

ANALYSIS OF SELECT NEWSPAPERS' REPRESENTATION OF THE THREE MAJOR CANDIDATES IN THE FEBRUARY 25, 2023 PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION IN NIGERIA

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Abstract: At the backdrop of the belief in the power of the media to influence peoples' voting decisions during elections and in order to understand media impact on voter behavior in the February 25, 2023 presidential election in Nigeria, this study examines select newspapers' representations of the three leading candidates in the 8 months period running up to the February 25, 2023 presidential election in Nigeria. Guided by the Agenda setting and Framing theories, the study used Content analysis design to achieve two objectives, namely: ascertain the dominant frames in the news stories and the purposes for which the newspapers covered the candidate's vis a vis the election's outcome. Using the composite week sampling technique and the systematic random sampling procedure, the study sourced 674 news stories from 200 samples obtained from a population of 1210 editions of five purposively selected newspapers. The newspapers include: *This Day*, *Guardian*, *Punch*, *Sun*, and *Leadership* newspapers. The study found that the newspapers represented the candidates using seven recurrent news frames, namely: ethnic, religious, political-support, good governance, economic recovery, corruption and problem-solution frames. While the presidential candidates of the APC and the PDP were majorly represented using ethnic, religious and political support frames, the candidate of the LP was represented using good governance, problem solution and economic recovery frames. The study also found that the newspapers' purpose of coverage of the candidate of the APC placed high on political castigation, while that of PDP placed high on promotion/persuasion and political endorsement, and that of LP led in promotion/persuasion, information and education. The study concludes that although the newspapers gave the candidates adequate coverage and varied representation, the intended media impact was not absolute. For example, the media popularity of the candidate of the LP whose news stories were most informative and educative and who was the famously framed and represented using good governance, problem solution and economic recovery frames never reflected in the outcome of the election, as opposed to that of APC who was defamed and most negatively represented in ethnic and religious and corruption gabs. Media competed with pre-determined attitude of the voters and other social factors such as ethnicity, religion, and vote buying to influence voters' behavior. The study recommends among others, that the media should always give unbiased representation to all candidates and be careful in their choices of news frames so as not to relegate the major issues to the background.

Key Words: Newspaper. Representation. Presidential. election. Nigeria. 2023.

Introduction

Background

Media representation is concerned with how media texts deal with and present social realities to an audience. Representation of political elites constitutes an important aspect of mass media role in politics (Boomgaarden, 2017). Media representation can impact and shape particular public beliefs and attitude as well as contribute to social change (Yildiz, et.al, 2022). Consequently, the image of a candidate in an election is of utmost importance to the success of the candidate if fairly presented to the voters through media representations (Devaney, 2013). Media texts therefore, have the power to shape audience's understanding of important issues as media representations of socio-political phenomena in news reports help the public to be well informed to take meaningful decisions concerning those issues and events that could affect their lives for at least a period of four years.

February 25, 2023 presidential election in Nigeria came with great expectations as Nigerians went to the polls to elect their president from among many candidates offered by the registered political parties. Periodic election such as this is no doubt one of the fundamental components of the democratic process, providing the citizens with the opportunity to choose their representatives especially when the process is free and fair (Oyovbaire, 1987). The election came with electioneering campaigns and making sense out of the many candidates on offer seemed to be a challenge to the electorates and this no doubt called for responsible media representation. This is because the media as purveyors of information lubricate the political system as they provide platforms for public debates and exchange of political ideals and ideologies during electioneering campaigns and in so doing create a critical link between the politicians and the citizens (Atkinson & Krebs, 2008).

Statement of the problem and scope of the study

As millions of Nigerians turn to the newspapers daily for news on politics, an understanding of how nationally circulating' newspapers in Nigeria dealt with and presented the three major presidential candidates in the February 25, 2023 presidential election in Nigeria could be important in understanding media impact on voters' decision making in Nigeria. This is more so as news frames in which the candidates are cast and the purposes for which the media covered them could play a role in shaping and influencing voter beliefs and attitude. Hence, considering the power of media reports in influencing peoples' voting decisions in an election, and in order to understand media impact on voter behavior in the February 25, 2023 presidential election in Nigeria, this study comparatively examined select newspapers' representations of the three major candidates in the eight months period running up to the election. The study examined texts from five purposively selected newspapers on the three candidates of All Peoples Congress (the APC), Peoples Democratic Party (the PDP) and Labour Party (the LP), namely: *This-Day*, *Leadership*, *Sun*, *Punch* and *Guardian* newspapers. The choice of these newspapers was **justified** with respect to their wide circulation and by their geographical locations, ownership, and ethno-religious and political affiliations.

Research objectives

While the general objective is the examining of the framing of the three major candidates, the specific objectives are:

1. To identify the recurrent frames used by the select newspapers in their representations of the three major candidates in the February 25, 2023 presidential election in Nigeria.

2. To understand the purposes for which the select newspapers covered each of the three major candidates in the February 25, 2023 presidential election in Nigeria.

Research Questions

Deriving from the objectives this study sourced data to answer the following research questions:

1. What are the recurrent news frames used by the select newspapers in their representations of the three major candidates in the February 25, 2023 presidential election in Nigeria?
2. What are the purposes for which the select newspapers covered each of the three major candidates in the February 25, 2023 presidential election in Nigeria?

Review of related literature

Secondary sources including textbooks, journal articles, internet sources, and other publications provided related materials.

Theoretical frameworks

This study anchors on media Agenda setting and Framing theories.

The agenda setting theory: formally propounded by McComb and Shaw (1972) assumes that the media set public agenda by predetermining the importance media consumers placed on news topics through quantity and prominence of reportage and the number of controversies generated in the text. The theory describes the ability of the news media to influence the importance the audience exposed to the same media messages placed on the topics of the news stories (McCombs and Reynolds, 2002), suggesting that the mass media texts have the ability to shape public opinion. This ability is driven by mass media's bias on topics such as politics, economy, religion, culture, etc. Hence media shape public opinion by determining what issues that are given the most attention or prominence in the news. Agenda setting implies that the mass media pre-determine what issues the audiences are to regard as important at a given time in a given society by making those issues visible and striking (McCombs and Shaw, 1972).

The object of analysis in most works in agenda setting theory have public issues or party candidates as units of analysis, but beyond this, there exists a second level of agenda setting: the attribute agenda (McCombs & Reynolds, 2009). This is to say that each of the objects on an agenda has many attributes, which are characteristics and properties that describe them. As objects on agenda vary in salience so do their attributes. Both the selection of objects for attention and the selection of attributes for picturing those objects are powerful agenda setting roles. An important part of the news agenda is the attributes that journalists and subsequently, members of the public have in mind when they think and talk about each object (McCombs & Reynolds, 2009). Public issues like all other objects of analysis have attributes. These attributes (i.e., different aspects of issues) are emphasized to varying degrees in the news to influence how people think and talk about the issues. This is the link between agenda setting and the idea of news framing, in that both show the various ways journalists and their audiences view daily news stories.

Media framing theory: propounded by Goffman (1974) has the basic assumption that media producers organize peoples' experiences/perceptions (how they make sense) of social realities in news reports by constructing news angles or selective narratives using words, images and contexts (Agbanu, 2018). It deals with the idea of creating or constructing news angles and selective narratives or perspectives of an event by journalists to achieve an end using words, contexts and footages. "It is a way of giving an overall interpretation to isolated items of facts, when journalists shape and contextualize the facts of news stories within some familiar frame of reference".

Tewksbury and Scheufele, (2009), indicates that journalists do not only offer objective and balanced chronicling of the facts of events and issues in texts but also unconsciously construct narrative structures/perspectives that direct the thinking of media consumers on these events, meaning that framing theory suggests that the way journalists' present and define information about events and issues for the audience (called "the frame") influences the choices media consumers make about how to make sense of that information.

Gitlin (1980) cited in de Vreese (2005) defines media framing as "persistent pattern of cognition, interpretation, and presentation, of selection, emphasis and exclusion by which symbol handlers (journalists) routinely organize discourses". In the same manner, McCombs (2004, pg.87) defines media framing as the selection of, and laying emphasis on, particular attributes of the news media agenda when talking about an object, an issue, or a person. The above definitions suggest that journalists construct their intentions in news stories by cutting and trimming the facts of the stories filtering and shaping them as they wish.

Similarly, Entman (2007, 1993, pg.52) states that to frame is to select some aspects of the facts of social issues and to make them more significant and salient than others in a communication context thereby promoting a particular problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation, and/or treatment recommendation of the events, issues, or actors being portrayed.

Tewksbury and Scheufele, (2009) described "frames in the news" as words and images employed by journalists to describe political and social realities and having the power to influence how audiences interpret and evaluate issues and policies. Moreover, Schuefele and Iyengar (2014) cited in Demarest, L., et.al (2020) defined framing as the process wherein news editors and journalists provide an interpretive structure for news facts by presenting information in particular ways. In addition, de Vreese (2005) explains that framing involves a communication source presenting and defining an issue, with emphasis in salience of the different aspects of the issue as each issue or policy being described has attributes (different aspects) that characterize it. Explaining further, de Vreese (2005) says that frames in the news can take the forms of journalists' descriptions of people and other political objects including their choice of the elements of events to include in the news and choice of words and images used to name an issue, etc. As a result, news stories become constructions of realities as well as issue packages aimed at influencing the public understanding of events and issues in a particular way.

Comparing agenda setting hypothesis with framing theory, de Vreese, (2005) indicates that while agenda setting theory emphasizes saliency (visibility) of issues, media framing is concerned with interpretation (meaning) of the issues. This is such that in media representations while agenda setting function gears towards issue visibility (through coverage in terms of message displays/placements, frequency, prominence and conflicts generated), media framing function goes beyond and deeper into the text to select, filter and emphasize saliency of elements or attributes that characterize the objects (issue or topic) of media agenda (Tewksbury and Scheufele, 2009; deVreese, 2005).

Agbanu (2018) identifies three ways through which journalists achieve framing in news reportage, namely:

1. By using or avoiding certain key words in a news story
2. By playing up an aspect or attribute of an issue or event while downplaying others.
3. By including some items as facts by using words to signify them, and excluding some items as non-facts when reporting a specific news event.

Furthermore, photographs and other visual materials in news reports could also be subjected to framing to achieve selective emphasis and presentation of the visual elements, the objective being to direct the thinking and behavior of the viewers in particular ways. Media framing and Agenda setting theories hence embody

propositions, constructs and definitions that give overview of media representation framework in the political process; hence they seem appropriate as study guides and helped in the selection of this study's unit of analysis and construction of the content categories.

Media representation

The mass media play a central role for the functioning of modern democracy (Ibraheem et.al, 2015). Media role concerns how information about events and issues in society are defined, presented and interpreted to the public. In performing this traditional role, the media represent (deal with and present) realities and in the process set public agenda (McCombs & Shaw, 1972; McCombs and Reynolds, 2009), and influence the public to think in certain ways and hold certain opinion about issues and events (de Vreese, et.al, 2001; Tewksbury & Scheufele, 2009). Information is a lubricant in the democratic process and its importance is like what water is to fish (Akinfeleye, 2007). Information as facts and figures is crucial for public belief, attitude and decision making in the political process (Oyovbaire, 1987). This is because the meanings/interpretations the media allocate to events and issues help shape public perceptions and constitute a vital ingredient of the democratic process.

In performing their traditional news functions in democracy media representation make issues salient and allocate meanings to them (McCombs & Shaw, 1972; McCombs and Reynolds, 2009; de Vreese, et.al, 2001; Tewksbury & Scheufele, 2009). More so representations in the media interpret more than they strive to show objectivity, fairness and balance in chronicling of events and issues.

Representation involves the art of constructing reality from a particular perspective, with each narrative constructed containing certain patterns of evaluation and value judgments whose logic stems from the view of the role of language in social life (Chiluwa & Chiluwa, 2022). This view holds that meaning is not necessarily embedded in reality as we perceive it, but that meaning is constructed through language use, and language use in texts (or talks) invariably assigns meaning to persons and groups, social practices, and to objects, events and situations in a particular way that suits the objectives of the language user.

Media representations point to the fact that media texts are constructed, being value judgments made about social realities and relationships and aspects of social reality that mirror the position and purpose of their producers (Chiluwa, 2011). These facts usually reflect in the choices media producers make about what is left in the background, included or excluded, made explicit or left implicit in the text. Hence, a given construction of social identities could define how their actions are to be judged or evaluated. Thus, the importance of mass media representation is indicated by the role the mass media play in any democratic society.

Media representation has become important especially in politics because of its role in influencing public perception of politics as media choices of words and phrases used in the description of issues, policies, actions and activities of political actors for example, influence the meanings public attach to them (Boomgaarden, 2017).

Media representation and ideology

Ideology refers to public beliefs or attitudes shared by members of a particular social group which may not always be consciously held by individuals, but can be deeply rooted in their thought patterns and language that it is taken for granted as self-evident and hence very difficult to question and hard to challenge openly in the social arena (Bloor and Bloor, 2007, pg.10).

Ideological position can be hidden by the use of words and how issues, individuals or groups are represented in the media has been shown to be a function of underlying ideological perceptions, meaning that ideological work

of media language includes representing issues, individuals or groups, identities and relations (Chiluwa, 2011). However, some particular representations in the press may conceal truths that need to be told and may legitimize particular negative labeling or identity in the interest of certain people or government (Dijk, 2005).

