

NEWSPAPER COVERAGE OF POLITICAL OPPOSITION IN NIGERIA
FROM OCTOBER 2014 TO MARCH 2015

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Abstract

This study sought to find out the nature of newspaper coverage on political opposition in Nigeria from October 2014 to March 2015. The researchers adopted content analysis method and coding sheet as the research instrument. Seventy editions of the newspapers for the *Nation* and *Daily Sun* newspapers were coded. This study asked among other questions, what is the direction of newspaper political messages towards the ruling party? The findings revealed that 38.4% of the political messages towards the ruling party (PDP) were unfavourable. The researchers, therefore, conclude that the media serves as a means for modifying the direction of audience attitude to an issue or situation. It was recommended that, not minding the presence of ownership influence in the practice of journalism, editorial independence should be appreciated and upheld in order to ensure credibility, factuality, accuracy, objectivity and balance in journalism practice.

Introduction

Mass media are the channels or vehicles used to carry information, feelings, and ideas from the source to the receiver. Most times the audience of the mass media is usually heterogeneous. The Mass media are classified into two broad groups and they include the print and electronic media. For the purpose of this study, content of the print media, newspapers, was analysed to ascertain the manifest content of political opposition in Nigeria.

Ojebuyi (2012) as cited in Ojebuyi and Ekennia (2013) noted that “the mass media are regarded as sacred institutions that service the democratic process. They re-construct, interpret and report issues that happen in the human society”. Norris (1995) as cited by Vreese (2005) noted that the media describe, explain and interpret events; they simultaneously provide the platform for the public to perceive the social reality.

There are some events that draw the public attention than others. Examples of these events that are catchier are always negative stories like disaster, war, conflict, negative consequences and scandals of any

type. Consequently some events always have a better chance of being selected and reported ahead of others by media actors (Watson, 2003; Schwarz, 2009)

In a democratic country like Nigeria, political clash and disagreement usually make up substantial amount of the media content. The way these political clashes are reported has a serious implication on the ruling party. Barom and Davis (2009,p.28) held that “many intense political conflicts affectsthe thinking about the mass media, and these conflicts shaped the development of mass media society theory”.

Political opposition is a situation where one or more political parties other than the one in control of government is/are in opposition to wrestle political control from a seating government in either a region, state or country (New World College Dictionary, 2010). In Nigeria, political opposition as at January 2014 were limited to All Progressive Congress, APGA, and other opposition parties that hope to wrestle power from the People’s Democratic Party. The parties hope to upturn PDP’s hold to power.

According to Likoti (2005) as cited by Lamid (2015), a political party is an organized group of people with similar political aims and opinions that seek to influence the public policy by getting its candidate elected to public office. Burke (2015) defines political party as a body of men united for promoting their joint particular principles in which they all agreed.

The media play a crucial role in political struggle. It is usually a forum where political parties state their philosophies and ideologies which they claim will serve the people better than other parties or party. It therefore, gives a political party an immeasurable advantage to have a print newspaper or broadcast station (television or radio) that is sympathetic to its cause.

The major opposition party in Nigeria as at 2014 was the All People’s Congress (APC) with the Nations newspaper as one of the major newspaper that is sympathetic to the party. The ownership of media determines who control the media content; the type of information published is determined by such factors.

Media ownership means having complete legal control of the status of the media. In a democratic country like Nigeria, through legal control, the media house can be owned by the government or the private individual.

According to the 2009 survey of newspapers in Nigeria, the *Nation* newspaper was said to be the second most read newspaper in Nigeria and claims to stand for freedom and justice. Their target audiences are the business and the political elite; while it seeks to influence the educated and the upwardly mobile people. It is oriented in Lagos, Abuja and Port Harcourt. The newspaper was founded on 31st June 2006, its headquarters is in Mushin, Lagos State Nigeria and its publisher is Vantage Press Limited. The publication is owned by Alhaji Bola Tinubu, a former governor of Lagos State and the national leader of All Progressive Congress (APC).

The Daily Sun is owned by Orji UzorKalu, former governor of Abia State, he was a member of the ruling party (PDP). The paper was incorporated on 29th March 2001 but started production as a weekly on 18th January 2003. Its target is the young audience on the 18-45 years age bracket and also the economic class. It is printed and published by the Sun publishing limited with the headquarters in Lagos State, