslim participants took place at the University of Jos, Old Campus, which is located at Gangare. The location is strategic because Gangare is a predominantly Muslim residential area. The conflict in Plateau State led to a lack of trust between the Muslim and non-Muslim communities in the state. This led to the segregation of residential areas. This means, Muslims and non-Muslims each have different residential quarters. The decision to hold the sessions at locations where participants felt most safe was another step the researcher took to gain their trust and cooperation for the research.

The sessions with non-Muslim participants took place at the premises of the University of Jos, permanent site at Farin Gada. The location was convenient for the participants because like the Muslims, the community surrounding the University is largely dominated by non-Muslims.

The third focus group discussion with Muslims and non-Muslims took place at the Plateau Youth Center, Dadin Kowa. The center was appropriate for the discussion because of its unique location. Dadin Kowa is one of the few areas in Jos that did not experience any form of violence. The area is still populated by people of different faiths and ethnicity.

Multiple Category Focus Group Design

This design was used for this study. The discussions were conducted with different participants in a sequential manner. Multiple-category design “allows the
researcher to make comparisons in two ways: from one group to another within a
category (younger to older youth) and from one category to another” (Krueger & Casey,
2009, pp.25-26). Using this design allowed the researcher to make comparisons between
categories. Three focus group discussions were conducted with participants. The first two
consisted of 8 Muslims and 8 non-Muslims separately, while the third group consisted of
participants from the two groups. Dividing the groups along this category is a way of
acknowledging the role of religion as a crucial variable in the conflict.

The first two focus groups discussions were initially slated from 10:00 am to 4:00
pm on January 6, 2014. The venue was the University of Jos, New campus at Farin Gada.
The second session with Muslims was scheduled to take place at University of Jos, Old
Campus at Gangare. The third focus group discussion consisting of Muslim and non-
Muslims took place on Monday January 13, 2014 at the Dadin Kowa Youth Center. The
session conducted with non-Muslims went on as planned, while the one with Muslims
was rescheduled to January 10, 2014 as six out of the eight participants failed to show up
for the meeting.

The researcher arrived at all three locations one hour before each session began
and with the help of an assistant moderator, set up the rooms and checked the audio
recorder. The chairs were arranged in a circle to encourage the participants to interact
with each other. The meeting began with brief welcome remark from the researcher. The
researcher took a few minutes to thank participants and explain the research. Participants
were assured that their privacy would be protected and all information collected will be
used mainly for research purposes. The researcher also informed participants that an audio recorder will be used.

In all three sessions, the researcher distributed informed consent forms and explained what was expected of each participant. Participants were advised not to answer questions they were uncomfortable with. They were also advised that they could withdraw their participation at any time. The researcher requested that participants sign consent forms or provide verbal consent.

Most of the participants opted for verbal consent. Using verbal consent was most appropriate because in Plateau State, like other states in Nigeria, forms are often associated with official issues, which could viewed with suspicion by some participants. A number of participants, who were employees of the State government, chose not to sign the written consent form. As one participant explained, “I am not comfortable signing any document at this time. I will agree more with the verbal one.”

The researcher explained the importance of informed consent and used the format in the form to get verbal consent from participants. The Economic and Social Research Council Framework for Research Ethics (2010) recommends the presence of a witness as the most appropriate way of applying verbal consent. The council suggested that, “verbal consent may be obtained but this should wherever possible be witnessed” (p.29). The requirement was fulfilled with the assistant moderator serving as a witness.

The first discussion session conducted with non-Muslims had eight participants in attendance (four females, four males), ages 19-33. The group consisted of students, civil servants, a journalists and a trader. The discussion lasted for 61 minutes.
Eight Muslims participated in the second FGD (4 males, 4 females), ages 19-39. The group consisted of students, civil servants, journalists, and traders. The first meeting scheduled with Muslim participants did not occur because most of the people failed to show up. With low attendance, the researcher was introduced to a Muslim who served as the gatekeeper for this process. The meeting gave the researcher the opportunity to recruit more Muslim participants.

The third session went on as planned and though ten people were invited to participate in the discussions, sixteen people showed up at the venue (six of them were invited by other participants). In all, nine Muslims and seven non-Muslims participated in the discussion. The session lasted for 1 hour 30 minutes. The researcher took a decision to allow all sixteen people participate in order to protect the quality and integrity of the exercise. First of all, not allowing the six people participate would have reduced the number of female participants. Four out of the six people that showed up were female. Secondly, most of them were Muslim.

Having this many people show up for this session was problematic. The room where the meeting was scheduled had to be rearranged to accommodate more people. The session was delayed for 20 minutes to allow the researcher to work on the seating arrangement.

At the beginning, it was difficult to have everybody engage in the discussion due to the number or participants. Since most of them felt strongly about their experiences with the conflict in Plateau State, some participants attempted to dominate the discussions, sometimes, interjecting when others were speaking. Also, since this was a
mixed group of Muslims and non-Muslims, striking a balance and managing the power dynamic playing the room was challenging for the first 15 to 20 minutes. The rest of the session went on smoothly after that.

After the three focus group discussions, the researcher conducted in-depth interviews with key informants, eight of whom were participants in the discussions. The group consisted of students, civil servants, and journalists who displayed knowledge on the research area and whose contributions during the discussions introduced new dimensions to the topic.

In-Depth Interviews

Interviews in qualitative research are conversations with a “structure and a purpose” (Kvale, 1996, p.6). Interviews are useful for collecting information from conflict audiences about the conflict in Plateau State, their experiences and perception of the media. Interviews allowed the researcher to collect uncover issues that cannot be observed and collected through “numerical aggregation of information” (Knox & Burkard, 2009; Stake, 2010, p.95).

Data collection for this study was conducted in three phases between November 2013 and November 2014. In the first phase, sixteen in-depth interviews were conducted between November 2013 and January 2014. After initial data analysis and theoretical sampling, the researcher conducted interviews in two phases: April, 2014 with four people and in October 2014, eight participants were re-interviewed by the researcher. The face to face interviews, which were audio-recorded, lasted 30 to 60 minutes.
Data were collected using both semi-structured protocols. Semi-structured interviews are more controlled compared to unstructured interviews. This approach is appropriate for this study because: (a) the format allowed the researcher collect information that covered a broad topic about the crises in Plateau State. Also, by using predetermined questions, the researcher was able to compare how the respondents responded to each question.

*Location for In-depth Interviews*

Using the same protocol in the focus group discussions, the researcher worked with the interview participants to choose locations that were convenient and safe for both the researcher and participants. The interviews were conducted in the following locations: Plateau State Secretariat, where most of the ministries and government departments are located.

- University of Jos (permanent site and Old campus).
- Dadin Kowa Youth Center.
- Jos Central Mosque.
- Press Center (Nigerian Union of Journalists).

*Interview Protocol*

The interview protocol had twelve questions (Appendix A). Although the protocols included predetermined questions, the researcher used follow-ups and probes to elicit more information from the participants. The questions covered issues, such as:

1. The opinions of participants about the causes of the conflict in Plateau State.
2. Views about the media, particularly the news media coverage of the conflict.
3. Experiences with the conflict (if or how these experiences shaped their perception of the media and other parties in the conflict
4. People the participants identified as opinion leaders and their opinions about the role that opinion leaders played at different stages of the conflict.
5. Alternative information sources (if any).

Data Analysis

Transcription began after each interview was conducted. Atlas-ti computer-assisted qualitative data management and analysis software was used to organize the vast amount of information collected. The transcripts were uploaded to into the software and coded (See Appendix E for sample). Using the Straussian grounded theory methodology, data were coded at three levels: (i) open coding-to uncover concepts and categories; (ii) axial coding-to seek for relationship between the categories and (iii) selective coding-the process of identifying patterns, concepts, categories and dimensions and then linking them to develop a theory (Strauss & Corbin, 1990; Thompson, 2011).

Open Coding

After a full transcription of interviews, the documents were uploaded into Atlas-ti software. The first phase, open coding, was conducted to discover concepts through a careful reading of the data. The process began with a line-by-line, sentence-by-sentence reading of each interview transcript. When using open coding, “data are broken into discrete parts, closely examined and compared for similarities and differences” (Strauss et al., 1998, p.102).
The coding took an inductive approach. After a careful reading of each transcript, substantive, in-vivo and theoretical codes were assigned. Substantive codes are codes that emerge from words, ideas of behaviors of the respondents. Similarly, when the substantive code derived directly from the data, it is referred to as in vivo code (Oktay, 2012). For example, when one of the responded said “there was a lot of information sharing through interpersonal networks,” I coded the text “information sharing through interpersonal networks.” This code is both substantive and in vivo since it emerged directly from the data. Unlike substantive and through ‘in vivo coding’, a theoretical code comes from the researcher. For example, at the initial coding phase, a theoretical code “negative media perception” was identified. Rather than emerging directly from the data, a theoretical code was created by the researcher. This situation occurs because “due to the conceptual background of the researcher, he or she will see some statements or behaviors as illustrations of theoretical concepts” (Oktay, 2012, p.55). Through ‘memoing,’ particularly the use of diagrams, the researcher reflected on the code and different dimensions of the code “negative media perception” and how that was conceptualized by the study participants, substantive and theoretical codes were created and grouped (See Table 2 in next chapter for an example).

Codes therefore emerged from constant comparison of data and literature. This process of analysis sharpened the researcher’s theoretical sensitivity. It also helped the researcher to formulate new research questions and identify key informants through the process of theoretical sampling.
Another important part of open coding was the use of memos, which according to Strauss et al. (1998) are “the researcher’s record of analysis, thoughts, interpretation, questions and directions for further data collection” (pg.110). Throughout the reflexive process, the researcher recorded her thoughts about emerging codes and concepts, questions that still needed to be answered and potential data sources.

In the next phase of the open coding process, the researcher grouped the codes into categories or concepts. A concept is an “abstract representation of an event, object, or action/interaction that a researcher identifies as being significant in the data” (Strauss et al., 1998, p.103). After the concepts were created from the coding, the researcher identified dimensions and properties of each concept.

**Axial Coding**

After generating categories and concepts through open coding, the next phase of analysis was axial coding. Axial coding focuses on exploring further relationships between the concepts developed during open coding as a basis for theory construction (Goulding, 2002). To achieve this, the researcher adopted a conditional/consequential matrix paradigm model developed by Strauss & Corbin (1990) to examine the key concepts that emerged. The matrix helps in “building a systematic, logical, and integrated account” of the context and conditions in which a phenomenon occurs (Walker & Myrick, 2006). Using a guideline suggested by Strauss & Corbin (1998, p.191), the matrix was used by the researcher to:

1. Locate the area or scope of the research project (the phenomenon)
2. Extend the range of conditions and consequences considered by the researcher.
3. Making choices about which combination or conditional or consequential factors in the data that might be relevant to the particular situation.

4. Trace the intricate web of connection that might exist between contextual factors (structure) and actions/interactions (process).

5. Develop explanatory hypothesis about these relationships that can be verified or modified through further data collection and analysis.

6. Organize materials and present a more complete and persuasive explanatory account of the phenomenon under investigation.

Through this incursive process, which required continuous modification and refinement of the categories and theoretical statements, the researcher emerged with a substantive grounded theory. The theory explains the communication behavior of conflict audiences, thus expanding arguments proposed by the individual framing model.

Selective Coding

The last stage during the process after open and axial coding is the selective process, where researcher worked at integrating the data to generate a theory (Walker & Myrick, 2006). Using constant comparison, a core category/concept was identified.

Ethical Issues and Research Permission

Before conducting the study, the researcher obtained permission from the Institutional Review Board at Ohio University. As part of the process, an informed consent form was developed for the participants. From the researcher’s experiences with conducting research in Jos, most participants are suspicious of signing official documents. The divisive nature of the conflict increased suspicions among study
participants. To deal with this problem, the researcher read and explained content of the form and also gave participants the option for verbal consent.

Since the researcher was dealing with a sensitive topic like violence and armed conflict, it was anticipated that some participants may at some point provide intimate or sometimes, private information about their participation in violence. To protect their privacy and the confidentiality of the information, participants were informed they could choose not to answer questions they were not comfortable with. The researcher also informed them they could withdraw their participation at any point during the interviews or focus group discussions.

Establishing Credibility

Establishing credibility and trustworthiness is important in qualitative research. This was achieved through the triangulation of data collected from literature review, in-depth interviews and focus group discussions. Member-checking was conducted by summarizing what participants discussed and contacting some of them after sessions to clarify if what is presented is reflective of their opinions.

The researcher also used thick-rich descriptions of findings, as well as peer-debriefing. In using peer debriefing, the researcher contacted another doctoral student at Ohio University who was also familiar with the conflict in Plateau State, Nigeria. The student helped to review the research questions in order to ensure that it would make sense to the participants. The researcher also used peer-debriefing at the data analysis phase. After initial themes were identified, the researcher allowed the same doctoral student to review the document. The comments/observations raised helped the researcher
to refocus the data analysis process. This process is presented in the researcher’s reflexive statement presented in chapter 6.

Chapter Summary

The aim of this study was to investigate the communication behavior of audience members during periods of active conflict in Plateau State, Nigeria and the impact on the information dissemination process. The goal is to also propose a substantive grounded theory that advances current arguments about interaction between conflict audiences, media and conflict. Given the nature of the research problem and the use of literature, Straussian grounded theory was deemed to be the most appropriate method for data collection and analysis. The data collection process involved identifying a research site, choosing appropriate sampling methods (purposive and theoretical sampling), and identifying study participants. The process also involved conducting in-depth interviews and focus group discussions, and transcription of data. Atlas-ti qualitative data management and analysis software was used to manage and code the data. Data analysis was also conducted using the Straussian GT guideline, which included open, axial, and selective coding. Data analysis also involved development of categories/concept dimensions and the use of a conditional/consequential matrix to examine the phenomenon under study, its causes and consequences. The matrix also allowed the researcher to develop explanatory hypothesis as a basis for investigating relationships that could be verified and tested with new data to be collected as the research progresses. The chapter also discussed potential ethical issues and research permission and processes used by the researcher to establish the credibility of the study.
CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS

The purpose of the study was to expand on arguments of the individual framing model by developing a substantive theory that explains the communication behavior of the conflict audience in Plateau State, Nigeria. Straussian grounded theory methodology was used to analyze data from respondents with the goal to answer the following research question: What patterns of communication behavior do conflict audiences in Plateau State engage in and how does this behavior shape the information dissemination process?

Data were analyzed using open, axial and selective coding methods. Five broad categories and sub-categories were identified. The dimensions and properties of each of the five categories were analyzed and regrouped into two key concepts that describe the communication strategies adopted by some conflict audiences in Plateau State. The key concepts are: (i) self-preservation; (ii) ‘attack’, as defensive communication strategy.’ Further analyses of the concepts were conducted using a conditional/consequential matrix. This analysis led to the identification of a core category, ‘conflict audiences as “dissemiusers” of information’, which is the major finding of this study.

This chapter presents the systematic ways that data were coded and how the initial concepts/categories were created. The chapter also provides an in-depth examination of the two categories using the coding paradigm proposed by Strauss & Corbin (1990). The findings are supported by the use of verbatim quotes drawn from the interview and focus group discussions. The chapter also presents the “core category” that emerged from this study.
The chapter is divided into four sections: (i) coding; (ii) recoding and regrouping; (iii) developing concept/category dimensions; selective coding process/core category; (v) chapter summary. These are discussed below.

Coding

Apart from the primary research question, the coding process was also guided by the secondary research questions: what is the perception of conflict audiences about news media in Plateau State? To what extent do these perceptions shape audience interpretation? To what extent does individual framing have any consequence on the behavior of conflict audiences in Plateau State? To what extent does interpersonal interaction with the opinion leaders shape the communication behavior of conflict audiences?

The first step in the open process involved “line-by-line coding” of words or phrases that described the emotions or actions of the respondents (Oktay, 2012, p.56). Similarly, actions or words that reflect “symbolic interaction concepts”, such as the perception of participants about the media, other parties in the conflict, or even justifications of their actions, were coded. Interviews were read and the different types of codes (substantive, in vivo and theoretical) identified. A total of 157 codes were generated. It is important to state that generating such a vast number of codes led the analysis in different directions. Specifically, by having this many codes, the researcher was more descriptive rather than analytical. This was compounded by the fact that most of the codes generated at this stage were theoretical codes.
While theoretical codes could help the researcher identify theoretical perspectives they are bringing into the research, it can be problematic because “there is fear that the analyst will force his or her data into preexisting categories and hence, will not be able to see beyond the prevailing paradigms in his or her field” (Oktay, 2012, p.55). To address this problem, the researcher went through the codes, constantly comparing to ensure that the codes did not only stay close to the data, they also directly represented the views of the respondent. The next step in the open coding process was the grouping of the codes into concepts or categories. Through a process of constant comparison, codes found to be conceptually similar were organized into groups (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). See Table 2 below for examples of initial concepts.
### Table 2

**Example of Initial Coding**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Negative media</th>
<th>“I think at this point, the media influenced an escalation of violence”</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“I felt the media did not help maintain peace”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The media contributed in negative ways and the people responded”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“Yes, I am angry that some of the international media like BBC and Aljazeera were sponsored by Muslims to report lies and perpetuate falsehood and malice against Christians”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The media are influenced by the owners</td>
<td>“The media in Plateau State are influenced by the owners and that means they tend to report in a way to suit their owners”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The state government was seen as supporting and funding an agenda so information that came from the state media was no longer credible”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“When the local media who are owned by the state government cover the story, they do not tell the truth”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“Also because the media in the state is funded and owned by the state government, there are some people who chose not to listen to them”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family and Friends are opinion leaders</td>
<td>“My father was an opinion leader during the conflict”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“My mother who is a journalist was an opinion leader during the conflict”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“Families and friends became more credible sources”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>I mean during conflict, everybody is an opinion leader”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“Family members, we call and ask their opinions and we believe every information they gave us”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Recoding and Regrouping**

During axial coding, the researcher analyzed the codes and categories that emerged during open coding. After recoding and regrouping of the data, five broad categories and sub-categories emerged. To illustrate, the axial coding process, Table 3, below, presents a list of the categories and sub-categories identified from the interviews.
### Table 3

**Example of Axial Coding**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Sub-category</th>
<th>Codes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Perception of media bias</td>
<td>The media fueled the violence!</td>
<td>▪ “Media contributed to the negative ways people responded”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>▪ “The local media saw and reported issues from the angle of the indigenes”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>▪ “Instead of calming the situation, the local media sometimes fueled the violence”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of trust</td>
<td>When the media fail you, you turn to the people!</td>
<td>▪ “The local media tend to exclude some voices from their stories so it is one-sided most times”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>▪ “When the media fails you, you turn to the people you trust the most, people that will not fail you!”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal experiences with conflict</td>
<td>Everyone has a story to share!</td>
<td>▪ “I see it in movies. Lion of the Desert, Umar Muktar. But then, I see it happening before my eyes. I really have a different impression of Muslims”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>▪ “He used a less complimentary word. He said, they are liars, and they are Christians”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interpersonal interactions</td>
<td>During conflict, everybody is an opinion leader</td>
<td>▪ “Families and friends became more credible sources”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>▪ “I mean during conflict, everybody is an opinion leader”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Developing Concept/Category Dimensions**

After the five categories were identified, further analysis was conducted to examine their dimensions or properties. To illustrate the process of identifying properties and dimensions, consider one of the concepts, “lack of trust” in Table 3. In considering the concept, the researcher began by asking questions like “lack of trust for whom or what? What is the range of trust? Who among the participants are more likely or less
likely to express the lack of trust and why? Under what conditions might they trust or not trust? What are the consequences for trusting or not trusting?