Media representation of politics

Journalists as media gatekeepers decide which information, ideologies, or political candidates that enter the news channels, receive prominence in positive or negative tones (McQuail, 2010; Barzinlai-Nahon, 2008). In performing this gatekeeper's function for the political system journalists must be fair, balanced and objective in news reportage as the quality of information the electorates get during elections depends on how best journalists follow these principles in their news selection exercises (McGregor, 2010). This indicates that biased representations of issues in politics could have unpalatable consequences for the democratic process as citizens are likely to decide wrongly which could retard the optimum performance of the political system.

Consequently, media representation has become crucial in democracy because balanced and fair representation of all issues, parties, aspirants and manifestoes is key to guiding the electorates to choose the right political leaders (Boomgaarden, 2017). Framing of politics and political process is an aspect of media representation that is a function of "gate keeping bias" which specifically links issues saliency to political actors (Boomgaarden, 2017; Agbanu 2018). Mass-mediated representation of political actors is shown to be based on the ideas of news bias, news personalization, gender bias, negative coverage, and framing of politics and political processes in relation to political actors.

The newspaper medium

Newspaper is an aspect of the mass media outside of television, radio, cinema and the internet and alongside other printed matter is referred to as the press, taken from its major technology, the printing press (Amobi & Hussein, 2013). Newspaper evolved with social, political, and economic development of societies and exists as vital information sources about local, national and international political events, including presidential campaigns (Benoit, et.al. 2015). The press has always specialized on human interest stories, in dramatic and sensational styles of reporting and presentation (McQuail, 2010). The press, independent from the state and from vested interests was recognized as a major institution of political and social life, especially as a self-appointed former of public opinion and voice of national interest and tended to show a highly developed sense of social and ethical responsibility, fostering the rise of journalistic profession dedicated to balanced, fair and objective reporting of issues and events (ibid).

Major Candidates in the February 25, 2023 presidential election

The candidate of the PDP: Atiku Abubakar, Muslim, retired custom officer, former vice president, businessman, politician was born on 25 November 1946 in Jada, Adamawa state, northern Nigeria.

The candidate of the APC: Bola Ahmed Adekunle Tinubu, Muslim, accountant, former senator and former governor of Lagos state, was born on 29 March 1954 in Lagos South-western Nigeria. APC currently is the ruling party.

The candidate of the LP: Peter Gregory Obi, Christian, businessman and politician, born on July 9, 1961 in Onitsha, Anambra State, was in May 2022. Obi was the former governor of Anambra with an "ideology of frugality; economic and resourceful management. LP had a deficient or nonexistent party structure. However, Obi's attracted followers nationwide, especially younger Nigerians.

Methodology

The study design was content analysis. It directed data collections, measurements and analysis, as it dealt with the arrangement of conditions and analysis of data (Kothari & Garg, 2016).

Content analysis method helped the study to focus on the manifest contents of newspapers (Robin, et.al, 2005; Sobawale, 2008)

Area of study

This study was conducted in the South east Nigeria focusing on the national newspapers circulated in the zone during the period under review.

Population of study

The population of study is 1210 editions of five purposively select newspapers. A population is Nigeria has a total of 28 national daily newspapers in circulation (Aladi and Okoro, 2020). The select newspapers include: *This Day*, *Leadership*, *The Punch*, *The Sun* and *The Guardian* Newspapers. The choice of these newspapers was with respect to their large circulation geographical locations, ownership, ethno-religious and political affiliations. The study covered 8 months period spanning from June, 2022 to February 2023. These account for 242 editions each of the five newspapers understudy, summing up to a total of 1210 editions in all.

Sampling procedure and Sample size

The study sampled using the Jones and Carter (1959) constructed composite weeks sampling technique. This sampling technique has been adopted in a related study by Aladi and Okoro (2020). In this regard, the study randomly selected 5 days from each month. Hence 5 days per month for 8 months summed up to 40 days per newspaper (for five newspapers). This amounts to 200 editions in all.

News reports examined in the study were obtained from sampled editions randomly and systematically from all the selected newspapers on equal proportion using the probability sampling procedure so that every member in the population had an equal chance of being selected. The systematic sampling technique with a random selection using the balloting system was employed. The technique operates on the basis of the first element being randomly selected. The study used number 6 as the Nth point. This means that every 6th edition of the select newspapers was systematically selected starting from a point that was determined by ballot. The first element determined who the other elements were. Thus, the sample size amounted to 201.666666 newspapers, approximately 200.