The researcher also attempted to define the dimensions of the sub-category “when the media fail you, you turn to the people,” a phrase directly used by a participant to describe their lack of trust for the media and as well as actions they take to express such displeasure. The researcher asked questions about the context in which the participant described the media as failing them, reasons why they might perceive the media have failed them, and what the word ‘fails’ might mean within the context of the conflict in Plateau State. Similarly, who are the media ‘failing’ and who are the people they turn to? The same process was followed in identifying the other four categories and sub-categories.

The researcher also examined the relationships and interrelationships between the categories with a view to identifying the different communication strategies adopted by conflict audiences in Plateau State. For example, while the dimensions identified in each of the five categories explained how conflict audiences in Plateau State interacted with the media and each other, as well as factors that shaped the communication behavior, together the categories provide a framework for understanding how people communicated with each other. For example, “Lack of trust” for the media and other parties could explain why there is a perception of bias among some individuals. It could also explain why people turn to non-formal leaders rather than formal or even why they decide to (re)gain control of the information dissemination during conflict.
With the dimensions created, the researcher began to identify emerging theoretical concepts and news questions that needed to be answered. Participants were therefore purposively selected to gather more data, validate both the researcher’s conceptualization of the categories and emerging theory through a process of theoretical sampling. The researcher decided to further examine two out of the five categories: “perception of bias” and “audience control of information” due to the explanatory power of the categories in explaining what was happening in the data.

For example, the category “audience control of information” suggested a form of communication behavior being expressed by some audience members while the “perception of bias” might explain the conditions under which that behavior may occur. Similarly, an analysis of the categories showed that audience bias toward the media may have been shaped by factors such as their underlying schema, lack of trust for media, lack of professional journalism practice. Similarly, from the data collected and analyzed, a pattern began to emerge, which showed that individuals or groups in the conflict were responding to information gaps caused by the perceived inability of the media in Plateau State to perform their duties.

In order to examine the two categories, four key informants were identified and interviewed (See Appendix B for interview questions). The list included two journalists and two media managers (two each from the state-government owned media organization and a private media organization in Plateau State.
After the new data were collected and analyzed, the categories were further merged into two key concepts that describe how conflict audiences in Plateau State interacted with the media and with each other. To identify these concepts, the researcher asked the question “what is this study about?” This was a question the researcher returned to over and over again throughout the coding and data analysis question. To answer the question, the researcher examined the concepts, specifically looking for units, relationships that best explain what the study is about. For this study, the focus is on identifying the communication behaviors of conflict audiences in Plateau State and the impact on the information dissemination process. By examining the relationships between the categories and identifying the behavior of people in relation to each of the categories, the researcher emerged with two concepts: “self-preservation” and “attack as defensive communication strategy.” The two concepts represent different communication strategies utilized by some conflict audiences in Plateau State to frame and disseminate information. A conditional/consequential matrix was then adopted to contextualize the two concepts. This involved a systematic analysis of the conditions and consequences of each category (Strauss, 1987). The model allowed the researcher to examine what is going on in the data as a framework for the development of the emergent theory.

Textual Analysis

As part of analysis of the “self-preservation” and “attack as defensive communication” concepts, the researcher analyzed selected videos and mini-documentaries produced and disseminated by conflict audiences in the State. The analyses, which are included in the findings, allowed for an understanding of how
conflict audiences framed their narratives of the Plateau State conflict. An in-depth analysis of the two categories or concepts is presented below.

Categories/Concepts

In this section, the researcher presents an in-depth analysis of the conditions and consequences of the two concepts “self-preservation” and “attack as defensive communication strategy.” Direct quotations of study participants are included to provide a thick-rich description of each category. As explained in Chapter 3, participants are given pseudonyms. Using an endorsement chart adopted by Rhodes, Hill, Thompson & Elliot (1994), the researcher used words like “most,” “many,” “majority” to indicate that an opinion is expressed by more than 20 participants. Similarly, phrases like “some”; “few”, “a number” was used to indicate that less the 20 participants expressed the same opinion about an issue.

Additionally, Tables 4 and 5 provide an outline of the conditions and consequences of the three categories. The tables contain the causal and intervening conditions of each behavior, actions/interaction of conflict audiences in response to these conditions, the consequences of each behavior and theoretical questioned posed by the researcher.

Category One: “Self-Preservation”

Vignette: Muslim friends who wanted us dead. People who we felt were family and friends we helped, those wanted the house burned down. At that time, I hated Muslims and never wanted to have anything to do with them….when you get pushed to the wall, you respond. People are provoked and when Christianity tells you to turn the other cheek, you will continue to turn until eventually they break your jaws. What do you do, you retaliate. You are afraid of a masquerade and you run, when there is nowhere else to run to, you will eventually remove the mask of the masquerade. Basically, it was protection mode, preservation, self-preservation
actually. Send our message across, find ways of ensuring we stay alive. (Nankyer, Interview, November 22, 2013).

Self-preservation is defined by the International Encyclopedia of Psychoanalysis (2005) as a set of behaviors through which individuals attempt to preserve their existence. This definition associates self-preservation as a biological behavior. However, the phrase is used in this study as a concept that describes a communication strategy used by some participants in their information sourcing and sharing behavior during periods of conflict in Plateau State. In order to examine the concept of self-preservation as a communication strategy, the researcher posed four theoretical questions: why do some conflict audiences have a need for self-preservation? How is self-preservation expressed? What category of conflict audience is more likely to express this kind of behavior? To what extent does this approach impact of the information dissemination process? These questions also serve as framework for understanding the causal/intervening conditions and consequences for using this approach. The conditional/consequences for self-preservation is presented in Table 4 and discussed in detail below.
### Table 4

**Self-Preservation**

<p>| | |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
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</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Causal conditions</strong></td>
<td>Lack of trust media and formal opinion leaders, past experiences of people personal loss/injury, media ownership</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Intervening conditions</strong></td>
<td>Underlying schema, perception that conflict is a “religious conflict,” access to mobile telecommunication technology and social media.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Action/interaction</strong></td>
<td>Individuals searching for safe people to trust (families/friends as opinion leaders)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Consequences</strong></td>
<td>Fear of identity being threatened, identity frames strongly influenced, polarization, stereotyping, forming enemy images, victimhood</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Theoretical Questions/what is going on here?</strong></td>
<td>Why do these conflict audiences feel the need to for self-preservation? How is this behavior expressed? What category of conflict audience is more likely to express this kind of behavior? To what extent does this behavior impact of the information dissemination process?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Self: Preservation: Causal/Intervening Conditions**

Most participants who displayed or reported this behavior have a general perception that the underlying cause of the conflict in Plateau State is religion. These views towards the arguments of religion and conflict theory proponents who suggest most contemporary conflicts feature religious fundamentalist groups that fight to preserve their identities against attacks (real or imagined) by non-believers (Hynes, 2009). Most of these participants argued that the recurrent crisis in Plateau State is fueled by the agenda of the Hausa Fulani to impose Islam on the State, while a few of them point to the indigene (mostly Christian) population as the aggressors:

A participant, who identified himself as Christian, recalled seeing some Muslims killing some Christians during the 2010 crises in the Plateau State. He said:
The house before ours was set on fire. It was burning, and by the time I tried to go outside, there were people screaming “Allahu Akbar” outside my door so I couldn’t go out. There were firing guns, bringing down the electric poles, and they were heading towards our home. (Focus Group Discussion, January 6, 2014).

Another participant, who lived at a different location in Jos, said on the same day, she watched helplessly as her family home was set on fire by some Muslims who she described as her former friends:

When I attempted to run out of the house, I heard one of them say, “kawo mana petrol, gidan Nan ya ki ya kone” (bring us some petrol, this house is refusing to burn down). Eventually, my father opened the door and started begging them. I didn’t know how we survived. (Focus Group Discussion, January 13, 2014).

In both situations, these two participants experienced the conflict first hand and for them, the issues are clear, what has come to be known as the “Jos crises,” is a religious conflict. Seul (1999) argued that, while religion is not necessarily the cause of religious conflicts, thinking of the problem through this lens, provides the “the most secure basis for maintenance of a positively regarded social identity, and it frequently supplies the fault line along which intergroup identity and resource competition occurs” (p.564).

Heightened intergroup identity and resource competition foster intractability of conflict, groups are therefore driven towards self-preservation. The fact that some of the participants regarded the conflict as an attempt to “Islamize” Plateau State enhances the possibility that the self-preservation behavior “may be emboldened by a sense of a religiously defined identity and purpose” (Seul, 1999, p.564). The importance of this argument is that individuals or groups that strive for self-preservation will use resources
at their disposal to protect their interests if they feel it is being threatened in any way.

Nankyer, one of the participants summarized the argument in the following way:

The first crisis in Jos, 2001, started in a mosque on a flimsy excuse of someone passing by the mosque when Muslims were praying. Now she was a Christian who did not know the rules of one not passing when they were praying. It was just a matter of correcting her and letting her know it was wrong for her to pass by the mosque when they are praying. That is all….but it started, that little thing led to a fight and before you knew it, weapons started coming out from the mosque, which means that was an arranged reaction! What do we do? Regroup and gather all we have to protect ourselves. We have to survive! (Interview, November 22, 2013).

Lack of Trust

Tied closely to the idea of religion, another causal condition for self-preservation is lack of trust for media, formal opinion leaders, and past experiences of the participants. In response to a question on why there is lack of trust for the media, some participants questioned the agendas of some local, national and international media organizations they perceived as being biased against their groups or positions in the conflict.

The lack of trust stems from the personal beliefs of people, as well as the tendency to associate some media organizations with certain religious agendas. Most of the people interviewed in this study had either negative or positive things to say about some media organizations, depending on their religious beliefs. For example, while most Muslim participants associated the state government owned media with an “indigene-Christian” agenda, non-Muslim participants identified international media organizations like Aljazeera with a clear Islamic agenda. Nankyer, one of the participants said:

There is a saying that nobody knows where the show pinches. You know what is happening; I know what is happening in Jos. We see them attack us first and because they have the money and access to the media, they go and change their stories and tell the world that the Christians are killing Muslims and committing
genocide. I am angry that some of the international media like BBC and Aljazeera were sponsored by the Muslims to report lies and perpetuate falsehood and malice against Christians. (Interview, November 22, 2013).

Mohammed, a journalist, recalled a conversation he had with another Muslim about the state government-owned media in Plateau State:

Let me tell you, I was speaking to one of the people and I was saying, why can’t you why don’t you want to. Because he was telling me all these newspapers and radio organizations, especially the state-government media in the state are liars. And I asked him; why do you say so and he tells me…they are all Christians. Actually, he used a less complementary word and I am sure you know what I am talking about. He said, they are liars and they are Christians. (Interview, April 5, 2014).

In another instance, the lack of trust for the news media is perceived to have been influenced by the stereotypes people have about some religious groups; stereotypes that are being reinforced by the media. When asked if they trust people of other religious, Daniel, who self-identified as a Christian said:

I think part of their religion allows shedding of blood. I saw this in the movies when I was young eh…what do you call it? Lion of the Desert, Umar Muktar! But then I saw it happening before my eyes, it is… (Pause) I really have a different impression of Muslims. (Daniel, Focus Group Discussion, January 13, 2014).

For Ado, a member of the Muslim-Hausa community in Jos, the lack of trust for members of the Christian community stem from his experiences with the conflict:

They always claim their religion is peace and ours is about violence. But I watched a lot of movies about the Christians, about the wars. In fact, there are books that talk about the history of war among them. Also, I survived the conflict. We were ambushed around Riyom and made to recite bible verses in order to be spared. I witnessed their violence first hand! (Ado, Focus Group Discussion, January 13, 2014).
Underlying Schema

While these participants have similar views about the media, as more interviews were conducted, it became glaring that most of the perceptions were shaped to an extent by past experiences of some participants, particularly personal loss or injury they may have incurred during the conflict. These experiences and beliefs influenced the production of individual frames or schemas, shaped the way some participants made sense of the media and other groups in the conflict (Elliott, Kaufman, Gardner & Burgess, 2002; Kaufman, Elliot & Shumeli, 2013).

Makan, who described herself as an “indigene” and Christian said she felt betrayed by former friends and neighbors who, rather than help protect her and members of her family, turned out to be the aggressors. Showing signs of visible anger during the interview, Makan described the 2010 crises in Plateau State and her close encounter with death as one of the worst experiences of her life. And even though she claimed to have forgiven those who hurt her, the experience has no doubt shaped how she currently interacts with people around her:

Whenever I remember what happened, I call myself lucky but I never want to experience that ever again. I don’t pray that anyone experience that again. I have learned to let go and forgive but, I was angry, I am still angry. I feel no need to want and seek for peace since people around me do not want peace. I do not want to be vulnerable any longer. I need to protect myself. (Interview, February 6, 2014).

Makan’s views and similar ones made by a number of participants underscore the role of individual frames in shaping the perception of individuals about the media or other parties in the conflict. Another reason is their religious beliefs.
Lack of Trust for Opinion Leaders

Apart from the media and other groups in the conflict, there was also an obvious lack of trust for formal opinion leaders. These include religious, ethnic, political, and community leaders in the state. When responding to questions about the role that opinion leaders in Plateau State played during the conflict, the emotions of a lot of focus group discussants, particularly during the mixed group session comprising of Muslims and non-Muslims ranged from support to anger and disappointment. For a few participants, some religious leaders preached peace and encouraged their followers to remain law abiding. One participant said: “our pastor banned people from talking about the crises. He told people to allow the military to take care of it. If you kill someone in the name of God, you will go to hell.” Another participant said members of the clergy helped “calm nerves” and because they commanded the respect of their followers, “people listened to them.”

For other participants, the feeling was not mutual. During an exchange with another participant, Dung, a university student retorted:

The clergy did not do enough. Sometimes they were biased. We hear that. I didn’t want to pin point it but during crisis, you will hear prayer from the mosque at odd hours. Sorry, I just have to say it but I think. I am not saying all eggs are bad but what leader will allow this happen? And we hear in some places, the pastor gave people guns and other arms. (Focus Group Discussion, January 6, 2014).

Although the conflict began in 2001 as a misunderstanding between the “indigene” and “settler” communities of a political appointment, the perception has since changed, with the majority of the participants, like most people in the state, describing it
as a religious conflict. Some participants put the blame on the doorstep of some religious leaders in Plateau State. According to Ruth, a focus group discussant:

In the first instance, the crisis had no business taking on a religious slant. It was not a religious crisis but unfortunately because of the configuration of the peoples involved, it took a religious coloration and unfortunately, being on that platform, religious leaders were likely to take sides. Their first instincts would be to defend their faith and members of their faiths. (Ruth, Focus Group Discussion, January 13, 2013).

Abraham and Joseph, two focus group discussants argued that some elite opinion leaders in the state were guilty of inciting violence:

We have religious leaders who were supposed to be opinion leaders but they said something on television because they wanted to be seen as saying something to pacify their people but when they get back, they incite. (Abraham, Focus Group Discussion, January 13, 2014).

As for politicians, I am sorry; they all disappointed me because politicians I think in most cases were looking to score cheap points. Rather than douse the tension and reduce the level of violence, the politicians urged the people to commit violence. (Joseph, Focus Group Discussion, January 13, 2014).

Some of the participants also claimed some politicians, government officials and community leaders instigated and sponsored violence in the state. One participant alleged that he knew some politicians who provided funds and military uniforms to hired thugs to perpetuate violence within a particular community in the state.

It was interesting to see that, while most self-preservation proponents expressed disappointment with the role that some religious, political and community leaders played during the conflict, a few of the participants justified what they identified as the “negative” roles of some religious leaders in the conflict. For example, three people who identified with a particular faith-based community who deliberately apply media strategies to “preserve” their communities argued that religious leaders were first “human
beings like other people” before they were saddled with leadership responsibilities.

Johanna, another participant said:

I think the clergy rely on their past experiences. Maybe they lost family due to crisis. They instigate violence by sending youths to avenge such deaths. The second justified it even further by saying “The leaders are human. People go through experiences” while the third person was even more blunt when she said: “for me, the leaders promoted peace. The idea of peace should be redefined. In a war peace can be attained through killing! (Focus Group Discussion, January 13, 2014).

In spite of the defense put up by these participants, a number of the participants said opinion leaders in the state were part of the problem rather than the solution.

*We are all Opinion Leaders!*

With seeming lack of trust for the media and growing suspicions among conflict audiences about formal opinion leaders, some participants turned to their network of friends and family members for information. Most of the participants reported relying on their peers as important sources of information and by implication, key sources of influence. Social network studies recognize ties between family and friends as critical relationships through which social capital, such as information, emotional and social support is exchanged (Bozo, Toksabay, & Kurum, 2009). These friends and family members therefore became the “opinion leaders” who were trusted even more than the media. According to Johanna:

Family and friends became more credible sources and the personal discussions we had with them gave us diverse insights into what was really happening. The point is that we were able to get and have access to different perspectives and opinions that helped us to make up our minds as to the way to respond to the media and the conflict in general. (Focus Group Discussion, January 13, 2014).
It is noteworthy that, while older people (ages 30 and above) turned to their peers for information during the conflict, younger participants, particularly some University students who participated in the focus group discussions identified their parents as the opinion leaders who provided guidance during the conflict. For example, one participant said: “parents were also opinion leaders because they told us children, what to do, where to go to and how to avoid trouble.” Another participant said her mother, who is also a journalist, was an opinion leader during the conflict: “I listen to her, I respect her and I know that the information she shared is factual.” A third participant claimed that his father was played a critical role during the conflict:

For me, my father was the opinion leader. During the 2001 crisis, both Muslims and Christians looked up to him...when we felt scared, he took us as a family to somewhere safe and still came back to that community. He had the option of leaving but he returned because the people needed him... He felt he had a responsibility and he lived up to it. (Isa, Focus Group Discussion, January 6, 2014).

Apart from friends and family members, some participants took up leadership roles during the conflict. They stepped in to provide support and direction where and when people in their communities needed such. Most of these people are not only educated, they claimed to have more access to information and other media sources than other people in their communities or immediate environment. People in this group included journalists, civil servants, teachers and public administrators. James for example, is a civil servant in Jos. When asked to identify people he considered opinion leaders during the conflict, he said: “I see myself as an opinion leader because being exposed, being educated more than the average population.”
Another participant, Mohammed, a journalist said this: “I can say I was an opinion leader to an extent, because people also sought for advice from me. They listened. I sampled opinions from different sources and I would then tell them the truth of what was happening.” Perhaps, no one captured this argument most succinctly than Mary, one of the civil servants I interviewed, who argued that existing lack of trust for mainstream media and allegations that formal opinion leaders instigated violence in the state, empowered individuals to assume leadership roles. She explained that fear and lack of trust that permeated the environment created a gap that allowed individuals to shape public opinion, sometimes at the expense of peace in the state:

We were all opinion leaders in our own right. I mean during conflict, everybody was an opinion leader oh. We all listened to the news, shared the information and those less educated than us tend to most times react based on what we say, sometimes, that led to a lot of violence. (Interview, April 9, 2014).

Agnes, another research participant, agreed with her. She argued that the conflict allowed people in her community to connect more and build stronger with each other. Apart from that, the constant need and demand for information meant that members of the audience, particularly educated people had the opportunity to step in and help fill the gap by providing information and serving as opinion leaders within their close network. She said:

The opinion leadership thing...em (scratches her head) it is complicated in a sense but sometimes I think the relationship between opinion leaders is distinct. I turn to you, you turn to me and in a sense, and we make our selves richer in information. What I know I share and vice versa and that way we are able to use that for credibility checks if you want to say that! (Interview, February 8, 2014).
Some media editors and journalists, employed by some faith based organizations in Plateau State, identified religion as the underlying cause of the conflict and therefore reported using self-preservation tactics as a deliberate communication approach. For them, self-preservation means protecting the religious identity of their community through reconciliation and finding common ground with the “enemy.” It also means being open to opposing views and working together gather to stop violence and promote peace in the state. Although some of these participants categorized media organizations that are sympathetic to their position in the conflict as “objective” and those opposed to their views as “biased,” they reported being receptive and accommodating to other points of view.