Content category and units of analysis

The units of analysis were the news stories on the presidential candidates of the APC, the PDP and the LP, while content categories were as indicated below:

Category 1. Media frames: the study identified ethnic frame, good governance frame, religious frame, problem solution frame, political support frame, economic recovery frame, and corruption frames. In this regard, stories with ethnic colorations for or against the candidates published in the newspapers were classified as **ethnic frame** while those that represented any of the three candidates from the perspective of being fair with national policy that can trigger good governance were regarded as **good governance frame**. All stories that portrayed the candidates as a solution to the woes of insecurity threats, sectarian agitation and relative deprivation leading to the desires for self-determination confronting the nation were classified as **problem solution frame**. Those that showcased the candidates and their activities as a matter of political party interest were seen as **political support frame**, while those that represented the candidates from the point of view of official corruption, presentation of unverifiable claims, figures and documents were seen as **corruption frame**. Some of the stories on the presidential candidates represented from the point of view of improved standard of living, creation of jobs, restoration of the naira, industrialization, attraction of foreign investors etc were classified as **economic recovery frame**.

Category 2: Purpose of the story: the study developed the following purposes. Information and education purpose, demarketing and castigation purpose, marketing and persuasion purposes, adoption and endorsement purpose. Stories that supplied information and explained the personality and previous leadership performance of any of the candidates were classified as **information and education purpose**, while those that exposed some inefficiencies and mischievous activities, unpatriotic ventures and other negative moves that can change the peoples' views against the candidate were seen as **demarketing and castigation purpose**. Further the study classified as **marketing and persuasion purpose** all stories that tended to sale any of the candidates and make the people to tilt towards supporting the candidate in the election. On the other hand, stories which showed the candidates being accepted as a result of endorsement by a set of people or group were seen as **adoption and endorsement purpose**.

Instrument of data Collection

Data collection was instrument coding sheet. The following instruments were used in the cause.

Validity and Reliability of the instrument

The coding guide and sheet were subjected to the scrutiny and constructive criticisms, corrections and suggestions on the structure and content of the instruments to strengthen it to be able to measure what it was designed to measure.

The instrument was further subjected to inter-coder reliability test to ascertain its correlation coefficient to establish its consistency in measuring items set to be examined. Inter-coder reliability was assessed using Holsti's inter-coder reliability formula. The Holsti's inter coder reliability test was calculated thus: Reliability:

$$R = \frac{2(M)}{N1 + N2}$$

Where:

M= the number of coding decisions which two coders agree.

N1 & N2= the number of coding decisions by the first and second coder respectively.

Therefore, Inter-coder reliability

$$R = \frac{2(34)}{49 + 38}$$

$$= \frac{68}{87}$$

$$= 0.78$$

Method of data analysis

Data were presented in tables and simple percentages with the implications of the data explained under. All thematic data were analyzed descriptively against the research questions. Data were used to supply answers to the research questions posed for the study through which the conclusion and recommendations were drawn.

Data presentation and analysis

Data were presented and analyzed using frequency distribution tables, simple percentages, mean scores and other simple statistical tools.

Table 1: Monthly distribution of stories on the three major candidates in the February 25, 2023 presidential election in Nigeria

Monthly	<i>This-Day</i>	<i>Leadership</i>	<i>The sun</i>	<i>Punch</i>	Guardian	Freq.	%
June	10	16	11	15	13	65	9.6
July	19	13	21	14	12	79	11.7
August	13	12	12	10	11	58	8.6
September	10	11	13	14	12	60	8.9
October	27	12	16	12	14	81	12.0
November	24	9	18	28	15	94	13.9
December	15	11	12	22	10	70	10.3
January	36	24	18	21	15	114	16.9

February	10	8	10	15	10	53	7.8
Total	164	116	131	151	112	674	100

Source: Researcher's content analysis 2024

Table 1 shows the monthly distribution of the news stories on the media representation of the three presidential candidates in the 8 months period leading to the 2023 presidential election in Nigeria. The data revealed that *This-Day newspaper* with a total of 164 news stories out of 674 news stories was on the lead in the coverage of the presidential candidates. This figure represents 24.33% of the total number of news stories published. This was followed by the *Punch newspaper* which published 151 news stories representing 22.40% of the total publications. *Leadership, Guardian, and Sun newspapers* published 116 (17.21%), 112 (16.61%) and 131 (19.43%) respectively. Data also indicate that the month of January 2023 dominated in the number of publications, during the period under review with 114 stories (16.91%) out of the 674 published. Data showed a zigzag pattern of publications in all the newspapers under review, from the month of June 2022 to the month of February 2023 when the election was conducted. The zigzag pattern of publications indicates that the newspapers performed more jobs in the month of January when the political tempo in the country became very high with expectations.