Michael, one of the participants, who works as managing editor for a popular faith based magazine in Plateau State argued that, while their organization was objective in its reporting of the conflict, the magazine focused more on promoting the opinions of members of their community. He explained that the organization was driven by the need to preserve identify and beliefs of their members, as well as the protection of lives. In order to achieve that, they developed a media strategy that involved identifying the “aggressor,” and highlighting members of their community as the “victims.” The strategy also focused on the magazine becoming an advocate for peace by preaching forgiveness and reconciliation and at the same time, becoming advocates for the “aggressors.” Michael explained it in the following way:

We try to expose the aggressors because first and foremost, that is where the problem lies. You expose the aggressors and also try to look at grievances of the
aggressors and also how these can be addressed so that it does not become part of the problem. (Interview, April 21, 2014).

Another journalist who works with the same media organization said, even though the organization’s media strategy was to ensure the protection of lives and property, particularly of members of their community, the group was open to dialogue and negotiations with the “aggressors:”

We had situations where the aggressors reached out to us to complain about the style of our writing and editorials. We have also tried to reach out to them to give us their own side of the story if they feel we did not present it well. We share their views and what we feel is the situation. (Thomas, Interview, January 28, 2014).

The strategy, according to him, changed the narrative and type of information disseminated by the mainstream media and other groups in the conflict. For this category of conflict audiences, self-preservation meant preaching peace and reconciliation. To achieve that, people relied on their cell phones and social media to disseminate content that promote their position in the conflict. Some of the participants said they produced or shared content that presented non-Muslims in Plateau State as the targets of a hidden “jihad” agenda.

For this study, several videos purportedly produced by some participants were analyzed by the researcher. Some of the videos are titled, “The Killings in Jos,” “Jos Crises, 2010,” and “The Jos Crises.” One of the most popular and most shared documentaries on You Tube and mobile phone apps is “Plateau: The Final Frontier” (screen shot of video in Figure 2 below).

An analysis of the 5 part documentary shared on You Tube shows that the dominant narrative of religious war was promoted by, mostly, the Christian population in
Plateau State (see Figure 2). The documentary traces the history of Plateau State formerly touted as “the home of peace and tourism.” It begins with a display of pictures of the diverse culture and tourism in the state and then discusses the conflict, which was caused by a “systemic, intelligent and organized movement enshrined in belief.” The documentary contains several interviews with Christian victims and individuals whose family members were killed during the conflict. Videos of churches razed by fire and interviews with wives of Pastors who were allegedly killed by Muslims were used to reinforce the argument about religious war in the State. The documentary links the situation in Plateau State to a global agenda and Islamic agenda of “immigration, abrogation, jihad and deception.” The narrative in the documentary links this agenda to the crises in Plateau State:

Plateau is strategic because of its potential and its ability to reflect the diversities that exists in Nigeria….with growing political strength and influence, the radical strain of Islam is being established in the country in pandemic proportions. The seeds have been sown….the incessant crisis on the Plateau is clearly fueled by this agenda! Start from Jos North…then take Plateau, which is clearly a Christian state, and the Middle Belt is taken. Take the Middle Belt and Nigeria is fully on the path to being radicalized. This is why taking Plateau State marks an iconic victory in Nigeria. Hence the need to overcome at whatever cost, Plateau as the final frontier! (Documentary, January, 2010).

The idea that Plateau State is the final frontier in a broader agenda to Islamize Nigeria can explain why some members of the Christian community see the need to preserve the Christian faith and members of the community. A participant explained that the goal was to sensitize Christians in the country about the underlying “Islamic agenda of domination.” It was geared towards mobilizing members of the community to preserve their religion from the “enemies.” For Michael, a journalist, the videos and
documentaries were widely disseminated on YouTube, Facebook and Twitter and other apps like WhatsApp and Blackberry Chats, were disseminated in a deliberate attempt to bring the warring groups to the negotiating table:

One of the things was the utter disregard for the sanctity of human lives so we continued to call on leaders of the groups to rise to the occasion and call their people to order. Like the issue of Boko Haram insurgency was all part of it. Nigerians were not known as people as killers. It starts gradually and we also preached about in our messages. (April 22, 2014).

Figure 2 Screen Shot of “Plateau: The Final Frontier” on YouTube.

Consequences of “Self-Preservation” Communication Strategy

Self-preservation is driven by fear among some participants who view their religious identify as being threatened. As a result, stereotyping, forming enemy images and victimhood are some of the actions/interactions expressed by participants who chose to apply this communication approach.
During the interviews, some participants, particularly journalists and editors who worked used words like “victims” to describe members of their community and “aggressors” or “enemies” to categorize other groups in the conflict. In their various statements, the phrase “aggressors” is strongly juxtaposed by the use of the word “victims.” By categorizing themselves as victims, these participants are attempting to alienate other groups in the conflict in order to justify the need for self-preservation. Similarly, by labelling other groups in the conflict as “aggressors,” they paint enemy images and thus advocate the importance of self-preservation as a necessary action taken to protect members of their community from their “enemies.” One of the participants said: “God has taught us to love and forgive our ‘enemies.’ Even though we are unhappy with what they have done to us as a people, we have been enjoined to love them and that is what we have been trying to do.”

The researcher also found that identity frames also shaped the behavior of individuals and/or groups during the conflict. Most people who displayed self-preservation behavior either knowingly or unknowingly reacted when they felt that their identity, particularly religious identity was being threatened during conflict. Their behavior was therefore geared towards reinforcing their loyalties to their different associations (Gardner, 2003). The nature of the conflict in Plateau State affected to a large extent by “Christian/Muslim” dichotomy made it more likely that group identities were enhanced.

Since this set of conflict audiences basically relied on personal interactions with people in their social networks, the focus was more on “word of mouth” communication
more than any other communication channel. According to two participants, “there was the word of mouth communication; we got information there” and “we are grateful because people became news reporters. People had the power to say what they wanted and we listened”

The implication is that the rumor mill became more active in Jos during the conflict. One participant said word of mouth communication increased the level of violence because: “Out of mischief, some people send wrong information about killings and then there are reprisal attacks, what of you and then we are left with violence.” Some participants supported this argument. One of the older civil servants interviewed for the study said even though interactions through word of mouth was useful as it allowed people to warn each other of impending danger, people that had personal grievances against other individuals or groups exploited the situation: “you find people telling lies and if they feel aggrieved for whatever reason, they exaggerate stories against the other side….people agitated others with the information they sent across and when people are angry, they tend to react, sometimes with violence!”

Some participants said rather than helping to maintain peace in the state, the availability of cell phones and social media increased the level of mistrust among the residents of Jos city. Ayuba, one of the participants said some of the texts being circulated to warn people in some communities about impending attacks carried unverifiable information. He said most of the texts sent by some alarmist increased the fear in people in some communities. He noted:

While the goal was to protect the people, the situation turned the opposite. Sometimes, a thief might be caught in the market and some people are either
trying to beat him up or hand him over to the police, some would just shout or even text, “it has started’ then people will start running away. As they are running, they will be telling people they meet along the way that it “has started.” Before you know it, young males in an area, will mount roadblocks and start killing and most times, this is how violence escalates and spreads. (Focus Group Discussion, January 13, 2014).

Category Two: “Attack” As Defensive Communication Strategy

Vignette: Even some of the music that was played on radio was the kind that was encouraging violence. I remember distinctly during one of those days of the crisis that I happened to have been trapped in when I was in Jos and playing on Plateau Radio Television Corporation PRTV was the song, “Onward Christian Solders” and I thought wow, come on. I tried to get the General Manager to speak with him on that day but I couldn’t get him… I wanted to tell him come on; you guys cannot be playing something like this at a time like this. It should be something that would calm the nerves and persuade people to sheathe their swords’ but that was something that happened! I mean, come on, we had to get into a new mode, we had to defend ourselves. I felt the need to defend myself. The Muslims had to find a way of defending themselves. We therefore changed tactics in the way we communicated with each other as well as the type of information we presented. (Mohammed, Interview, April 24, 2014).

Gibb (1961) defined defensive behavior as that “behavior which occurs when an individual perceives threat or anticipates threat in the group” (p.141). A person who displays this kind of behavior puts on a defensive posture and devotes most of his/her energy to defending themselves, especially if they feel threatened by the actions of other people. A defensive person often “thinks about how he appears to others, how he may be seen more favorably, how he may win, dominate, impress, or escape punishment, and/or how he may avoid or mitigate a perceived or an anticipated attack” (Gibb, 1961, p.141). Attack as a defensive form of communication strategy is displayed by individuals or groups when they felt threatened during the conflict in Plateau State. Conflict audiences who displayed this form of behavior said they produced and shared information that
defined their position about the conflict. They also used media content to “attack’ individuals and groups they perceived as threatening that position.

The goal of the communication strategy was to mobilize members of the community through extensive dissemination of content. The content was distributed through videos, short films, documentaries and text messages that sometimes “disparaged” other groups in the conflict. Four theoretical questions posed by the researcher provided a framework for understanding this kind of behavior. The questions include: In what situation do conflict audiences feel the need to defend themselves? And who are they defending themselves against? Others are: in what way(s) do they defend themselves? How does this form of behavior shape the information dissemination process? Table 5 below presents a breakdown of the conditional/consequential matrix for attack as defensive communication strategy.

Table 5

*Attacks as Defensive Communication Strategy*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Causal conditions</th>
<th>Perception of media bias, lack of trust for media and other parties in the conflict, Prior experiences, fear, feeling unprotected</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Intervening conditions</td>
<td>Perception of political marginalization (“indigene/settler” question), access to Internet, social media and cell phone technology</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Action/interaction</td>
<td>Relying more on formal opinion leaders</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Consequences</td>
<td>Fighting back, attacking other parties in the conflict, sending out sometimes “unreliable information”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Theoretical Questions/what is going on here?</td>
<td>In what situation do conflict audiences feel the need to defend themselves? Who are they defending themselves against? In what way(s) do they defend themselves? How does this form of behavior shape the information dissemination process?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
**Attack as Defensive Communication Strategy: Causal/Intervening Conditions**

Individuals and groups who reported framing and disseminating messages that “attack” other groups in the conflict explained that the approach is defensive strategy aimed at protecting their interests and members of their community. Several participants said the need to defense was instigated what they perceived as deliberate government policy geared towards marginalizing and discriminating against members of a particular ethno-social group. Two participants, Kande and Abdullahi explained that the indigene/settler question in Plateau State remains the most critical issue in the conflict.

According to Abdullahi:

> As a people, we have had a history of living together in peace in Jos. But I think one tribe feels they have been segregated. This is what they have been nurturing in their minds for long. One groups claim they own the land but even though the other group has contributed to the economy for long, they have been relegated. (Abdullahi, Interview, February 8, 2014).

Kande’s comments complimented the views presented by Abdullahi. She believes the indigene/settler policy threatens the unity of the country:

> It is sad that after over 50 years together, today we say in this state, we have “settlers” and we have “indigenes.” Today, the settlers are denied their basic rights as citizens of Nigeria. This has affected the settler community in terms of education, economy, and politics, etc. This dichotomy has divided the people and for those who feel marginalized, survival instincts kick in. If no one fights for them, they have to fight for themselves. (Kande, Interview, February 8, 2014).

Another participant, Umar Farouk, observed that, while the conflict in Plateau State is fueled by the scramble for scarce economic resources, the situation was compounded by polarizing and discriminate government policies that have segregated a particular community in the state. He accused the state government for implementing policies that have further divided the “settler” and “indigene” communities in the state.
Umar Farouk also argued that the policies have had negative consequences on the conflict:

We expect a responsible government to be fair and just in terms of administration and distribution of social amenities. But if a government shows that it is biased, it situation creates tension and distrust among the general public. Government has a hidden agenda, they have introduced policies that have further alienated some people and fueled crises. (Interview, February 12, 2014).

The Media are Biased!

The participants also identified other causal conditions as personal loss and injury people incurred during the conflict and a sense of hopelessness and feeling that members of their community are not being protected. The sense of loss impacted greatly not only on how these participants viewed other parties in the conflict but also the media, which the accused of promoting the agenda of the state government. For instance, there is a general perception among the participants that stories presented by the state government-owned media have been biased against one of the groups in the conflict. The media, which is owned and funded by the Plateau State government, is perceived by some members of the Jasawa community as promoting the ethnic and political agenda of the state governor. In response to a question posed about the media in Plateau State, some participants made statements like: “since the government owns and funds the media, some chose not to listen to them,” “information that came from state media was no longer credible until you investigate other sources,” “for the state media, I think government does not want them to report the exact thing that happened,” “The thing is who owns the
media matters a lot whether TV, radio or newspapers. The owners determine what happens in the most cases.”

To drive home this point, Shamsudeen, a principal of a privately owned secondary school in the state, told the researcher about an incident that happened in September 2013 when some people launched a rocket attack on the school. Although no one was arrested over the incident, Shamsudeen blamed the state government-owned media for not only instigating the attack on the school but also for “victimizing” members of the Muslim-Hausa community:

Actually, I think I would say there is already an agenda in the media against us. Our school was attacked. A rocket was thrown at us and we were lucky no student was hurt. The media came and reported. We were surprised rather than say what happened, they seemed to support the attack when they said we were attacked because we used a curriculum that is Islamic and also that we have an element of us that is Boko Haram. All these against us, we were physically attacked and then again victimized by the media that should be our voice. (Interview January 15, 2014).

Sani, another student of the Plateau State Polytechnic, supported this view. He specifically accused the state government-owned media for being “reckless” in its reporting of the conflict and also for inciting violence against members of their community:

The…the…people in the crisis themselves, I mean members of our community, if they sat down and listen to the news; it did not allow them to recognize themselves in the crisis. A lot of people were surprised at the information coming from the media about the crisis at that time. But I don’t think it was only in terms of news reportage. I think it was also in terms of programing. Programing also took on a form of bias, particularly the state government-owned media. It took on a certain ambiance of support for one side or group in the crisis. Like this, you other side, you are the enemy, you are the em, trouble makers, so we are on the side of people who are on the right side. (Interview, December 21, 2013).
We Turned to Our Community and Political Leaders!

Like the self-preservation group, this category of conflict audiences who expressed a lack of trust for both media. However, unlike the first group who did not also trust formal opinion leaders, some participants in this group explained that they trusted their religious, community and traditional leaders. They also relied on them for information and guidance during the conflict. Participants said interpersonal interaction with these existing hierarchal communication structures united members of their communities against what they viewed as attacks by both the media and other groups in the conflict. For example, in the Jasawa community, whose members are predominantly Muslim, religious and community leaders are respected for “maintaining order as a result of their formal positions of authority” (Goldberg, 2014, p.19). Ahmed, Sani and Amina, three members of the Jasawa community interviewed viewed these roles as positive and rewarding for the community. According to Ahmed:

Religious leaders were good in calming the people. Like the Sultan, he called our people and told them the crisis was not good, they shouldn’t fight but be their brother’s keepers. (Ahmed, Focus Group Discussion, January 10, 2014).

Sani argued that people in the Hausa-Muslim community trusted opinion leaders more because there was a general perception that the media, particularly the state-owned media was biased. Amina, another interview respondent agreed with him. She said:

Our Mai Angwa (community leader) was good. He gave us good leadership and told us what to do and we listened. Like religious leaders, these people had great influence on the people. (Amina, Focus Group Discussion, January 10, 2014).

Apart from opinion leaders, participants reported applying the “attack” as a defense strategy behavior produced and distributed their own media information. One
participant, Shehu, said the group took the decision to produce videos, short documentaries and jingles as part of a strategy to voice their opinions, which they felt were being silenced by the media in Plateau State:

Actually, in some cases the media did not help the situation. The BBC international who broadcast their news in Hausa language, they see it from the angle of the Hausa people, you understand. Whereas, the local or state-government media, they see it from the angle of the indigenes. And since we stay in Jos, we live in the middle of the problem, we feel attacked constantly by the local media. They protect the indigenes and attack us the non-indigenes. In a situation like that, we learn to create our own media, to attack back. If you do not attack back, they take advantage of you. They will think you are weak. (Bukar, Interview, January 13, 2014).

Action/Interaction: Communication Approach

Like self-preservation proponents, access to cell phones, Internet and social media empowered them to control the flow of information. Members of the Hausa-Fulani ‘settlers’ responded to the ‘marginalization’ and ‘discrimination’ against their communities by producing and disseminating videos that ‘attacked’ the indigene/settler policy of the State government. Some members of the community said “attacking” the other party in the conflict is an intentional way of responding to what they perceived as the negative propaganda of the state government, the media against the Hausa-Fulani community in the state. Shehu, a student, said the information disseminated by members of his community was framed in a way to send a strong message to other groups in the conflict about their commitment to defend themselves:

We created our videos, short documentary clips showing our losses in lives and property. We tell our people how much we have lost. We distributed that by phones. We sent the clips to our people. We sensitized them and the truth is yes, the goal is to mobilize the people to defend our positions, to protect ourselves we must attack. After all, they say attack is the best form of defense. We attack to
defend. We have information and power that it gives us and we use the power of information to defend and attack. (Interview, January 13, 2014).

The videos were disseminated through Facebook, YouTube, and cell phones (Bluetooth) and apps like WhatsApp and BlackBerry Messenger. The researcher observed that, while several videos and pictures were disseminated by the group, one mini-documentary, which seemed to have been shared the most, is titled “Jos Muslim Ummah: A Fact File on the Jos North Post-Election Violence (see Figures 3 & 4 below).

The video, which is in sharp contrast from the one produced by the Christian ‘settler’ community, declared that the violence in Plateau State is “government backed genocide against the Muslim Hausa-Fulani community. In the video, the producers argued that the 2008 crises in Plateau State began after results of the Jos North Local Government Elections showed that a Muslim Hausa-Fulani candidate was winning the election. Unlike the videos produced by the Christian community, which identified the conflict as a jihad waged by Muslims, the ‘Fact File’ documentary said the ‘genocide’ against was caused by the indigene/settler policy that denied members of the community of the basic rights of all indigenes, employment, scholarships, and federal appointments.

Below is an excerpt from the documentary:

The sky in Jos was covered in smoke and the city’s air had a rancid odor and the shots of gun shots mixed with cries of help provided a sound track reminiscent of the Hollywood movie, ‘Hotel Rwanda.’ Indeed this one too was a genocide, another government-backed genocide (sic)….the heart wrenching thing about it was that the targets were the ‘non-indigene settler communities’ of Hausa-Fulani Muslims. Government involvement became glaring as the corpses kept coming in. (YouTube Documentary, January, 2010).

The narrative, accompanied by gruesome videos and pictures of the dead and wounded, purported to be Muslims, blames the Christian ‘indigene’ community for the
“genocide.” The video also indicted members of the Nigerian Police Service for conniving with the state government to attack members of the community. The narrator said: “for the period of the uprising, the police who are constitutionally saddled with the responsibility of protecting lives and property and maintaining order went on rampage in the predominantly Hausa-Fulani neighborhoods.” The documentary also accused the local media in Plateau State for inciting violence against the Hausa-Fulani. The narrator said: “the local media should receive the year’s award for hate radio for providing the assailters with gingering music and giving highly biased coverage of the crisis afterwards.”

Apart from raising similar issues, other videos circulated among members of the community with titles like “Jos Nigeria: Christian Killed Muslims and Eat their Meets” (sic), “NSFW Massacre: Dismemberment of Muslims by Christians in Rukuba, Jos, Nigeria” and “Massacre of Muslims in Jos, Plateau State, Nigeria,” were strongly worded in a way to mobilize members of the community against indigenes in the state.