Table 2: Average distribution of stories on the three major candidates among the select newspapers in the February 25, 2023 presidential election in Nigeria

Newspapers	Total average pages Per day	Average number of main stories per page	Total average main stories per day	Total main stories in a month	Total main stories in 8 months	Number on the three presidential candidates	Total % covered in 8 months
This-Day	56	5	280	8400	67,200	164	0.24
Leadership	44	5	220	6600	52,800	116	0.21
The sun	60	6	360	10800	86,400	131	0.15
The punch	56	6	336	10080	80,640	151	0.18
Guardian	46	5	230	6900	55,200	112	0.20
TOTAL	262	27	1,326	35,880	342,240	674	0.98

Source: Researcher's contents analysis, 2024

Table 2 shows the general news items published by the five select newspapers in the period understudy. Data in the table indicate that a total of 342,240 stories were published. Out of this total, 674 news stories representing 0.98% were published on the three presidential candidates alone. The table thus implied that the three presidential candidates commanded media attention in Nigerian within the period under review.

Table 3: The media frames used in the representation of the three major candidates in the February 25, 2023 presidential election in Nigeria by the select newspapers

Story frames used	APC	LP	PDP	Freq	%
Ethnic frame	35	43	45	123	18.2
Good governance frame	10	65	22	97	14.3
Problem solution frame	24	54	16	94	13.9
Political support frame	55	20	61	136	20.7
Corruption frame	45	0	44	89	13.2
Religious frame	60	14	23	97	14.3

Economic recovery frame	8	15	15	38	5.6
Total	237	211	226	674	100

Source: Researcher's contents analysis 2024

Data in Table 3 show that majority of the stories covered tilted towards political support frame (136; 20.7%), followed by ethnic (123; 18.2%) and religious and good governance frames (97; 14.3% each). Corruption frame came a distant fifth position (89; 13.2%) preceded by problem solution frame (94; 13.9%). Of the three candidates being investigated, the candidate of the LP was mainly represented as a symbol of good governance and problem solution with 65 and 54 stories out of the total 97 and 94 stories published in these categories. On the other hand, the candidate of the APC was mainly represented in the media using religious frame with a total of 60 stories out of the 97 published in that category. Data also show that the candidate of the PDP secured the first and second position on the political support, ethnic and corruption frames, leading the other two candidates with a total of 61, 45 and 44 stories out of the 136, 124 and 97 stories published respectively in these categories. This data indicates that while less attention was paid by the media to good governance and problem solution frames; greater attention was given to political support, ethnic and religious frames. This explains the position of ethno-religious inclinations to the political activities of the people of Nigeria. Again, this data revealed the personalities of the candidates in the ways in which they were represented. From this data, the candidate of the LP was in the lead in terms of positive attitude and fair play while those of the PDP and APC enjoyed negative clout in the media leading from issues that divide the country more than they unite it.

Table 4: The purpose of the story published on the three major candidates in the select newspapers in the February 25, 2023 presidential election in Nigeria

Purposes of coverage/representation	APC	LP	PDP	Freq	%
Information and education purpose	45	67	35	147	21.8
De-marketing and castigation purpose	89	56	79	224	33.2
Marketing and persuasion purpose	87	76	66	229	33.9
Adoption and endorsement purpose	16	12	46	74	10.9
Total	237	211	226	674	100

Source: Researcher's contents analysis 2024

Table 4 shows the purpose for which the coverage on the candidates was carried out in the media. Data revealed that *Political Marketing and Persuasion* for the candidates dominated all-other media publication purposes with a total of 229 stories representing 33.9% of the total publication within the period under review. Although demarking and castigation came a close second to the other variable, the media contents also contained messages that have purposes of information and education about the three candidates. Data also revealed that the candidate of the APC was the most de-marketed and castigated followed by the candidate of the PDP who was the second most de-marketed and castigated candidate. Of all the three candidates, the candidate least de-marketed and castigated was that of the APC who also came second in the table as the second most marketed candidate with 76 stories out of the 229 stories published in this category. Significantly the candidate of the PDP is the candidate with highest number of stories on adoption and endorsement accounting for 46 stories out of the 74 published in that category. Stories published on the candidate of the LP were mainly for the purpose of passing information and educating the masses on who he is and what he represents in previous positions. The

implication of this data is that the media represented the three candidates differently mainly based on what they do; say and what the people that make the media personality say and do about them.

Answers to Research Questions

Research Question 1: What are the recurrent news frames used by the select newspapers in their representations of the three major candidates in the February 25, 2023 presidential election in Nigeria?

Research question 1 sought to find out the recurring news frames, in other words the dominant point of views from which the newspapers defined and presented the three presidential candidates. The study identified seven news frames, namely: Ethnic frame, good governance frame, Problem solution frame, Political support frame, Corruption frame, religious frame, and Economic recovery frame. The select newspapers adopted mainly the Political support frame (20.7%), Ethnic frame (18.2%), and religious frame (14.3%) in reporting the activities of the candidates.