Figure 3: Screen Shot of the “Fact File Documentary on YouTube.
Consequences of the “Attack” Strategy

These videos and statements of the participants raise two important questions: was the strategy successful in providing an alternative communication channel for members of a community who feel alienated by the media? What consequences did the strategy have on the information dissemination process and the conflict as whole?

The Approach Incited Violence!

In response to the first question, several participants who supported this type of behavior suggested that the communication strategy gave them a platform to voice their opinions. A number of participants, however, agreed that the communication strategy had great implication on the conflict. It was clear during the interviews that some participants were not happy with the strategy adopted by Shehu and other people.

While acknowledging that everybody in the state had the right to express their views, Nankyer, a study participant, criticized the video clips and documentaries for
“exaggerating facts and inciting people to commit violence.” Nankyer said groups and individuals who engaged in kind of behavior capitalized fear and distrust in the state to trigger an escalation of violence:

The clip was showing dead bodies and the message was that their Muslim brothers were being killed in their thousands. They showed bodies in the mosques, bodies everywhere and some of these places they took those pictures were not even Muslim dominated areas but they should these and urged the young people to avenge the deaths. (Interview, November 22, 2013).

Other participants supported Nankyer’s observation by recounting what they viewed as provocative messages shared to members of the public. For example, Michael stated: “by showing such number of the dead and claiming they were all Muslims and then calling on the Ummah to rise and revenge, what were they thinking?” Nankyer noted that, rather than reconcile people, the video messages were very divisive:

For me, knowing the person that produced the video, I was very disappointed because as an educated media person, he was supposed to play a key role in promoting peace. He is a leader and people looked up to him. He had the power to say, “hey drop it’ and people would and listen to him. But he was sending out this clip, what did he intend to achieve? He wanted to instigate violence and he succeeded and later he comes to speak about peace? After having a wound, you scratch it rather than putting a balm? (Interview, November 22, 2013).

Selective Coding

After the axial coding process was concluded, the next phase in the process was selective coding. Selective coding is the final phase in the coding process where the researcher attempts to “integrate and refine the theory that has been developed in the open and axial coding stage” (Oktay, 2012, p.81). The main goal of grounded theory research is theory development. Theory development involves the identification of a core category, which is “the central phenomenon around which all other categories are
integrated” (Strauss & Corbin, 1990, p.116). It is also a category that appears frequently in the data, is abstract, is related to other categories, is applicable to other areas, and grows in complexity and explanatory power as you relate it to other categories” (Oktay, 2012, p.81). During selective coding, ‘conflict audiences as “dissemiusers” of information’ emerged as the core category for this study.

To identify the core category, the researcher examined the conditions, consequences and relationships between the two concepts “self-preservation” and “attacking as defensive strategy to defend,” which were developed at the axial coding process in the section above. After an analysis of the concepts, the researcher observed that, while people applied self-preservation and attack as defensive communication strategies in different ways, similar factors encouraged these behaviors. Similarly, the participants who displayed these behaviors reported using mobile communication technology and social media as alternative communication platforms. The analysis led to the identification of the concept, ‘conflict audiences as “dissemiusers” of information.’ As the core category of this study, the concept is the major finding of the study. The concept describes the communication behavior of conflict audiences in Plateau State.

The core category accounts for most of the variation in the data. As such, the other two categories “self-preservation” and “attack, as defensive communication” relate to it. The core category explains the latent pattern behavior that individuals or groups using these two communication strategies engage in. The researcher observed that, while individuals or groups (participants) applied different communication strategies to mobilize support for their agenda in the conflict, access to a wider and more convenient
communication platforms empowered them to engage in an information seeking and sharing behavior that allowed them to be both disseminators and users of content. The core category, “conflict audiences as ‘dissemiusers’ of information” is therefore an abstraction that explains how a pattern of communication behavior occurred among conflict audiences in Plateau State.

**Second Phase of Theoretical Sampling**

After the emergence of the core category, the researcher conducted another phase of theoretical sampling and conducted another round of interviews. Grounded theory methodology recommends that the researcher tests out the core category in another phase of data collection to see “whether it holds up and to explore its limits” (Oktay, 2012, p.81). In order to saturate the core category, the researcher theoretically sampled and re-interviewed some participants because their articulation of the phenomenon being studied was both descriptive and informative. The homogenous nature of the participants, which included members of the Christian-indigene and Muslim-settler communities led to quick saturation of the core category (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). The core category, which is also the major finding of the study, is discussed in Chapter 5. In all, eight participants (2 journalists, six university students) were (re)interviewed. The participants were asked four questions and the average length of the interview was 30 minutes. (See questions in Appendix C).

**Chapter Summary**

In this chapter, the researcher presented the findings of the study. The findings are based on an analysis of interview and focus group discussion data, supported by reviewed
documents. The findings were discussed in three parts, explaining how data were systematically analyzed using the Straussian grounded theory model.

The first section of the chapter focused data analysis using open, axial, and selecting coding methods. This involved identifying different codes (substantive, in vivo and theoretical), as well as grouping the generated codes into initial concepts or categories. The codes were further recoded and regrouped into five broad categories and sub-categories: (a) perception of media bias; (b) lack of trust; (c) personal experiences with conflict; (d) interpersonal interactions; (e) audience control of information.

In the second section, the researcher developed the concept/category dimensions for each of the five categories and sub-categories. The researcher also investigated the relationships and interrelationships between the categories, with a view to identifying core constructs that might describe the communication behavior of conflict audiences in Plateau State, Nigeria.

Analysis of these relationships posed new research questions, leading to further data collection after a theoretical sampling of new study participants. After further recoding and regrouping of the five categories, two key concepts emerged. The concepts, which describe the communication (information sourcing and dissemination) of conflict audiences in Plateau State, are: (1) self-preservation; (2) attacking as defensive strategy.

The researcher used a conditional/consequential matrix to analyze the concepts. The process involved identifying the causal condition of each behavior, intervening variables (if any), the action or interaction among the audience and consequences of each behavior. The chapter also provided an in-depth analysis and thick-rich description of
each of the two concepts: “self-preservation” and “attack, as defensive communication.”

Each of the concepts identified were presented and the findings were supported with verbatim quotes drawn from the statements of the study participants.

Selective coding, the third phase of the coding process led to the identification of the core category, ‘Conflict audiences as “dissemiusers” of information.’ This is also the major finding of this study. The concept, ‘dissemiusers’ describes the communication behavior of conflict audiences in Plateau State. In order to ensure the saturation of the core category, the researcher conducted the third phase of data collection and analysis. In the next chapter, the researcher examines the core category and presents the theoretical model.
CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION

While current literature provides an insight into the effect of news media coverage on the attitudes and behaviors of audiences in conflict environment, this study presents one of the first attempts to use grounded theory methodology to identify and explain conceptually, the communication behavior of conflict audiences in Plateau State and its impact on the information dissemination process. Although the study focused on Plateau State, Nigeria, it responds to an emerging field of research that examine the interaction between the audience, media and conflict (Bratic, 2006; DellaVigna, Enikolopov, Mironova, Petrova, & Zhuravskaya).

Straussian grounded theory methodology was used in this study to categorize theoretical concepts that emerged inductively from data collection and analysis. Five categories emerged, which were recoded and regrouped into two: “Self-preservation” and “attacking to defend,” concepts that describe how the audience in Plateau State seek out and share information during periods of crises. A core category “Conflict Audiences as ‘Dissemiusers’ of Information” was identified after further analysis of the concept. The emergent substantive theory, which is centered on the core category, is presented with aid of a diagram (conceptual model). Strauss & Corbin (1998) recommended that researchers use a diagram as a “tool to gain analytical distance from materials and to present the results.

This chapter reviewed key findings of the study against the backdrop of relevant literature. The chapter is divided into four sections. In the first section, the researcher examined a core category, “conflict audiences as ‘dissemiusers’ of information” as a
concept that explains a pattern of communication behavior among conflict audiences in Plateau State. Section two examined the micro and macro causal conditions for the behavior, intervening variable, action/interaction of the conflict audience and consequences of the behavior. Section three presents a summary of the key findings. In section four, the researcher presented Audience Empowerment Theory as the substantive grounded theory, which emerged from the findings of the study as represented in the core category. This is illustrated by a theoretical model.

Core Category: ‘Conflict Audiences as “Dissemiusers” of Information’

Vignette: We received and exchanged information through phone calls and text messages cell phones and social media... Everybody has cell phones even children and that means all can send news and then when no control, it is chaos oh! So these cell phones were useful. They allowed people to call, send SMS to provide current information...same with Facebook. I hear from my children that they get pictures, information, videos of what is happening in different parts of the town. People became reporters; people consumed, disseminated and most times, produced the news, eye witness news. Where the media could not go, people went! You see, that is where the media are failing us. If the media cannot fill the gap, people will do that and that is what you is happening here (Thomas, Interview, January 28, 2014).

The major finding of this grounded theory study is the emergence of the core category or concept, “conflict audiences as ‘dissemiusers’ of information”. The concept describes the latent communication behavior of conflict audiences in Plateau State. It is an abstracted category that emerged from the data. The two key categories “self-preservation” and “attack as defensive communication strategy” are related to this core category. They demonstrate how the core category works among conflict audiences in Plateau State.
The phrase “dissemiusers” is coined and used by the researcher to describe the communication behavior of conflict audiences (or information seeking and sharing information behavior) of conflict audiences who strategically design, disseminate and use information to promote their conflict agenda.

The term was created by merging two words ‘disseminators’ and ‘users.’ Like the communication theory model, “dissemination” of information involves a sender and a receiver. However, unlike the traditional communication process, where the receiver collects the information and provides feedback, the disseminator broadcasts information to different people without necessarily expecting any direct response. The central argument is that dissemination is a potent instrument for mobilization, particularly in the hands of conflict audiences.

According to Peters (2006), dissemination can be a powerful tool of persuasion because “once the seeds are cast, their harvest is never assured...the metaphor of dissemination points to the contingency of all words and deeds, their uncertain consequences, and their governance by probabilities rather than certainties” (p.212). Since the sender may never have the opportunity to clarify or restate the intended meaning of the message, the information disseminated might be interpreted in different ways by the receivers. Depending on the environment or circumstances in which the listener is situated, dissemination can affect the interpretation and outcome of the message (Peters, 2006). In this particular context, the findings of this study show that the conflict environment and the media system has an impact on how people make meaning of the message and its overall outcome on the conflict in Plateau State.
As a core category, the concept ‘dissemiusers,’ describes the pattern of communication behavior of conflict audiences who apply self-preservation and attacking as defensive communication strategies in when they seeking for or disseminate information. Although these two approaches represent different communication goals and strategies, the findings of this study explain that participants that utilized self-preservation and attack as defensive strategies aimed for similar communication goals. That is, disseminating information to disparage perceived ‘enemies,’ while at the same time, mobilizing and persuading members of their different communities to support specific agendas. The findings also show that most of the messages they disseminate had intended and unintended consequences on both the communication process and the intractability or otherwise of the conflict.

A crucial part of this behavior is the accessibility and availability of cell phone technology and social media. Findings of the study presented in Chapter 4 shows, as an intervening variable, access to cell phones and social media by the ‘dissemiusers’ provides a personal communication channel that, not only aids the general flow of information among conflict, but also allows individuals and groups to rally support for their positions in the conflict. Both self-preservation and attacking to defend ‘proponents’ said access to the Internet, social media and cell phones empowered them to control the flow and the type of information they wanted other people to have.

From the data, the researcher observed while ‘dissemiusers’ consist of the younger demographic of conflict audiences who broadcast messages through new media and communication technology, most of them are not necessarily heavy users of
technology. The data showed, as ‘users’ of information, conflict audiences who are ‘dissemiusers,’ who actively participate in the communication process. Also as ‘users,’ their behaviors were expressed in two ways: one, through “user-to-user interaction,” where conflict audiences interacted with the each other. Secondly, through “user-to-content interaction,” this involved sharing content through SMS, emails and social media interaction (Shao, 2009). These patterns of behavior were facilitated by availability, accessibility and affordability of the Internet and social media sites.

In order to investigate the nature of this communication behavior, the researcher was guided by four theoretical questions:

1. Why do conflict audiences engage in this pattern of behavior? (Micro/Macro causal conditions)
2. How does access to mobile communication technology and social media facilitate this behavior? (intervening condition)
3. How does this behavior impact on the communication process? (consequence)
4. To what extent does this form of interpersonal communication affect incidence of organized violence? (consequence)

The researcher responded to these questions by identifying the causal conditions, intervening action/interaction and consequences of this pattern of this information sourcing and dissemination of conflict audiences that participated in this study.

*Causal Conditions: Conflict Audiences as ‘Dissemiusers’ of Information*

The concept, ‘Dissemiusers’ describes a pattern of communication behavior among conflict audiences in Plateau State. This is an expressive behavior employed by
individuals or groups who feel the need to correct perceived misconceptions about their positions in the conflict. The findings of this study show that some of these people adopt self-preservation and ‘attack’ as a defensive communication strategies to communicate their positions and mobilize others to support their agendas. The results also show that access to new communication technology is providing ‘dissemiusers’ with an alternative communication platform that is, not only changing how they interact with each other, but is also shaping the information dissemination process of conflict environments.

Detailed explanation of the two concepts, ‘self-preservation’ and ‘attack’ as defensive communication, as presented in Chapter 4, shows there are several causal conditions or factors account for why some conflict audiences adopt these communication strategies. These include lack of trust for the media, journalists, and media ownership. Others are lack of trust for opinion leaders, perceived political marginalization, religion, past experiences, and underlying schema of the some conflict audiences.

For a more in-depth analysis of the phenomenon, the causal conditions for self-preservation and attack as defensive communication strategies identified in Chapter 4 were further identified in two categories: the macro and micro conditions. Macro-conditions are conditions, “which are broad in scope and possible impact” (Strauss & Corbin, 1998, p.181). These broader structural determinants of the conflict in Plateau State, such as the overarching political and religious conditions impinge on the communication behavior of ‘dissemiusers.’ One the other hand, Strauss & Corbin, (1998) define micro-conditions as contextual factors that are “narrow in scope and possible
impact” (p. 181). Using this definition as guide, the researcher identified the micro-
conditions as structural factors in the media environment that impact on the 
communication behavior of conflict audiences. Both the macro and micro levels also 
reflect structural variables that shape the media environment in Plateau State, the conflict 
and the conflict audiences themselves. Findings of the study show that, at the macro 
level, causal conditions like indigene/settler dichotomy, (grievances), and religious 
factors. At the micro level are distrust for media among conflict audiences, preexisting 
beliefs, rhetoric of elite opinion leaders, and lack of professionalism among journalists 
among other factors. These conditions are discussed below:

Macro-Conditions

Most individuals or groups, who acknowledged using “attack” as a defensive 
communication strategy, identified the indigene/settler policy as a major cause of the 
conflict. Although the indigene-settler policy has been a cause of widespread 
intercommunal conflicts in Nigeria, the crisis, which erupted in Jos, has remained the 
most volatile. The indigene and settler problem in Nigeria can be traced to the British 
colonial policy of residential segregation in the 1940s and 1950s, which sought to create 
a distinction between indigenous and non-indigenous communities in the country 
(International Crisis Group, 2012). Fifty-five years after independence, there has not been 
any effort to change this policy.

The Nigerian constitution is vague in its determination of who an indigene is and 
how that might differ or not with the concept of citizenship. Although section 15(3)(b) of 
the 1999 Nigerian Constitution suggests all Nigerians have equal citizenship status, and
section 4(1) says every citizen in the country has the right to reside in any state in the federation, the Federal Character principle seems to negate these rights. This principle and the constitution of a Federal Character Commission introduces the phrase “indigenes of a state,” and promotes a quota system for appointing political office holders in the country. Isa-Odidi (2004) argued that the lack of clarity in the FCC act authorizes “individuals and communities to use the ‘indigene clause’ and the ‘Federal Character provision’ as justification for discrimination against citizens who live in states other than their state of ‘origin,’ especially when it relates to those citizens’ ability to participate in the political process” (p.20). This lack of clarity is also factor in the indigene-settler violence in Plateau State. The ambiguity in the Federal Character Commission Act, which defines an indigene as one whose parents or grandparents are indigenes of a local government area or one who is accepted as an indigene by the local government area has remained problematic for Nigeria (Kendhammer, 2014).

Since the FCC Act empowers local government councils to identify indigenes, it has opened the interpretation to political office holders, who have continued to use it to pursue personal agendas. In Plateau State, particularly in Jos North Local Government Area, one of the major triggers of the conflict was the non-issuance of indigeneity certificates to members of the Hausa-Fulani community, who have been categorized as “settlers” by the local government authority (Sayne, 2012). The lack of indigeneity certificate means that non-indigenes face discrimination in political appointments, recruitment into Federal Universities, scholarships and jobs in the state civil service. The indigene-settler conflict in Plateau State is therefore fierce because “privileges and
entitlements are nearly a zero-sum game; the gain of one group is the loss of the other” (International Crisis Group, 2012, p.4).

Religious Factors

The conflict in Plateau State has also been characterized as inter-religious, mainly between the Christian “indigenes” and Hausa-Fulani “settler” communities. Even though the indigene/settler question is a major cause of the conflict, several factors contributed to the religious dimension of the conflict. First, Plateau State is situated in the Middle Belt area of Nigeria, a critical location where the predominantly Muslim North and Christian South meet.

Although the different ethnic groups constitute the majority in the state, Christian indigenes of Plateau State are increasingly afraid of losing their cultural or religious identity to the Hausa-Fulani “who are more forceful in asserting cultural rights, advancing their religious identity, claiming indigene rights, and seeking political power in this region” (Human Rights Watch, 2013, p.35). As the Hausa-Fulani population increases in the state, so does their demand to be treated as equal citizens of the country. Although the Hausa-Fulani point to marginalization, discrimination and exclusion due to the implementation of the indigeneity policy in the state, Christians in the state view the problem as being caused mainly by an Islamic jihadist agenda.

These differences became more pronounced with the introduction of Sharia criminal code in 12 Northern States between 2000 and 2001. Disputes over Sharia led to series of religious crises in Kano and Kaduna States. For some participants, the 2001 crisis that broke out in Plateau State was caused by the agitation for Sharia law to be
implemented in the state (Krause, 2010). Most Christian participants invoked the terms “jihad” and ‘terrorists’ to describe the current situation in the state. A number of them also described the crisis as an Islamic agenda, a direct extension of the 19th century Usman Dan Fodio Jihad.

It is necessary to note that, while the indigene/settler and religious questions are both causal conditions for the conflict, the causal conditions have different impacts on the participants. On one hand, most study participants who identified as Christians point to their killing of the faithful and some clergy, as well as burning of churches as evidence that the conflict has broader religious dimensions. For this group of people, self-preservation is a strategy they have adopted to protect their religious identity. One the other hand, the Muslim participants said the conflict is ethno-political in all ramifications. It is for them, a struggle for political power and a protest against marginalization and exclusion, which threatens their political identity.

Apart from the different impact of these causal conditions on the self-preservation and attacking to defend behaviors, the actions/interaction of participants to these issues does not follow the same pattern. Most members of the Christian ‘indigene’ community, who viewed the conflict through the lens of religious conflicts advocated self-preservation as a communication strategy aimed at preserving and protecting the religious identity of its members. The Muslim Hausa-Fulani ‘settlers’ on the other hand, are driven by a need to gain indigene status in Plateau State, a place they claimed their community has settled for many generations. Some participants said the denial of economic and political right for the Hausa-Fulani community is an injustice they are fighting. Their
communication strategy is therefore to tell their own stories and at the same time, “attack” any information they consider unfavorable to their positions.