Research Question 2: What are the purposes for which the select newspapers covered each of the three major candidates in the February 25, 2023 presidential election in Nigeria?

Data in Table 4 show that the major purpose of media coverage in respect of the presidential candidate of APC was to *De-market/castigate* as well as to *market/persuade* with 89 and 87 stories each. Data also show that the major purpose of media coverage in respect of the candidate of the PDP was dominantly to *De-market/castigate* as well as to *market persuade* with 79 and 66 stories published in these categories respectively. Data also show that the candidate of the PDP equally enjoyed strong media coverage from the purpose of *political endorsement and adoption* of candidates by groups with a total of 46 stories followed by the candidate of the APC with 16 stories and that of the LP with only 12 stories. However, the candidate of the LP came first in *Marketing and persuasion* and *information and education* categories.

Discussion of findings

The select newspapers adopted seven news frames, namely: “problem solution frame”, “ethnic frame”, “religious frame”, “corruption frame”, “economic recovery frame”, “political support frame”, and “good governance frame”. Political support frame dominated the reports followed by the ethnic and religious frames. Considering the socio-economic problem Nigeria is facing, the good governance, problem solution and economic recovery frames should have majorly dominated the contents. But these more progressive frames were ignored by the press. They failed in their social responsibility duty by not projecting the true situation expected of them to generate the required positive thought for Nigerians to make an informed decision at the polls. Representing the presidential candidates with these frames went determined what the people saw the election to be. Importantly, scholars have argued that if the media continuously report a certain event using certain frames, those reports will continue to influence the views of the audience towards the frame adopted in the media during their report (Batelaan; Seldenrijk; Bot, Balkom; & Penninx (2016); Liu; Li NA, Li WA; Khan, (2017). Shaping the views of the citizens towards the belief that election is a function of belonging to one ethnic or religious group will continue to make the citizens see voting that way. The finding aligned with the views of the proponents of the framing theory which according to Akpoghiran, (2023) has the power to cause the people feel and understand a given political matter or event. On the other hand, it is clear from the data that the framing of the three candidates by the newspapers favored the candidate of the LP, who was mainly, represented with the problem solution, economic recovery and good governance frames. This finding supports the expectations to generate public love and endorsement for the candidate for aligning himself with the challenges facing the greater percent of the population of the country but the election result demonstrated otherwise. This fact goes to

confirm the finding made in Ikegbunam and Agudosy (2021) that media ability to frame issues is not absolute. The media power of framing has been seen to be confronted by other powers which sometimes change the views of the people away from what the media shapes them to be. This draws a line between what is reported and what is acted upon by the people. Again, this finding supports the generalization of Klapper (1960) which states” that mass communication does not serve as a necessary and sufficient cause of audience effects, but rather functions among and through a nexus of mediating factors and influences...”

Objective number two of the study sought to understand the purpose for which the media covered the three presidential candidates. Data in table 4 indicated that the major purpose for which the select newspapers covered the presidential candidate of the APC was both to *De-market/castigate* and to *market/persuade* with 89 and 87 stories respectively. The candidate of the PDP was also dominantly covered with media purposes of *De-marketing/castigation* and *marketing /persuasion* with 79 and 66 respectively. This candidate also enjoyed strong media coverage from the purpose of *political endorsement and adoption* of candidates by groups with a total of 46 stories followed by the candidate of the APC with 16 stories and that of the LP with only 12 stories. However, the candidate of the LP came first in *Marketing/persuasion* and *information and education* categories). The high number of *De-marketing/castigation* and *Marketing/persuasion* frames shown by the data reveals the antagonistic nature of the election, laden with ethno-religious sentiments which according to Ikegbunam and Ekweonu (2020) have dominated the Nigerian political scene since 1999.

Summary, Conclusions and Recommendations

This study examined representations of the three major candidates by select newspapers in the February 25, 2023 presidential election in Nigeria. The study adopted the content analysis study design and anchored on media framing and agenda setting theories. The study answered two research questions, with each highlighting a different aspect of the manifest content of the newspapers. The study covered a period of 8 months and has the composite sampling week method as its sample selection pattern. A total of 242 days were selected and 200 editions out of 1210 editions were examined. A total of 674 stories out of 342,240 were published on the three major candidates with the number of stories published on the candidates constituting 0.89% of the total publications made. The study found as follows:

1. That the presidential candidates were mainly framed using the political support, religious and ethnic frames. Good governance, corruption, problem -solution and economic recovery frames were few, an action considered less productive on the side of the media which is saddled with the responsibility of supporting public good.
2. That the major media purposes of coverage of the presidential candidate were both to demarket/castigate and to promote/persuade. The candidate of the APC was both demarketed/castigated and promoted with 89 and 87 stories respectively. The candidate of the PDP was also demarketed/castigated and promoted with 79 and 66 stories respectively, even though he enjoyed strong media coverage from the purpose of political endorsement and adoption of candidates by groups with a total of 46 stories followed by the candidate of the APC with 16 stories and that of the LP with only 12 stories. However, media purposes for covering the candidate of the LP were largely promotional/persuasive, informative and educative.