These issues, compounded by the lack of political will of the government to punish perpetrators of the violence have elevated the hate-filled myths and stereotypes and also increased the level of distrust the people have for each other and also public institutions in the state. Participants on both sides of the conflict indicated a lack of trust for the government, the media, or both.

Like other media organizations in Nigeria, most participants regarded it as a propaganda tool used to promote and maintain ethnic or religious boundaries. Nwozor (2014) argued that the media in Nigeria reflects the different ethnic interests of the owners. As a result, any “social action is seen from the prism of ethnicity” (p.155). Although there are five television and six main radio stations in Plateau State, the ethnicity and/or religion of the owner defines how the media organization are perceived by people in the state. Members of the Hausa-Fulani community interviewed for this study suggested that Plateau Radio Television Corporation, the state government-owned radio and television station promoted and protected the interest of the Plateau State government and by extension, that of the indigenes of Plateau State. Some of them described the state media organization as a propaganda tool of the government that is being used to marginalizing and victimizing members of the Hausa-Fulani community in the state. Access to the Internet and cell phones therefore empowered individuals and groups in both communities to not only air their opinions but also ‘preserve themselves’
from or “attack” individuals or groups whose views they deem biased against their positions in the conflict.

Micro-Conditions

A major consequence of the conflict is the growing distrust that people have for the news media. Findings of this study show that conflict audiences in Plateau State are increasingly becoming disenchanted with the media. Most of the participants interviewed for this study expressed deep distrust for the media for the state government-owned and some international media organizations. A number of participants said the media sensationalized coverage of the conflict by exaggerating the number of casualties without providing verifiable information sources. An action they said contributed to escalation of violence in the state. Some of them also identified the ideological or religious affiliation of some media organizations as influencing how media framing of the conflict. Even though these perceptions have had important consequences on behavior of some audience members and on the conflict as a whole, the public distrust for the media in Plateau State is not an isolated case.

Survey data shows that audience trust in the Media is fading in different parts of the world. A 2014 Gallop poll shows there is a growing decline in the confidence the American public held in the media. The report shows only 24 percent of Americans have confidence in newspapers. This is about eight points below the historical average. Similarly, only 21 percent of Americans expressed confidence in Television news (Byers, 2015). Other surveys conducted in Greece, France, Germany, and the United Kingdom
show an average of 54 percent of the residents have little or no trust on their respective media (Sputnik News Agency, 2015).

Research has proposed different reasons for why this is so. These include hostile media phenomenon, immediacy and drama in the media, and preference for war/violence journalism narratives. Others factors also identified in this study are media ownership, lack of professionalism among journalists, elite opinion leadership, and pre-existing beliefs of the audience. Another noteworthy reason is, the “hostile media phenomenon” or the “perception of media bias.” Both experimental and survey data show there is a propensity for people to view news coverage of events as being biased against their own opinions (Vallone, Ross, and Lepper, 1985; Giner-Sorolla & Chaiken, 1993). The hostile media phenomenon also assumes people are more likely to perceive news coverage as biased when they have strong involvement with an issue (Schmitt, Gunther, & Liebhart, 2004).

Findings of this study support the hostile media phenomenon arguments in three ways: one, the findings show that both self-preservation and attack as defensive strategy proponents perceived the media (national or international) as biased against their views. Two, this perception can be attributed to the audience’s issue involvement (Schmitt, Gunther, & Liebhart, 2004). While this study does not determine whether there was bias in the news content they were exposed to, it was evident that the level of audience involvement with issues, such as underlying causes of the conflict played a major role in shaping their perception of the media. Three, how the audience perceived the medium,
particularly issues like media ownership or the degree of its alignment with the
government position may impact on these perceptions (Choi, Watt & Lynch, 2009).

For example, the findings show “self-preservation” proponents who viewed the
conflict as a “religious conflict,” doubted the sincerity and credibility of media
organizations like Aljazeera, which they perceived as promoting an Arab Islamic agenda.
On the other hand, the “attack” as defense advocates identified the conflict as fueled by
the indigene/settler policy of the government, which aims at deliberately discriminating
members of the Hausa-Fulani community in Plateau State. In the same regard, they
perceived the news coverage by state government-owned media as aligning with this
position.

*Elite Opinion Leaders*

Mass communication research has shown that media agenda is sometimes
disseminated to the public through a two-step flow of communication with opinion
leaders. For some scholars, opinion leaders are individuals who hold positions in social
networks. They are more literate than, have more access and exposure to the mass media
than other members of their social networks (Katz & Lazarsfeld, 1955). Opinions leaders
are also more cosmopolitan than their followers, having a higher socio-economic status
(Rogers, 2003). For Kelly & Berry (2003), these leaders are just everyday people who
influence others.

The rhetoric of elite opinion leaders can influence opinions, particularly among
people who have the same biases (Ladd, 2010). Individuals or groups tend to me more
open to persuasion from people they consider as well-informed and sharing their opinions
(Lupia and McCubbins 1998). In conflict environments, elite consensus and discourse about a conflict impacts on media framing and by extension, public support or not for the conflict.

Although these studies provide the context through which we can understand the concept of opinion leadership in conflict environments, the findings of this study support the arguments presented by Niesbet (2005) that the political, economic structure, as well as the media environment of countries shape how they categorize and interact with opinion leaders. Low media penetration, cultural values, belief system, and the traditional structure of most communities in Nigeria create situations where elite opinion leaders are respected and sometimes, revered by people. In light of these issues, the study participants were asked to first identify their opinion leaders. The goal was to examine if their conceptualization of opinion leadership supports existing literature. The study also examined if interpersonal communication with the opinion leaders contributed to the knowledge that people have about the conflict issues. Two, if the perception of bias exists in this type of interaction with opinion leaders. Three, if interpersonal communication contributes to shaping the how the ‘dissemiusers’ interacted with each other.

While most participants identified opinion leaders as “influencers” whose opinions influenced the behavior of people during the conflict, there were differences in the way opinion leaders were classified by the study participants. For example, most Christian participants identified religious leaders as their opinion leaders whose views they respected. Their views are understandable. For them, the conflict is a religious conflict and these people provide the leadership they required to navigate through the
issues. Some of them said Christian leaders in Plateau State preached peace and mobilized the community to explore reconciliatory options with their ‘aggressors.’ Since their strategy is geared towards self-preservation, the message of religious leaders seemed to have reinforced these perceptions.

There were, however, few members of this community who expressed distrust for religious leaders. A number of the participants alleged that the rhetoric of some religious, political, ethnic and community leaders in Plateau State incited their followers to commit acts of violence. The participants also alleged that some of the leaders hired young people to perpetuate violence and distributed guns and other weapons. It was evident from the answers that religious leaders were perceived as playing important roles in the conflict. However, with a general distrust for formal leaders, family members and friends became the ‘opinion leaders’ whose views and opinions were trusted and respected.

It was, however, a different scenario among the Muslim-Hausa participants. For them, religious, political, community and traditional leaders were the opinion leaders they relied on for information and guidance during the conflict. Understanding the traditional structure of the Hausa-Fulani in Nigeria provides us a context for understanding why this might be so. The political significance of religious and traditional structures in the predominant Muslim Northern region can be traced to pre-colonial Nigeria when traditional rulers had full authority over religious, administrative and judicial matters in their communities (Blench, Longtau, Hassan & Walsh, 2006).

During colonialism, Britain indirectly ruled over Northern Nigeria through the traditional rulers who were allowed to continue overseeing the affairs of their domains. In
post-independent Nigeria, the situation has not changed much. Although changing political environment in the country has undermined their powers, the hierarchical structure of leadership within the Hausa-Fulani community in Northern Nigeria allows these leaders to still exert some level of control of their subjects. Blench, Longtau, Hassan & Walsh (2006) said even though the 1999 constitution does not define any role for traditional or religious leaders, “The Hausa Emirates in the north retain significant authority and influence” (p.58). The historical significance of this relationship might explain why Muslim participants of this study identified strongly with formal opinion leaders compared to other groups in the states whose leaders have very limited powers over their subjects (Blench, Longtau, Hassan & Walsh, 2006).

This finding is significant for three reasons: first of all, the findings support the two step flow model conceptualization of opinion leadership in some situations. On a general level, the data supports research which defines opinion leaders as ‘influencers’ whose views have the potential of influencing the attitudes and/or behavior of people in their social networks(Katz & Lazarsfeld, 1955; Rogers, 2003). They could also be independent sources who pass across media information that agree with their opinions about issues (Visser, Holdbrook & Kronsnick, 2008). Participants indicated that these leaders (family members, friends or elite opinion leaders) shaped their behavior towards the news media, other parties in the conflict, and the conflict issues. This also suggests the possibility that the perception of bias might exist in non-mediated form of communication as it does in mass communication through the media.
Secondly, some participants acknowledged that interaction with some opinion leaders prompted the conflict behavior of individuals (violence). For example, some participants who focused more on the religious dimension of the conflict credited their opinion leaders, particularly religious leaders for reinforcing the self-preservation agenda.

Thirdly, the result also demonstrates that the cultural, historical and traditional structures of some communities, like the Muslim Hausa communities encourage how the people conceptualize opinion leaders. This is contrary to the dominant argument in literature (Katz & Lazarsfeld, 1955; Rogers, 2003). Although these leaders are respected by members of their communities, they are not more cosmopolitan, do not necessarily have greater access to the media, nor do they have higher literacy or socio-economic levels compared to other people in their social networks.

*Media Ownership*

Tied closely to the rhetoric of elite opinion leaders is the idea of media ownership. Participants link distrust for the news media to ownership. Two participants who identified with the Hausa community described journalists as “dancing to the drums,” or “paid by someone and need to follow the owners to keep their jobs.” These participants suggested that journalists employed by the Plateau State government owned media organizations are promoting an ethnic/political agenda by marginalizing and excluding some groups in the conflict. A focus group discussant said: “The state government was seen by many people as supporting and funding an agenda. So, the information that came from state media was no longer credible except you investigated other sources.” A news
editor and publisher of a news magazine in the state supported the argument. However, for him, the media agenda is dictated by a larger agenda of Plateau State governor:

The state governor has not hidden his disdain for the Hausa community. He has marginalized them in terms of projects, education, appointments, etc. That is the same treatment they get from PRTV. The media station is silencing the voice of that community. No matter what you pay to have them to cover stories from that community, the station does not. Have you noticed that even some religious programs have been removed from air? That station employed indigenes to read the Hausa news and removed all the Hausa people from newscast? (Isa, Focus Group Discussion, January 10, 2014).

The views presented by this journalist and other participants led the researcher to further explore this topic as an important theme that might explain why some conflict audiences chose to be ‘dissemiusers’ of information. Some journalists who participated in the study attributed the problem to factors such as the politicization of appointments in the media. They said the appointment of most news directors and General Managers of public media organizations are done on the basis of political patronage rather than qualification. A journalist with the state government-owned television station alleged that state governors appoint General Managers to compensate party men and women who worked for them during the campaigns. He said:

We all know that the last two General Managers of our corporation for example, were merely selected because they are loyal party men. The last one we had did not have any media experience, nothing. He just came and began buying computers and wasting resources. No equipment, no training for journalists. It was the same story for the one that was there before him. People no longer listen to our station. They don’t trust us the journalists. (Awwalu, Interview, April 4, 2014).

Issues of politics and the media can be understood within the context of the media and ownership in Nigeria. The government at both the Federal and State levels in the country own most of the television and radio stations. Similarly, the Federal government
owns and controls the Nigeria Television Authority and the Federal Radio Corporation Network, which have the largest coverage for television and radio in the country (Musa & Mohammed, 2004). The situation is, however, different with the press, especially newspapers where private ownership remains dominant. The 36 states and the Federal government own 14 newspapers while the remaining 42 are owned by rich individuals or some political elite (Musa & Mohammed, 2004). These are the news makers whose views and opinions shape the media agenda in the country. According to Okechukwu (2014):

The concept of “news making” by “news makers” which largely revolves around this same group of people (the ruling elite) and the control they exert both directly and indirectly undermines the ability of the media to on its own perform its agenda setting function. Instead, the media functions to regurgitate the imposed agendas of its owners, their friends and associates (p.44).

Some participants, particularly Muslims, argued that the media in Plateau State lacks objectivity as most of the journalists are ‘forced’ to promote the political agenda of the government and the political elite against members of their community. They said the discrimination is perpetuated by refusal of the media to provide them a platform to express their views. A participant explained that ‘attack’ became a communication strategy that allowed them to ‘defend’ themselves from the “Christian-indigene” political agenda. They were also able to mobilize members of their community to support the cause. A journalist with the state government-owned television, who identified himself as ‘indigene and Christian,’ acknowledged that the media in Plateau State have, through their action or inaction, contributed to the escalation of tension and hostility among warring groups. He also criticized other groups in the conflict for resorting to strategies
that “undermine the security of lives and property.” While calling for responsible journalism, he says the self-preservation strategy adopted by some individuals in his community is geared towards peace and reconciliation. According to the participant:

The major challenge is that you have a duty and then you are conscious of your responsibilities. Striking the balance between the ideal and what we have on ground. There are challenges no doubt but we must continue to find ways to do our jobs because we are vital part of the peace process. As journalists, that consciousness that we have a responsibility to society to promote peace should make us more responsible. (Joseph, Interview, April 5, 2014).

War/Propaganda Narratives

Although most journalists (participants) stressed the importance for peace journalism in the state, another causal condition that might shape the pattern of communication behavior among ‘dissemiusers’ is the war/violence narratives of the news media. A number of participants said journalists deliberately framed around war/violence rather than peace narratives with the goal of inciting violence. They said, rather than reconcile warring groups, journalists took sides in conflict. The consequence is that news coverage “dualized” news coverage by reducing the number of parties in the conflict into two. By looking at the conflict through this lens, journalists created an “us” versus “them” dichotomy, where “them” were categorized as the aggressors and “us” as victims of the conflict. This approach, also referred to as war or violence journalism, focuses on propaganda that has a strong victory and elite orientation (Galtung, 2005; Lynch & McGoldrick, 2005; McGoldrick, 2006; Hemelink, 2011).

The impact of war/violence journalism on any conflict cannot be taken too lightly. This approach to conflict reporting has crucial impact on the audience and the conflict itself. For example, the way people perceive themselves in the conflict can either
exacerbate the situation or not. If news coverage reinforces the notion among individuals or groups that “we” are the victims, there is the tendency for them to “win” the war.

News coverage in war/violence journalism begins with the outbreak of violence and the emphasis is on the visible consequences of the violence. Here, journalists are only concerned with the number of the dead and damage of property. Violence journalists also “advocate the fate of “our side” it only exposes the untruths and perpetrators of atrocities on the “other side”, whereas the lies and cover-up attempts of “our side” will be supported (Hanitzsch, 2004, p.484).

A study participant in Jos argued that some journalists promoted the “us” versus “them” narrative to manipulate people and mobilize them around some propagandist agendas. He said “the journalists say there are aggressors, there are trouble makers in the crisis. The goal, the way I see it is to mobilize the indigenes, the Christians against one group to justify the use of force.” By focusing on the violence, journalists do not investigate the underlying causes of a conflict, causes of violence escalation or even the impact of media coverage on the conflict (Galtung, 2005). Similarly, by demonizing groups in a conflict and focusing on the violence, casualty and losses, ignore available options for peace and reconciliation.

Most participants argued that journalists, like other interested parties in the conflict, are prone to ethnocentrism. The personal biases of individual journalists are shaped by their by religious, political and ethnic beliefs. The drive for neutrality and objectivity among journalists also leads to an unbalanced news report that has the potential to exacerbate the conflict. A participant said: “Whether you like it or not, those
ethnic, religious whatever would be at play among certain individual bias. “Another one suggested: “I think the personal inclinations of the reporters contributed in causing some of the problems” (Ahmed, Focus Group Discussion, January 10, 2014)

**Immediacy and Drama**

Tied closely to the concepts of war/violence journalism is the argument that media’s emphasis on immediacy and drama is a major cause of violence in the state. As previous research has shown, simple storylines and good visuals appeal to the audience. Journalists are often driven to pursue these values, rather than discuss ideologies, which are often times, primary reasons for violence among groups (Wolfsfeld, 2004). Immediacy relates to the idea that the Media are more interested in covering events, such as the outbreak of violence, rather than long-term processes that could lead to peace and reconciliation. When it comes to drama, “every act of violence, every crisis, and every sign of conflict is considered news” (Wolfsfeld, 2004, p.18).

In this context, some participants argued that the interest of the media, particularly the state government-owned news media to pursue these values had devastating consequences on people in the state. A participant recalled an incident during the 2010 crisis in Plateau State, when the state government-owned news media reported on the mass killing of people in Kuru Karama, a predominantly Muslim village. News reports about the incident with accompanying videos showing corpses inside wells and pit latrines is believed to have incited reappraisal attacks that led to the killing of over 500 woman and children in Dogon Nahawa (a Christian community) by suspected Fulani Herdsmen. Rather than paying attention to the “historical origins of conflicts, the
structural root causes of violence, the exacerbating factors as well as the triggering factors” (Tayeebwa, 2014, p.9), the journalists paid more attention to violent pictures and confrontations among members of the community. Some participants attributed however attributed the actions of the media to lack of professionalism among journalists in the state.

*Lack of Professionalism*

Another causal condition for the communication behavior of ‘dissemiusers’ is the low quality of news reporting caused by the lack of professionalism and investigative skills among most journalists in the state and country as whole. A participant said a large number of journalists employed by the state-owned media perform “poorly” because they lack adequate training. According to him: “I like CNN like watching a movie, you watch these guys tell you the story as it unfolds and then give you some analysis that would be the framework for your own analysis. Our local media are not yet there, it is a lack of professionalism.” Another participant said: “our local Media have not reached that level of sophistication in reporting. When you watch international media like Aljazeera, CNN, BBC, you see their reporting is more accurate….the problem is that the media are always in a hurry to break the news.”

As part of the third and last phase of data collection, the researcher interviewed some conflict audiences, journalists and media managers working with the state government owned media, as well as some privately owned media organizations. The interviews were geared towards investigating why journalists are perceived by some participants as biased and unprofessional in their coverage of the conflict.
Most of the journalists and media managers interviewed for this study agreed that some of the observations made by the study participants are true but attributed the problem to a number of factors. The factors include lack of adequate training for journalists, lack of effective monitoring by the Nigeria Union of Journalists, poor enumeration, and non-regular payment of salaries. Others are lack of job security, lack of adequate security for journalists during periods of active conflict and the current situation where Muslims and non-Muslims in the state live in segregated areas.

For example, Ezekiel, a media manager employed by the state government-owned media in Plateau State attributed the poor performance of journalists in the state to lack of training. He explained that there are very few journalism schools in the country, thus creating a situation where graduates of programs like fine arts, political science, and history are employed as journalists by media organizations in the country. He noted:

How many journalism schools do we have? As a matter of fact, only one in the country...that is the established by the Federal Radio of Nigeria. Even at that, the focus is on broadcasting. How many journalism degree programs do we have in the country? We do not have basic training facilities for journalists. The situation is bad because the profession is for every tom, dick and harry. What do you expect? How do you expect them to perform well? (Ezekiel, Interview, April 22, 2014).

Ezekiel’s statement echoes interview data from other journalists and media managers like Awal, who believe that journalism profession in Nigeria has been infiltrated by “quacks:”

It is difficult to even say if journalism in Nigeria can be called a profession. We have a lot of fake journalists. I tell you most of those parading as journalists are mere hustlers. The Nigerian Union of Journalists has codes and ethic but lacks the willpower to implement it. Most of these people who call themselves journalists are dropouts who are rejected by other professions. (Awal, Interview, April 20, 2014).
Additionally, some journalists who participated in the study attribute a lack of professionalism to the government policies in Nigeria. The journalists specifically pointed to the procedures for appointing news directors and General Managers of public media organizations, which they claimed placed more emphasis on political patronage rather than the qualification of potential appointees. A journalist with the state government-owned television station said some state governors in Nigeria appoint political party men and women as a form of compensation.

A study conducted by Ndolo (2011) corroborates this finding and lists other reasons for the poor performance of journalists to include poor enumeration, no regular payment of salaries, and systematic collapse of educational institutions in the country. These issues have led to high level of corruption among journalists in the country (brown envelope syndrome). Some participants suggested that a few journalists interviewed only groups or individuals who could offer “brown envelopes.” According to a focus group discussant in this study, “news was for the highest bidder. If you don’t give a hefty envelope of ‘kwa’ (nick name of brown envelope), you are on your own.” Akpan, Ering, & Adeoye (2013) acknowledged that corruption among journalists is a major problem, which has hindered effective journalism practice in Nigeria. They said:

Before they can write stories or give coverage. They collect “sandwich”, extort gifts and gratifications either directly or indirectly all in attempts to influence news judgment. We now witness a lot of “cash and carry” or “Cajun pepper” journalism. For the same reason they become chatter boxes and sycophantic megaphones of government or their sponsors (p.2284).
Another issue the participants raised is the lack of security for journalists. Ndolo (2011) argued that during the military regimes in Nigeria, journalists were killed, imprisoned and media houses closed by the government. In the current political dispensation, some politicians use thugs and hired killers to intimidate journalists. Most journalists that were interviewed also cited lack of security during the conflict in Plateau State as a major challenge. While recalling stories about her experiences during the conflict, a participant lamented that a few journalists in the state lost their lives in the line of duty. Grace, a journalist, with a private media organization, recounted an instance where a Deputy Editor and a reporter with The Light Bearer Newspaper (a church based publication) were killed during the 2010 conflict:

On April 24, 2010, a mob at Gadan-Bako, Nassarawa Gwom, intercepted and killed these great journalists. They were on their way to report the story of a conflict that broke. Do you know what happened? No one heard from them for some hours. The father of one of these men called his phone and a strange voice was said to have retorted, ‘we have killed your son, you can do your worst.” Apart from these two, a reporter with the Nation newspaper, one of the national papers was also attacked. Why do you think journalists will risk their lives without any one concern about their lives and security? (Interview, April 5, 2014).

Grace explained that the security challenges that journalists in the state face are further exasperated by the segregation of communities in Jos North and South Local Government areas along religious lines. Investigations conducted by the researcher, which also confirms this argument, shows that, after the 2010 crises, most residents of Jos city were forced to relocate to “safe” neighborhoods. Jos city is currently polarized with Muslims living in Muslim-dominated neighborhoods and Christians staying in areas dominated by other Christians. The segregation has also affected the educational and
economic structures in the state. This means Muslims and Christians attend different schools and go to different markets. The current arrangement has great consequence for the security of journalists since, as there are currently no-go areas for people, depending on the religion they profess. That is why Gloria, another journalist, argued that the current segregated residential arrangement in Jos impacts on the ability of journalists to effectively perform their duties:

Imagine as a Christian, you cannot dare going into a place in Anwan-Rogo or Gangare to report on anything going on. It is like a death warrant. Same for a Muslim journalist, going to a place like Angwan Rukuba or Tudun Wada is like inviting disaster for you. So if journalists cannot do that and there is no guarantee that their lives will be protected, there is a gap. I mean something happens. When journalists can no longer report the news, a vacuum is created and it becomes a free for all. People take over. Its chaos, my sister! (Interview, April 4, 2014).

The import of this statement by Gloria was reflected in the statements of other participants who suggested that that the inability of journalists to efficiently perform their duties created an information gap, which conflict audiences are filling up. A focus group discussant’s statement offers a corollary of this argument: “Journalists most times rely on us the people for information and truly it all depends on who they are calling. People give them personal opinions and sometimes what they present may not be perceptions and what they present would not be what they had seen or experienced” (Thomas, Interview, January 28, 2014).

‘Dissemiusers’: Mobile Phone Technology and Social Media Access

A review of the findings show that access to cell technology and social media as an intervening variable played a crucial role in promoting the self-preservation and ‘attack’ as defensive communication behaviors of conflict audiences. Most participants
said the inability of the media to provide necessary information prompted audience members to seek alternative channels of communication. They said access to the Internet, social networking sites, and affordable cell phone technology allowed them to seek out information outside of traditional media sources. They were also able to produce and disseminate their own information.

The Internet has not only changed the way Nigerians are interacting, it has also revolutionized how they are interacting with each other and discussing national issues. The 2014 statistics show that there are over 67,101,452 Internet users in Nigeria, representing about 37.59 percent Internet penetration in the country. The perceived anonymity that the Web provides has emboldened Nigerians to express themselves, often without fear of arrest or intimidation.

Social networking and micro-blogging sites like Facebook and Twitter are also changing the dynamics of information sourcing and dissemination among citizens and challenging the dominant roles of the mostly government-owned traditional media outlets in monopolizing and controlling information. By providing alternative information and communication platforms, social Media are also empowering citizens to shape new public discourse in the country (Okonkwo, 2013).

The proliferation of cell phone technology in Nigeria as in other countries in Africa has made all this possible. The rate growth of mobile phone subscription in the continent is faster than any other continent in the world (Tortora & Rheault, 2014). With over 732 million mobile phone subscribers by 2012, Africa continent has a yearly cell phone growth rate of 20 percent (Pierskalla & Hollenbaugh, 2013). In Nigeria, the
Internet subscriber data released by the Nigerian Communications Commission shows as at August 2015, there are over 151 million active subscribers on the Global system for Mobile Communications (GSM) networks.

This figure is instructive if we consider that the 2006 census population in Nigeria data puts the national population at 140 million people. With poor Internet infrastructure, Internet-enabled mobile phones provide the most popular access to the Internet. A 2015 Ericsson Consumer Summary report indicates that 84 percent of smart phones in Nigeria have Internet access. Telecommunication companies like MTN Nigeria are daily in daily increasing their smartphone customer base. The company is currently collaborating with Samsung and Standard Chartered Bank in a device-funding program to ensure that more Nigerians can afford to pay for Internet-enabled devices (African Telecom Outlook, 2014). Mobile phone ownership among households in Nigeria surpasses ownership rates for radios at 83.4% and television at 74.6%. Similarly, younger and more educated Nigerians lead the way in cell phone ownership and Internet use. 9 out of 10 of those with at least a high school certificate own reported owning a cell phone (Broadcasting Board of Governors, 2014).

Like the Internet, Web 2.0 introduces a platform for social networking. Social networking sites such as Facebook attracts more than 7.1 million daily users in Nigeria (Emmanuel, 2015). WhatsApp and Blackberry messenger apps are also the preferred social media applications among Nigerians. This changing communication landscape is significant for Nigeria. Against the backdrop of the country’s history of repression during
military rule and limited freedom for the media, the Internet and social media presents citizens with an opportunity to express their opinions without fear or intimidation.

Although media audiences in the country seek information from other traditional media, such as newspapers, radio, and television, the Web provides an alternative means of information sourcing and dissemination for Nigerians. Most participants interviewed for this study said access to their cell phones and social media applications and platforms allowed them to receive real time information, videos, and pictures about the conflict as it unfolded in different parts of Plateau State. While responding to questions about information sourcing during conflict in the state, a participant said:

What I do is if I hear anything is happening in a particular area, I go on Facebook and ask my friends, to comment, those who live in those areas, to let us know what is happening. People responded those who lived there or those who know people in those areas make calls get the information and let us know the true situation of events. (Henry, Focus Group Discussion, January 13, 2014).

Makan, another participant said she relied on her mobile phone and social media for information during the crises:

My most reliable source of information has been my blackberry phone. I got pictures and information. People take that and for me, I relied on it more than the media. When they say it is happening and I see pictures I say yes, it is better. (Interview, February 6, 2014).

Some of the focus group discussants also explained that access to the Internet and social media helped to save the lives of people who would have ordinarily been affected by the crises. A focus group discussant recalled that he travelled out of the state when the 2010 crisis broke out. He said owning a cell phone did not only make it possible for him to keep in touch with his friends and family members in Jos, it allowed him to verify the credibility of information that was being circulated:
Based outside Jos for instance, a lot of times when the crisis was on, I called home to ask if they were safe, and then I get a picture. I will then call other different locations and if I had friends, I would call and see how they were doing, if they were okay and all, I will then get on-the-spot assessment of what was happening, which would of course assist me to appreciate how close to the truth reports from the media and social media. (Muktar, Focus Group Discussion, January 10, 2014).

**Availability and Affordability**

Apart from accessibility, the availability and affordability of cell phones and the Internet in Nigeria also play a crucial role in shaping the communication landscape. The possibility becomes more evident “given the combination of Nigeria’s relatively young population (around a third are between 15-34), discovery of the Internet using feature phones, introduction of flexi data tariffs designed for the mobile Internet on prepay” (GSMA Intelligence, 2014).

Operators of the Global System for Mobile Communication (GSM) in Nigeria are providing affordable basic phones and Internet-enabled devices for their customers. Information culled from the Website of MTN, a leading mobile operator in the country shows that the company is settling smartphones with prices ranging between 8000 naira ($40) and 18,000 naira ($90). The company’s first set of Android branded phones (with a lot of functions including Web access capabilities) are currently being sold for between 8 thousand naira ($40) and 10 thousand naira ($50). Other GSM operators like Etisalat, Airtel, and Globacom are providing similar services.

The influx of cheap and sometimes substandard phones also makes it possible that the average Nigeria can afford to own a cheap “smartphone. Olukotun (2012) argued that handset manufacturers in China are capitalizing on the high rate of poverty to export
substandard products in the country. For example, while a basic Nokia phone might sell for four thousand naira ($20), a Chinese “Nokia” Phone sells for one thousand five hundred naira ($7.50). A 2014 Nigeria Communications Week report indicates that about 1 million fake cell phones were imported into Nigeria. The phones, which Nigerians popularly refer to as “China or Chinco,” were valued at 2.7 billion naira. About 250 million counterfeit cell phones are sold in Nigeria annually.

Although fixed broadband remains unfordable for the vast majority of Nigerians, the Internet penetration rate through mobile services is on the rise. GSM operators in the country are increasingly making it possible for subscribers to afford data plans on the different networks (GSMA Intelligence, 2014). MTN services online shows that Nigerians can pay for a bundle plan of 10MB for 100 naira ($.50) for 24 hours. Other rates are 4.5GB for 2,500 naira ($12) for one month. MTN also has other packages that allow customers to make calls and send texts at very minimal charge. Mobile voice packages like ‘MTN smooth talk’ allows people to enjoy a flat rate of phone calls at 15 kobo (less than a penny), with free calls between 12:00 am and 4:30 am and free 10MB data weekly, as long as they maintain a monthly balance of 100 naira ($.50). Its counterpart, Nigerian-owned Globacom network offers its customers weekly plans of 65MB and 150MB at 400 naira ($2) and 500 naira ($2.5) respectively (Glo Nigeria, 2015).

Although, the growth of mobile phone communication, Internet penetration through mobile devices and current usage levels has made communication more effective, it has not been without disadvantages. Adeyanju & Haruna (2011) said, of the
2011 post-election violence in Nigeria, that people published false election results through Facebook and SMS that made some electorates believe that the election was rigged against a particular candidate. People used “all kinds of abusive languages, all manner of attacks and counter attacks” which increases tension and led to violence in different parts of the country (Nnanyelugo & Nwafor, 2013, p.32).

It is important to note that, for Nigeria, which has a long history of military rule, where the press freedom was restricted, and the current media system is democratic, yet regulated, unrestricted access to information and opportunities for free speech seems to given Nigerians a sense of ‘liberation.’ However, this liberation comes with a price for both the people and the government. In the last few years, there have been attempts by the government to clamp down on social media for what it perceives as the critical commentary of Nigerians on the Internet. Although online speech is not regulated in the country, in 2011, the National Assembly attempted to draft a bill on electronic transactions and fraud detection. The bill included a provision that would allow for the prosecution of people who participate in online speech. The bill proposed up to seven years imprisonment, fines or both for offenders (Freedom House, 2014). The Nigerian senate deleted this provision after a public backlash against the proposed bill.

With the lack of legislation over the Internet and mobile phone networks in the Nigeria, there is an open environment for communication. This has also created challenges for a country that is grappling with serious security challenges. The use of cell phones and social media by some Nigerians to incite violence, particularly during the 2015 national elections has drawn the attention of the Nigerian senate. In the first week of
December 2015, a bill that prescribes a two-year jail term for people who incite members of the public through social media passed the second reading in the Nigerian Senate. A section of the bill tagged, “A Bill for an Act to Prohibit Frivolous Petitions and other Matters Connected Therewith” reads:

Where any person through text message, tweets, WhatsApp or through any social media post any abusive statement knowing same to be false with intent to set the public against any person and group of persons, an institution of government or such bodies established by law shall be guilty of an offence and upon conviction, shall be liable to an imprisonment for two years or a fine of N2, 000,000.00 or both (Umoru & Erunke, 2015, p.6).

While there are concerns about the true intent of the bill, there is no doubt that some Nigerians have taken advantage of the unfettered access to cell phones and the Internet to make inciting and provocative statements. These have had serious corollaries for conflict environments like Plateau State. The results of this revealed that in spite of the benefits of cell phones and the Internet in providing alternative communication sources, most participants said unrestricted access empowered people to “control information and at the same time, misuse the opportunity.” The participants said by having uncontrolled access to these technologies, some people disseminated false information and in the process, elevated the level of rumor mongering in the state. Some of the participants said, rather than attempt to reduce tension in conflict situations, the information disseminated by some conflict audiences was deliberately framed to incite violence in the state. Yop, a focus group discussant, said people took advantage of the unrestricted access to cell phones and the Internet to ‘intentionally’ incite other people to commit acts of violence. She said:
There were issues of people sending text messages to carry unfounded false alarm. It was very bad really because it actually created a street mentality. You wake up in the morning and you receive a text message that this people are going to attack today and then send it to as many people as possible and so the whole town was on edge and then there was that tension that at the slightest. (Yop, Focus Group Discussion, January 13, 2014).

Like Yop, Gyang, another focus group discussant believed that people used social media to instigate violence:

The social media, Facebook, Twitter were very active but you will realize that most of the stuff that came out of those was more of inciting materials. “Look what they did to us” look at how they treated us” “see how they killed our people” so it was more of an inciting output. (Focus Group Discussion, January 13, 2014).

When asked to describe their experiences during the crises, some participants observed that access to cell phones and social media networks sparked rumors, thus allowing people to disseminate inciting religious and ethnic hate content. Thomas, a journalist with a newspaper published in the South-Western region of Nigeria, said people in Jos used text and voice messages to deliberately incite violence:

We had issues where people sent and used derogatory word against other groups, which when people get to see, aggravated situations. When one side uses it against the other, when they hear they feel bad and also did the same, it didn’t help the crises at all. (Interview, January 28, 2014).

While some messages were disseminated by some conflict audiences to deliberately incite violence in some communities, others had unintended consequences. For example, a participant narrated a story about his neighbor, an older woman, who reportedly died after receiving a call from one of her family members. Sounding upset, the participant said: “someone called a woman on phone and told her the violence in Jos had started. Because she had high blood pressure, she heard the message, slumped and
died. She wasn’t even there and truth is that nothing was even happening!” Two participants, Emma and Isa, also shared similar stories. According to Emma:

Sometimes, someone is just jogging, someone sees them, begins to run and a chain reaction till people get killed or get heart attack for nothing. When we lived in Dogon Karfe, we woke up one day to see people running around secretariat junction about 1 mile from our home. Soon text messages were sent and Facebook posts were circulated…rumors that people were attacking passersby in that place. People ran and avoided the area. Later we got to hear, the area was a raided by bees. (Focus Group Discussion, January 6, 2014).

For Isa, narratives of fear reinforced through text messages or phone calls have had devastating consequences:

You know sometimes, a thief might be caught in the market and some people are either trying to beat him up or hand him over to the police, some would just call or text, “it has started’ then people will start running away and some going home and as they are running, they will be telling people they meet along the way that it “has started” even when they do not see it. Before you know it, young males in an area, would mount roadblocks and start killings and most times, this is how violence escalates and spreads. (Focus Group Discussion, January 13, 2016).

These views highlight the consequence of the behavior that ‘dissemiusers’ engage and the impact on the information dissemination process. Through sharing or disseminating content, ‘dissemiusers’ offered an alternative information platform that met the growing demand for information among conflict audiences in Plateau State. While understandably, they filled an information vacuum created by a general mistrust that most conflict audiences had for the media and journalists in the state, having unrestricted access to and control over information allowed people send out unverifiable information. Most participants said individuals or groups also incite violence through the dissemination of ‘negative propaganda.’
This is demonstrated by the statement made by a participant who said: “some people circulated text messages and video clips that depicted alleged assault or violence against some groups through cell phones and on social media. The truth is that some conflict audiences reacted to these messages by physically attacking people they perceived as their enemies.” This statement and similar sentiments expressed by others point to the impact of ‘dissemiusers’ in shaping the behavior of people during the conflict.

This finding thus contributes to the body research that investigates the intersection between cell phone technology and violent collective action. Current research has focused more on investigating the impact of new communication technology on economic development and political collective action (Abraham, 2007; Aker, Ksoll, & Lybbert 2012; Breuer, Landman, and Farquhar 2012). Research has shown that the spread of cell phone technology in Africa has improved access to use and spread of information, provided income-generating opportunities through the creation of new jobs, and improved communication through social networks (Abraham, 2007). While the availability and accessibility of cell phones has been good for Africa, some scholars argue that the technology also presents consequences for the continent, “which is host to a large number of active or simmering conflicts (Pierskalla & Hollenbach, 2014, p.208).

Existing studies on cell phone technology and violent collective action, which have been mostly quantitative, have investigated the relationship between natural resources needed for cell phone production and human rights abuse in Africa (Sutherland, 2011) and local cell phone coverage and probability of political violence (Pierskalla &
Hollenbach, 2014). Other studies also examined the effect on mobile technology on the opportunities of ethnic conflict (Bailard, 2015) and the effect of cell phone violence on insurgent violence in countries like Iraq (Shapiro & Weidman, 2012). Although these studies point to the effect of cell phone coverage on the probability of violence and collective action especially among insurgent groups, the studies lack specific focus on the audience, their mobile phone usage and how it shapes their behavior during conflict.

Previous studies suggest that media effects will be more powerful in conflict zones since the environment facilitates uncertainty. For example, Bratic (2006) argued that media systems in conflict zones are often few and diverse. As a result, the few sources that exist, “generate a dominant opinion that silences the opinion of the minority” (p.5). The findings of this study however reveal that, while arguments of underdeveloped and less diverse media might hold true in a conflict zone like Plateau State, the availability of mobile technology and the Internet is becoming a game changer. As the behavior of ‘dissemiusers’ has shown, the opinions of the minority are no longer being silenced. Access to alternative channels of communication allows the ‘minority’ voices to be heard. It also provides a platform where the different voices in a conflict zone can be heard. The results also show that access to new communication technology makes widespread dissemination of information in conflict environments more likely, than was previously thought.