Conclusions

The study concludes that there is a difference in impact between the newspapers ‘framing/or agenda and public agenda implying that, in as much as the newspapers had the power to shape the perception of the people on the personalities of the candidates, they could only teach and not coerce the people on who to vote for. This

supports the claims among emerging communication scholars that media effect is not absolute as media compete with audience predetermined attitude and other factors in shaping the perceptions and actions on issues. This is because, irrespective of taking the lead on the economic recovery, problem solution and good governance frames, against the candidates of APC and PDP whose stories were dominated by political support frame, religious and ethnic frames the candidate of the LP placed last position among the three candidates at the poll.

Recommendations

This study recommends that the media should always be careful in their choices of frames in reporting presidential candidates so that their framing or representation should not ignore the major issues to dwell on trivialities that can mislead the people. Paying more attention to religious, political-support and ethnic frames gave the media less opportunity to examine the major issues facing the continuous and harmonious existence of the country.

Again, Nigerian who are exposed to the media messages should at all time premise their decision-making on the views and reports represented in the media concerning presidential candidate to avoid regrets thereafter.

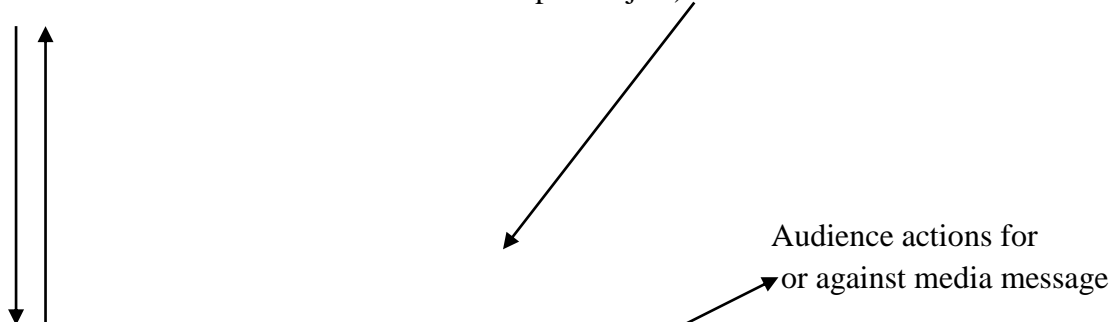
Further investigation should be carried out to ascertain whether there is a significant relationship between the newspaper's representations of the presidential candidate and actual voter behaviour in the election.

Contribution to knowledge

This study provided an overview of media performance in the representation of politics in Nigeria. The work has demonstrated that while the media can succeed in serving the people in one direction, it failed to serve well in the other. The study has shown that the media can adequately and prominently cover an event but fail to properly frame the events for the people to take appropriate decisions. The relationship between the media and public attitude has been reemphasized to be two way-controlled rather than being a unidirectional effect of media messages taken hook line and sinker by the people. Rather than being omnipotent in shaping the will of the people, this study has shown that the media can drop their views and the people will decide either to take what the media have presented to them or abandon them entirely. Based on this, the study developed a model for understanding the relationship between the media and the society called the **Media-Attitude Relationship Communication Model**. This model is designed to factor in the fact that media messages are not left alone to determine the peoples' decision-making process on certain issues of public concern as presented by earlier media scholars. This model depicts the view that audience predetermined attitudes and other social factors compete with media messages in determining audience actions. The model is represented in the diagram below:

Media-Attitude Relationship communication Model

Media messages and contents (Frames, Slants, representations in form of media agenda designed to influence the media audience, framing as to determine what media audience accept or reject) -----



Media audience predetermined

Attitude and other social factors -----

Media –Attitude Relationship Communication Model acknowledges the fact that both the candidates and their actions during electioneering campaigns decide what happens in the media. According to this model, as the media slants, frames and sets agenda on issues, events and persons to influence the minds and behaviors, people's predetermined attitude and other social factors in turn compete with these media messages to shape people's perceptions and opinion on those issues, events and persons. Thus, audience predetermined attitude and other social factors compete with/alter media intended effect

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