This also corroborates other findings on the role that social media played in what has now come to be famously known as the Arab Spring. Social media platforms such as Facebook, YouTube and Twitter empowered people, particularly those in non-democratic
countries in the Middle East to communicate and organize non-violent collective actions that led to the ouster of some authoritative regimes (Gire, 2014). Even though there are varied points of view about whether the success of the revolution can directly be linked to the use of new technology, there is no doubt that social media played allowed people to receive and share information in a region where repressive governments control the flow of information. Wolfsfeld, Segev & Sheafer (2013) acknowledged that social media can mobilize people to participate in political conflicts. According to them, social media, “can provide information and images that motivate people, they allow groups to organize and mobilize much more efficiently than in the past, and they allow protesters to convey messages to the outside world” (p5).

While this study did not set out to identify a correlation between cell phone/social access and violence action, the data does suggest that the communication behavior of ‘dissemiusers’ has the potential of inciting violence. Apart from empowering conflict audiences to seek out and disseminate information through other channels outside the traditional media, unrestricted access to cell phones and the Internet can make it possible for individuals to disseminate information that can potentially incite violence. This is more likely in conflict environments like Plateau State, where a deep distrust for media, perceived corruption and lack of professionalism among journalists made it difficult for the media to perform their social responsibilities to the people.

Summary of Findings

Theoretically, the intent of this study was to examine the relationship between the media, the audience and conflict. Specifically, the study was interested in expanding the
arguments of media effects, limited effects and individual framing models by conceptualizing the latent communication behavior of conflict audiences in Plateau State, Nigeria. The study attempted to investigate the causal conditions of the behavior and its role (if any) in shaping the mass communication process during the conflict.

By applying the Straussian grounded theory methodology, the study identified the pattern of behavior of conflict audiences in Plateau State. Through a rigorous application of the methodology, the study conceptualized “self-preservation” and “attacking as defensive communication” as patterns of communication strategies utilized by some conflict audiences in Plateau State. The data demonstrated that these strategies were adopted by some conflict audiences in the state either for self-preservation or to ‘attack’ other parties in the conflict. They also utilized the strategies to mobilize support for their different conflict agendas. Through constant comparison and saturation of the concepts, the phrase ‘dissemiusers,’ emerged as the core category of this study. The phrase was coined by the researcher to provide a conceptual understanding of the latent pattern of communication behavior that conflict audiences engage in as they interact with media content or each other during conflict.

The process of disseminating and using information for self-preservation and attack by conflict audiences was abstracted and conceptualized to explain their underlying communication behavior: hence, the concept “dissemiusers of information.” As an outcome of this study, a substantive grounded theory and theoretical model of “audience empowerment,” generated around the core category, are presented to explain the nature of the communication behavior of conflict audiences. Consequently, through
the theory, the study presents insight into the communication behavior of conflict audiences in Plateau State. At the core of the empowerment model is the concept of power; the power of the individual as an “influencer” in the information dissemination process in conflict environments.

In identifying the causal conditions of the behavior, data collected in this study established that the communication behavior of conflict audiences in Plateau State are shaped by the institutional and social structures in the society. The findings showed that the conflict and media environments in Plateau State are the predisposing micro and macro factors of this behavior. First, the study found that existing political and religious environment in Plateau State serve as structural determinants of the crises as well as the communication behavior of the audience. The indigene/settler question and the religious nature of the conflict played significant roles in determining how some conflict audiences in the state perceived the media and other parties in the conflict. Although all participants reported experiencing the conflict in Jos, Plateau State, their interpretation of the issues and communication strategies adopted were shaped by their perception of the political or religious issues in the conflict. The findings support the arguments of the grievance and religious conflict theory models, (discussed in Chapter 2) that injustice, marginalization, oppression, and underlying ethnic, political and/or religious hatreds among groups shape the conflict behavior of people (Collier & Hoeffler, 2001, 2004). This study shows that, apart from shaping the opinions of conflict audiences about the conflict, these factors provide a rallying point for framing their different agendas.
As a macro condition, the media environment/system was critical in shaping this communication behavior. The study findings also showed that current media environment in Plateau State accounts for why there is deep-seated distrust for the news media among conflict audiences. The study also identified that the perception of media bias among participants was shaped by other factors, which include the level in which individuals were involved with the conflict issues; lack of trust in the media ownership, and involvement of some elite opinion leaders. Like other studies, the findings also show that media ethnocentrism (Wolfsfeld, Alimi & Kailani, 2008; Weinmann & Wolfsfeld, 2002; Anastasia, Rose & Chapman), war/propaganda journalism agendas (Becker, 1992; Chomsky, 2001; Galtung, 2005) and journalistic objectivity (Tehranian, 2004; Lynch & McGoldrick, 2005; Hackket, 2006) contributed to narratives that incited violent behavior among the conflict audience. The data showed that the distrust among conflict audiences in Plateau State reduced the ability of the media to provide much needed information during periods of conflict, thus greatly undermining their agenda setting role.

Another significant finding is the lack of trained journalists, poor professional journalism practice, and a lack of adequate security for journalists are factors that played very crucial roles in shaping the behavior of ‘dissemiusers.’ The fact that most journalists and media managers interviewed admitted to relying on audience members for information in crises periods is an indictment on journalism practice in the state. These factors did not only create distrust and obstructed the media’s ability to perform its social responsibilities; it also created an information vacuum, which individuals and groups attempted to fill.
In response to the third research question, which seeks to find out to the extent to which communication behavior of “dissemiusers” are shaped by preexisting beliefs, the study findings showed that the preexisting schemas of conflict audiences, which is shaped by their personal experiences and political or religious beliefs, interfered with how they perceived the news media and other parties in the conflict. This finding support individual framing arguments that suggest that individual interaction with the news media are influenced, to a large extent, by underlying beliefs, opinions and experiences they might have about an issue. Individual frames serve as a mediating variable in the communication process. At the core of this argument is the assumption that conflict audiences perceive, interpret, and respond to conflict through frames, which evolve from underlying personal schemas and experiences (Shen, 2004; Chong & Druckman, 2007; Moaz, & Blondheim, 2010; Moaz, 2010). This study found the underlying beliefs of most participants and their level of involvement with the conflict issues shaped their perception of the media; the prevailing, issues vis-à-vis other groups in the conflict. Though the individual framing model explains the impact of underlying schema on audience behavior, this study takes the conversation further by identifying and explaining the type of behavior individuals engage in, and its potential impact on the mass communication process during the conflict.

In response to the fourth question, which seeks to examine the extent to which the two-step flow of communication with opinion leaders in Plateau State shaped the communication behavior of conflict audiences, the study found that some opinion leaders contributed to shaping the behavior of people during the conflict. Most conflict audiences
acknowledged the role of opinion leaders as ‘influencers,’ particularly in an ethnic, religious, and politically charged conflict environment like Plateau State. However, while most conflict audiences said they respected the views of their opinion leaders, the findings do not suggest that these leaders contributed significantly to the communication behavior of ‘dissemiusers.’ The results also showed that the conceptualization of opinion leadership among most conflict audiences in Jos were driven more by “trust” and the pre-existing historical traditional structures rather than existing theoretical arguments that link them to higher levels of education or more access to media and higher socio-economic status (Rogers & Kincaid, 1981; Katz & Lazarsfeld, 1955; Rogers, 2003). The findings also show that access to and interaction through new information and communication technology, like cell phones and the Internet can affect how people choose their opinion leaders. The study shows that, depending on the situation, everyone in a conflict situation can play the role of an opinion leader. In a highly fragmented and charged conflict environment like Plateau State, relationships are built on trust and, as some participants demonstrated, opinion leaders are chosen on the basis of such trust.

Another important finding is the role of mobile phone technology and social media as intervening variables in the communication behavior of ‘dissemiusers.’ The behavior revolves around accessibility, affordability and availability of cell phones and Internet connectivity among conflict audiences. Access to these new media technologies helped to provide alternative communication platforms for conflict audiences and also empowered them to control how they sought for or disseminated information.
These findings acknowledge key arguments of media and limited effect models that identify the media and opinion leaders as influencing public opinions and attitudes, particularly during conflict. The study also finds that preexisting schemas influence the perception of individuals about the media and other parties in the conflict. Although these models provide a lens through which the relationship between the media and audience can be understood, it can be implied that the models stand like two legs in a three-legged stool structure. Both media effects and individual framing models provide complementary viewpoints that explain the complexities in the mass communication process. The findings of this study strongly suggest that conflict audiences play an important role in the information dissemination process. As reflected in the core category of this study, the findings show that conflict audiences as “dissemiusers” engage in a form of communication behavior that empowers them to shape and sometimes, dictate the information dissemination process. Therefore, by introducing a grounded theory as the third leg of the structure, we are able to expand the conversation and advance understanding about the pattern of information sourcing and dissemination behavior of conflict. We are also able to identify the potential role of the behavior in shaping the media and conflict environment.

Toward a Theory of Audience Empowerment

The findings of this study can be summarized into a substantive grounded theory, “Grounded Theory of Audience Empowerment.” The theory is illustrated in Figure 5 as “A conflict model of audience empowerment” (see figure 5). The model, which was generated using Atlas-ti qualitative data management and analysis software, is generated
around the core category “conflict audiences as ‘dissemiusers’ of information,” which attempts to identify and explain, contextually, the latent communication behavior of conflict audiences in Jos, Plateau State. The model is therefore a theoretical conceptualization of the core category that emerged in this study.

The model presents a schematic conceptualization of the relationship between the audience, the media and conflict environment, which constitute categories or theoretical constructs that make up the theory. The presentation of the audience empowerment theory is divided into four parts: The theoretical construct, “audience empowerment,” “media environment,” “conflict environment” and “access to new communication technology.” These parts represent the key conceptual components of the theory.

*Theoretical Construct: Audience Empowerment*

The findings of this study acknowledge the arguments of media and limited effects and individual framing models on the impact of the media, opinion leaders and underlying schemas in shaping individuals at different stages of conflict (Bratic, 2006; Reuben, 2006). This substantive theory expands the conversation by conceptualizing the latent communication behavior of conflict audiences and the possible impact on the effect on the communication process. In brief, the substantive grounded theory states that conflict audiences as ‘dissemiusers’ of information are empowered by the media and conflict environment to (re)gain control of and shape the information dissemination process. The theoretical construct “audience empowerment” presented in this theory, describes a process through audiences (re) gain control over the communication process, particularly in conflict zones where there is a potential for dominant media sources to
silence minority voices. At the core of the empowerment model is the concept of power; the power that conflict audiences to have to “correct” what they might view as negative perceptions about them created by the news media or other parties in the conflict. The model suggests that individuals as “dissemiusers,” diffuse power over the information dissemination process and over other people in a conflict situation. This means empowering themselves to control when and how they disseminate information, to ‘influence’ other people and also ‘invoke’ a response (conflict behavior).

The model suggests that access to communication technologies like cell phones and the Internet empowers people to meet their information need and, at the same time, provides them an operative platform to mobilize support for their different agendas in the conflict. The audience empowerment model also suggests that such access facilitates a shift in power from the traditional media players to ordinary people in society.

Explanatory Variables

Audience empowerment theory identifies the communication behavior of “dissemiusers” as being by three explanatory variables: (1) the conflict environment in which the audience is situated; (2) the media environment/system; (3) accessibility, availability and affordability of communication technology. Each of the three variables is discussed below.

The Conflict Environment

The conflict environment, in this instance, includes underlying causes of a conflict and how that shapes the perception of people about the news media, other individuals and groups, as well as their conflict behaviors. The assumption here is that the
conflict environment shapes how people interact respond to the news media coverage of conflict and the different conflict issues. It also shapes how they interact with each other. For conflict audiences in Jos, the perception and level of involvement with the conflict issues shapes their response. For instance, while the perception of threat to religious identity led to the adoption of self-preservation strategies by some participants, others chose to ‘attack’ groups they perceived as politically marginalizing them. For either group, their perceptions of, or involvement with the conflict issues, led to their adoption of different communication approaches, as “self-preservation” or “attack as defensive communication,” which defined the way they disseminated information, interacted with content and with each other. The strategies also characterized how they mobilized support for their different agendas. A further analysis of the conflict environment shows that the behavior of conflict audiences in Plateau State was shaped by perceived economic, political marginalization, as well as ethnic or religious polarization. The findings thus validate the key arguments of the grievance and religious models of conflict reviewed in Chapter 2.

*The Media System (Environment)*

Although conflict environments create a need and demand for information, the media system, could make it potentially difficult for the media to perform this function. Findings of this study strongly suggests that these factors, particularly state government intervention in ownership and control of the media, the lack of development in journalistic professionalism, unethical journalism practice are institutional and social structures that make it difficult for journalists in the state to effectively perform their
duties, thus creating an information vacuum that ‘dissemiusers’ attempt to fill. Conflict audiences are thus empowered to serve as alternative communication sources. While previous research has shown that the lack of information at any stage of a conflict makes the audience vulnerable to manipulation, this study also finds that in some conflict environments, like Plateau State, that relationship is not necessarily linear. The data shows, in some instances, perceived manipulation of the media can be resisted by audience members, particularly when they have access to alternative communication channels. For some conflict audiences in Plateau State, such access also positioned them in a situation to become “influencers” of each other and, in some instances, the media. Like the conflict environment, the existing media environment in the state also shaped how people responded to the conflict issues and other parties. The findings of this study suggested that most conflict audiences adopted different communication strategies to issues like deep distrust for the media, perception of media bias, media ownership and structure, lack of ethical and professional journalism practice in the state. By using self-preservation and attack as defensive communication strategies, the conflict audience had unrestricted control over the information they consumed and disseminated. However, as this study has found, such audience “control” can have intended or unintended on the information dissemination process and the intractability of conflict.

Accessibility, Availability and Affordability (3As) of New Communication Technology

Conflict model of audience empowerment is presented as a mediating effect model. Individual framing and accessibility, availability and affordability of new media communication technology (cell phones and Internet) are presented as intervening
variables. These factors explain the relationship between the media, conflict environment, and the communication behavior of audience members during conflict. The theory suggests that, while the media and conflict structures that shape how conflict audiences, as ‘dissemiusers’ interpret and process information, access to new communication technologies empowers them to control how they seek for and share information.

This study identified the media, conflict environment, and access to new communication technology as being symbolically connected in six ways:

1. In conflict environments, like Plateau State, where there is a deep-seated distrust for the media, the communication technologies provide an alternative communication platform where the information needs of conflict audiences can be met.

2. The access to also gives conflict audiences a wider audience and opportunity to fill an information gap caused by the ‘perceived’ inability of news media (journalists) to provide much needed information during conflict.

3. Some conflict audiences who perceive their voices as being silenced by the news media have the power to ensure that their voices are now heard.

4. Access to these channels of communication allows for the production, use, or dissemination of information aimed at ‘self-preservation’ or ‘attack as defensive communication’ strategies adopted by some conflict audiences.

5. Cell phones and social media access empowered the audience to have unrestricted control over information.
6. Unrestricted access to and dissemination of information among conflict audiences has the potential for misuse with consequences for misinformation and violence escalation.

It should be noted that the “theory of audience empowerment” is a substantive grounded theory that was developed inductively to explain a phenomenon (communication behavior of conflict audiences in Plateau State). The theory, which is centered on the core category of this study, presents theoretical interrelationships between the audience, the media and the conflict environment. This researcher did not set out to obtain empirical substantiation for the hypotheses. Rather, the goal of this study, like other grounded theory studies, is to abstract concepts and integrates into them into a theory that explains underlying communication behavior of conflict audiences (Glaser, 2004).

This researcher acknowledges that the core concept generated in the study ‘conflict audiences as “dissemiusers” of information,’ may have different meanings for different people. In grounded theory methodology, the “…categories presented in the final theory are conceptual rather than descriptive, meaning that they can account for much variation in the data” (Breckenridge, 2012, p.14). Since the focus is on conceptualization, the researcher acknowledges the modifiability of the theory. This suggests the possibility that the final theory presented in this study can be revised when exposed to new data.
Figure 5 A Conflict Model of Audience Empowerment.
CHAPTER 6: CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This study set out to investigate the communication (information seeking and sharing) behavior of conflict audiences in Plateau State and its outcome on the information dissemination process. This chapter dwells on the research and policy contributions of this dissertation and provides recommendations for future research and practice. The chapter concludes with a reflexivity statement, which reflects on the professional and personal experiences of the researcher and examines how these might have shaped (or not shaped) the dissertation research process.

Theoretical Implications of the Findings

The findings of this study have several theoretical implications:

One, though results of study validate dominant arguments about the power of the media and opinion leaders to influence the opinions and attitudes of people, the findings also contradict the dominant conceptualization of definition of opinion leaders. This study finds rather than higher socio-economic status, education and exposure to the media, a wide range of variables that include lack of trust and existing historical societal structures, determine how some societies might conceptualize opinion leaders. Additionally, access to the internet and social media among conflict audiences in conflict can also change how we study opinion leadership. This study finds rather than a “traditional” two-step flow of communication, information was disseminated by “dissemiusers,” a new breed of a new breed of opinion leaders who are using new communication technology to shape and sometimes, dictate narratives in conflict environments.
Two, with reference to the individual framing model, the study finding support existing studies that individual schemas of frames play an important role in shaping how people respond to news media frames (Elliot, Gray & Lewicki, 2003; Lewicki, Gray & Elliot, 2003; Kaufman, Elliot & Shumeli, 2013; Scheufele, 1999; Cheldin, Druckman, & Fast, 2003). As reviewed in Chapter 2, individual frames or self-schemas of people sometimes become the lens through which they perceive the media and other (Kaufman, Elliot & Shumeli, 2013; Lewicki, Gray & Elliot, 2003).

The study findings corroborate existing arguments that preexisting personal, religious, political beliefs or past experiences contribute to individual biases against the media. Like previous research has shown, the partisan involvement with the conflict issues and their distrust for the information source (media) made it more likely that for study participants to perceive the media as biased (Vallone et al., 1985; Gunther and Schmitt, 2004; Reid, 2012). The recurrence of armed violence and the political/religious environment in Plateau State made it more likely that people relied on individual frames to interpret and process information. This includes information presented by the media and through non-mediated channels. The data showed that the highly charged religious and political environment also led to a fragmented audience, whose self-activated frames played a crucial role in the how they used and disseminated information. While the findings support theoretical explanations that perception of bias is high when people do not trust the media, the results of the study also show that this perception can also exist in non-mediated channels of communication, particularly in conflict environments where
trust. Findings of this study therefore have implications on how we can understand these theories within the context of conflict.

Three, while the study showed that the perception of some participants about the media and other parties in the conflict, were to an extent, influenced by the news media coverage of the events. This study, also notes that the availability of alternative communication sources in conflict environments has the capacity to change this dynamic. Furthermore, this finding contradicts the argument by Bratic (2006) that only a few news sources dominate the media environment in conflict situations. As this study has shown, the communication behavior of “dissemiusers,” promoted by the availability of the new media, e.g. cell phones and the Internet can provide minority voices with a platform where their opinions can be heard. The implication is that there is a propagation of different voices and agendas in the media environment. This does not only reduce the agenda-setting influence of the media, it has the potential of changing the erstwhile perceived homogeneity of conflict audiences. The finding also shows that the communication behavior of conflict audiences can have an impact on both the information dissemination process and the complexities of the conflict environment.

Four, the findings of this study also have implications on how conflict audiences are conceptualized. As this study has established, conflict audiences as ‘dissemiusers’ of information” played a critical role in shaping the mass communication process in Plateau State, an armed conflict zone. The resultant substantive theory presented in this study, “the grounded theory of audience empowerment” furthers this understanding by conceptualizing that conflict audiences tend to engage in a form of communication
behavior that empowers them to (re) gain control of information dissemination. The study also conceptualized “dissemiusers,” the communication behavior of the audience, as an agency in relation to structure. Structure in the context of this study refers to the conflict environment and media system. The findings of this study show the relationship between these structures and the behavior of conflict audiences as symbiotic and mutually reinforcing. Furthermore, structural conditions at the macro and micro levels help to shape how the audiences interpret, process, and present information. It also showed that some conflict audiences adopted self-preservation and attack as defensive communication strategies, depending on how they were affected by the media and political or religious structures in the State. Both the media and conflict environment shape structures can shape behavior of the audience. As this study has also shown, the behaviors as “dissemiusers” are can potentially shape these structures more than previously thought.

With regard to the behavior of “dissemiusers,” the finding of this study carries meaningful implication for research on new communication technologies and the likelihood of violence escalation among conflict audiences. Current research has focused on investigating the relationship between cell phone coverage and probability of violence, particularly among rebel groups (Bailard, 2015; Pierskalla & Hollenbach, 2014; Shapiro & Weidman, 2012). It is, however, noted from this study that the spread of the mobile phone technology and access to the Internet has no doubt revolutionized and improved communication among Nigerians at all levels of the social strata. The study also finds that, in underdeveloped and less diverse media systems in countries like Nigeria, access to these new technologies is providing citizens with alternative communication channels.
It is even more critical for a conflict environment like Plateau State, where there is the possibility of minority voices being silenced. The availability, affordability, and accessibility of these new communication technologies therefore empower individuals to (re)gain control of the information dissemination process. It also allows them to tell their own side of the story through the production, dissemination and interaction with media content. Similarly, this study also found out that, while this form of communication behavior can be beneficial to the audiences, it might have negative consequences on the intractability of the conflict. For instance, the findings show that behavior of “dissemiusers” has the potential of inciting violence. By using other methodologies, future studies can test empirical relationships between access to cell phones and Internet among conflict audiences and violence escalation.

Five, the findings also showed that the perception of some participants about the media and other parties in the conflict, were to an extent, influenced by the news media coverage of the events. This study, however, notes that the availability of alternative communication sources in conflict environments has the capacity to change this dynamic. Furthermore, this finding contradicts the argument by Bratic (2006) that only a few news sources dominate the media environment in conflict situations. As this study has shown, the communication behavior of “dissemiusers,” promoted by the availability of the new media, e.g. cell phones and the Internet can provide minority voices with a platform where their opinions can be heard. The implication is that there is a propagation of different voices and agendas in the media environment. This does not only reduce the agenda-setting influence of the media, it has the potential of changing the erstwhile
perceived homogeneity of conflict audiences. The finding also shows that the communication behavior of conflict audiences can have an impact on both the information dissemination process and the complexities of the conflict environment.

Although this study does not provide empirical support for this relationship, the abstraction and conceptualization of the communication behavior of conflict audiences from the data indicates a probability that macro and macro factors in conflict environments shape the communication behavior of conflict audiences. Similarly, the underdeveloped media systems and lack of professionalism among journalists in the state created an information vacuum that individuals stepped in to fill. As the situation in Plateau State has shown, conflict audiences took control of the information dissemination process and even became information sources for the news media. In many instances, the audience became the news reporters, while the media became the audience. With this kind of dynamics playing out in a conflict environment like Plateau State, the conflict audience becomes the proverbial tail that wags the dog.

Finally, the findings also validate emerging scholarly arguments on how new communication technology, particularly the Internet is creating new opinion leaders (Bowman & Lewis, 2003). Access to mobile communication technology and the Internet is causing a shift in power and perceived influence from the traditional media to individual audience members. This finding presents an important implication for understanding the new breed of “influencers,” particularly in conflict situations; the power they can exert in the information dissemination process and its potential impact on the escalation or de-escalation of violence.
Implications for Practice

One particular policy finding, with extensive theoretical underpinnings, is the relationship between the media environment/system and the audience, particularly in conflict situations. Research has established the agenda-setting power of the media and its effect on the behavior of people in conflict situations (Anastasia, Rose & Chapman, 2005; Reuben, 2009; Sheafer & Dvir-Gvirsman, 2010; Wolfsfeld, 2004). The media in Nigeria is known to be dominated and controlled by the elite (Olayiwola, 1991). The Nigeria Police Service in Plateau State identified the state government-owned media as instigating violence in the 2010 crises (Ajobe, 2010). While the findings of this study corroborate these arguments, the data also shows that the communication behavior of conflict audiences contributed to the escalation of violence in Plateau State. The findings further indicate that factors like a lack of professionalism in journalism, professional misconduct, and corruption, affected the ability of the news media to effectively perform their duties. This shortcoming created an information vacuum, which individuals filled in with serious negative consequences on the conflict. The theoretical argument for this relationship suggests the need for a policy review that will prescribe appropriate professional development for journalists in Nigeria. It is also important to restore the credibility of the profession by redefining membership requirements, and through procedures for recruitment and implementing a code of conduct for journalists.

Another practical implication of the study has to do with understanding conflict audiences and identifying the strategic role they play in the information dissemination
process. Some scholars have suggested that media systems in conflict situations are weak and less diverse (Bratic, 2006, p. 5), leading to a situation where “majority opinions leads to suppression of minority opinions” (p.6). However, data from this study seem to suggest that the accessibility and of cell phones and the Internet in conflict environments can potentially change that narrative. First of all, diversity of information sources is created when conflict audiences have access to these technologies. Secondly, the power of influence in conflict situations can move from the traditional media to the audience, also from the elite to ordinary citizens. This scenario provided alternative information sources for conflict audiences in Plateau State. It also reduced the perceived influence of government-owned media over the people. However, as this study has shown, the conflict environment and the absence of gatekeeping mechanisms have the potential for misinformation and violence incitement among conflict audiences.

Additionally, understanding the communication behavior of conflict audiences within the context of the current “regulated and democratic” media system in Nigeria can provide a framework through, which their potential can be harnessed and channeled towards more positive outcomes. Therefore a policy that allows for establishment of community radios can be reviewed. Communities should be encouraged to establish such stations. By encouraging open public conversations, people can express their opinions and also have an opportunity to verify the information they receive through their cell phones and social media on phone-in, community radio programs. While this may not necessarily stop or people from using these outlets to incite violence, it can serve as a check and balance mechanism, which is currently lacking in Plateau State.
Recommendations for Future Research

Several opportunities exist for future research and practice.

1. The “conflict model of audience empowerment” introduced in this dissertation provides a natural guide for future research. For example, the model suggests that both the media and conflict environment shape the behavior of communication behavior of conflict audiences. It also proposes that the communication behavior of the audience as “dissemiusers” shape both the media and the conflict environments in which they are situated. While this finding infers that conflict audiences, the media, and conflict environments influence each other to a greater degree than in the past, future research will need to interrogate this issue further by providing empirical evidence of these relationships.

2. The concept “dissemiusers,” as a core category of this study aims at conceptualizing the kind of behavior that conflict audiences could engage in while interacting with content and each other. The concept points to the role of dissemination as a potent tool for mass mobilization. It also identifies the behavior as being driven by user-to-user interaction and user-to-content interactions. As disseminators and users of information, access to new communication technology like cell phones and the Internet empowers individuals to change and, sometimes, dictate the narratives during conflict situations. While this might raise questions about power relations in the media landscape, more research may be needed to examine if there is a significant shift in the balance of power between the conflict audiences and the traditional media.
as well as its implication on the media environment, particularly during conflict situations.

3. The model of audience empowerment also suggests that the behavior of “dissemiusers” has the potential to precipitate the escalation of violence in conflict environments. Current studies on mobile phone technology use and armed conflict identify a relationship between the availability of cell phone coverage and political violence, especially among rebel groups. The findings of this study indicate that access to cell phones and social media increased the probability of violence in some communities in Plateau State. However, since the findings only imply an association between the two, future studies can engage this question further by testing if there is indeed any empirical relationship between access to cell phones and social media and violence escalation among conflict audiences.

4. This study presents supporting evidence that explain how access to these technologies can shape both the media and conflict environments. Data collected from participants showed that, while such access offered alternative information sources, the use of the technologies also had an effect on the behavior of conflict audiences. There is no doubt that the benefits of these communication technologies might outweigh the negative effects. This means that the communication behavior of conflict audiences can be channeled towards more peaceful outcomes. Further studies are therefore recommended to identify what
mechanisms promote positive versus negative audience engagement in conflict environments.

Recommendations for Practice

1. The failure of journalists in Plateau State to effectively perform their duties in conflict situations created an information vacuum that conflict audiences stepped in to fill. Participants in this study, including journalists and media managers, identified lack of training, professionalism and ethical journalism practices as major factors that promote audience distrust of the media in the state. These factors have also made it difficult for the media to effectively perform its duties in a conflict environment like Plateau State. In several instances, journalists relied on individuals and groups for information, which sometimes turned out to be false. It is therefore important to build the capacity of current and future journalists in professional journalism. This can be achieved in the following ways:

   a) The Nigeria Union of Journalists should professionalize the practice by putting in place regulations that will prescribe a minimum professional qualification requirement for journalism practice. This can also serve as a guide for employers and media organizations. Doing that will reduce the number of “quacks” currently practicing as journalists. It will also ensure that only professionally qualified people are employed and licensed to practice as journalists in Nigeria.
b) The “brown envelope syndrome” has been the bane of journalism in Nigeria. Participants of this study identified corruption among journalists as a major problem hindering ethical professional practice. Journalists demand for bribes before they cover and report stories. Members of some communities in Plateau State suggested that journalists failed to effectively cover stories during conflicts because there was no money to be made. Poor remuneration and lack of infrastructure were identified by participants as some of the reasons why some journalists engage in this practice. The recommendation is for the Nigerian Union of Journalists to work with employers to fix salaries and allowances, while unethical journalists are sanctioned.

c) More journalism schools need to be established in Nigeria. There is only one journalism school in the country, the Nigerian Institute of Journalism. A look at the institution’s website shows the school offers only an equivalent of the associate degree in Mass Communication, with certificate courses in Journalism. There are also no undergraduate Journalism programs in Nigerian universities. Most universities offer a few journalism courses as part of Mass Communication undergraduate programs. This means that most journalists in Nigeria lack basic professional training. It is therefore recommended that the Nigerian Union of
Journalists and the National Universities Commission push across legislation for the establishment of more journalism programs in the country.

d) While the findings of this study show that most journalists were ill-equipped for standard professional practice, there was a general perception that most were biased. Some participants argued that journalists, particularly those employed by the state government-owned media, incited some groups to commit acts of violence. It is therefore important that practicing journalists need to be trained and re-trained, particularly in conflict-sensitive journalism. This is a form of practice that allows a journalist “search for new ideas and new voices about conflict” (Howard, 2003, p.15). Such training will equip journalists to promote dialogue and open up the media space to accommodate diverse voices. They will also be able to promote conflict transformation and peace building through their coverage and reportage of news. The focus on journalists and professionalism is a crucial finding of this study. The study findings indicate poor professional practices have negative impact on the media system/environment, which in turn, has reinforced the communication behavior of conflict audiences. With the media and the people working together, the situation in Plateau State could move beyond the
current struggle to a partnership where the power distribution can
serve the interest of both the media and the people.

Reflexive Statement: Taking a Step Back to Reflect on the Research Journey

We are a product of our historical and cultural background and therefore we
accept that we cannot remove this culture and history from ourselves, as this in
part is what underpins our knowledge of the world (Moon, 2008, p.77).

Reflexivity allows a researcher identify who they are in relation to what they are
studying. Preissle (2008) said reflexive statements: (a) helps the researcher identify how
their personal experiences, cultural viewpoints, and professional backgrounds might
impact on their research; (b) it also allows the researcher to present these standpoints to
other scholars in other to preserve the credibility, quality and authenticity of the study.
While there is a possibility that reflexivity might bias the research process, I, like some
scholars, believe that acknowledging these viewpoints will provide the audience with the
opportunity to understand how the researcher “goes about the process of knowledge
construction during a particular study “(Watt, 2007, p.84). For me, this reflexive
statement allows me to acknowledge my personal and professional position in the
research and also to explain how I was able to navigate it in the research process.

As a Nigerian from Plateau State, in North-Central region of the country, I
witnessed and experienced first-hand, the conflict, which has come to be popularly
referred to as the “Jos crises.’ I remember the sleepless nights and occasions when I ran
with my daughter and other members of my family every time we heard the sound of gun
shots. I lost friends and family members to the conflict. One of whom was Nathan
Dabang, a journalist who was killed in the line of duty (I made reference to him in the narrative).

I have also not been in contact with friends and acquaintances who no longer maintain communication with me because we share different religious ideologies. Conducting research in Jos was, in a way, difficult because working the Plateau State has always evoked in me, very conflicting emotions. Acknowledging these issues was very important for the study and also for me.

First of all, having a personal experience with the conflict gave me an advantage because I can say that I know the issues involved. Because I conducted a research on the conflict also means that this is a topic and a conflict area I am very comfortable with. This means I had an advantage when it comes to gaining access into the research site. While these factors no doubt aided my data collection and analysis, they also presented difficulties for my study.

For example, being familiar with the environment and my personal experiences with the conflict raised difficult power issues that I sometimes felt could compromise me and my ability to go into the process with an open mind. Some of these power imbalances were shaped by the how some of the participants reacted to the idea that I shared a different faith than theirs. Being a Christian, for example, at times, presented a problem because gaining trust from Muslims in a very divisive conflict was difficult. Similarly, being a former journalist created trust issues between a number of participants and me.

Most of them also perceived my interviews as an extension of my duties as a journalist (I was employed by the Plateau State government), rather than a Ph.D.
research. Some interviews began with participants rejecting my request to use an audio recorder, telling me they did not want to be quoted. I also had an experience with an educator (Muslim) whom I have personally known and related with for over 10 years, demanding for an authorization letter from Ohio University as proof. Even after I showed him the IRB approval letter and provided phone numbers he could call to verify my claims, he still requested for my school identity card “just to be sure.” It was also interesting that the interview I conducted with him was the shortest (lasted for 10 minutes) because he gave me a “yes” “no” or “I do not think” answers. He also refused to answer follow-up or probe questions. That experience showed me how difficult it was to navigate a research field, particularly in conflict environments where fear and distrust is prevalent.

To counteract these imbalances, I relied on some resources available to me. For example, I worked for over 13 years as a news reporter, news caster, and news producer with the Plateau Radio and Television stations and for a number of years as a Press Secretary with the Plateau State Government Office. My experiences as a journalist and an administrator allowed me to develop friendships with people of different faiths. This turned out to be an asset because some of these acquaintances served as gatekeepers who helped to reduce tension and gain the trust of participants.

As a former Chairman of the Nigerian Union of Journalists at the Plateau Radio Television Corporation Chapel, and also an ex-Chairman of the Education Committee, Plateau State Council of the Nigeria Union of Journalists, I had the opportunity to cover and report the conflict when it broke out in 2001. This meant having first-hand
knowledge of the crisis. At that time, I was able to interact with people in Jos North Local government area, particularly with heads and leaders of different communities; some of whom served as gatekeepers for this study.

I attempted to counteract the power imbalances by working with the participants to determine date, time, and location of the interviews and focus group discussions, answering questions before, during, and after the interviews and creating a safe place for participants to express themselves. I held meetings where and when necessary, to respond to concerns or questions that bordered on my research.

I was also able to position myself in the study by developing theoretical sensitivity. In grounded theory, theoretical sensitivity means “the ability to recognize and extract from the data, elements that have relevance for your emerging theory (Birks & Mills, 2011, p.59).

Theoretical Sensitivity

Theoretical sensitivity employs that the researcher reflects on their experiences, personal and professional history, read related literature and rely on different analytical tools and techniques. Having the personal and professional experience meant I had a baseline position going into the study. I utilized analytical tools proposed by Birks & Mills (2011); these include constant data comparison, use of questions, relying on personal experiences, and drawing of tables and models to identify relationships between categories.

One of the problems I encountered was during open coding phase of the data analysis. Having prior knowledge, through the literature review, created a situation where
the initial codes I generated were theoretical and the analysis process, more deductive. Similarly, I observed that my own experiences, both personal and professional began to force how the categories emerged. By forcing, I lost sight of the bigger picture, which was to conceptualize the latent pattern of communication behavior among conflict audiences (participants). I first generated a set of themes, which I shared with a colleague who was familiar with the conflict. The colleague observed that the themes I had generated seemed preconceived. He also reminded me that my goal was to conceptualize rather than describe the behavior. This meant I had to look at the data again, merge and regroup the categories, and describe the different dimensions.

By taking these steps, I was able to identify relationships and identify specific phrases or words used by the participants to describe certain actions they took and why. Using these tools allowed me to identify and generate two key categories that explained the communicative strategies that some conflict audiences used to produce and disseminate information. I used the consequential matrix by drawing a table to identify causal conditions, actions/interactions, and consequences of these categories. I also developed theoretical questions that allowed me to understand what was going on in the data. Through constant comparison, I was able to develop a core category. I used a similar matrix to develop the dimensions of the category and its relationship to the other categories. I used new data to ensure saturation of the core category. The process did not only make me become more sensitive to the overall goal of the study (research questions), it allowed me to identify things I may have missed or overlooked.
Through reflexivity, I was able to identify my personal experiences and preconceived ideas during the process. This was useful because it increased my theoretical sensitivity and helped me to identify and acknowledge how much I had grown through the research process. The research process had an influence on me; I learned how to look at data through different interpretative lenses. Rather than remain fixated on the data and was happening in the immediate, I looked at the bigger picture. I developed a story line and used the data to develop the key concepts.

Even though the theory proposed in Chapter 5 emerged from the data, meaning in this study was also created from a “situational context” or “praxis” (Patton, 2002, p.115). I also acknowledge that “all research is interpretative; it is guided by the researcher’s set of beliefs and feelings of the world and how it should be understood and studied (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005, p.22). However, maintaining theoretical sensitivity and constant comparison of data helped to ensure that conceptualization of the key concepts and the core category were driven by the data.
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APPENDIX A: INTERVIEW PROTOCOL (PHASE 1: DATA COLLECTION)

1. How did you access information during conflict?

2. Did you rely on the media for news and information about the conflict in Plateau State?

3. What do you think about the way the media covered and presented news during the conflict in Plateau State?

4. What about the state-owned media? What is your impression about the performance of the state government-owned media?

5. Did you trust the information that the news media present? Why? Or why not?

6. In your opinion, do you think news media coverage of the conflict incited the level of violence? Why?

7. Can you share the experiences you have had with the conflict in Jos?

8. Would you say these experiences (negative or positive) have anything to do with the way you feel about the media? Can you explain how?

9. Who do you identify as an opinion leader or leaders? Why?

10. What kind of information did you get from these opinion leaders?

11. Did you trust the information you received from opinion leaders?

12. Apart from the media, what other sources did you rely upon for information during the conflict?
APPENDIX B: INTERVIEW QUESTIONS (GUIDED FIRST PHASE OF THEORETICAL SAMPLING).

1. A number of people I interviewed for this study expressed a deep distrust for the media, particularly its coverage of the conflict. What do you have to say about that?

2. Some also said that journalists in the state were biased in their reporting of the conflict. How true is this statement?

3. A few study of the study participants alleged that journalists relied on individuals or groups for information during the conflict in Plateau State. What is your response to that allegation?

4. Some of the study participants raised the issue of lack of professionalism and problem of “kwa” (brown envelope) as one of the reasons why they do not trust the media. What can you say about this?
APPENDIX C: INTERVIEW QUESTIONS (GUIDED SECOND PHASE OF THEORETICAL SAMPLING).

1. In some interviews I conducted, some people told me they relied on social media and text messages for information. Why was that necessary?

2. Would you say information disseminated through social media or cell phones had any impact on the conflict as a whole? If yes, in what way? If no, why not?

3. A number of people I interviewed said the audience controlled how information was distributed during conflict. What do you say about that?

4. Do you think the audience control of information affected the conflict? If yes, How? If no, why not?
APPENDIX D: SNAP SHOT OF INITIAL CODING ON ATLAS-TI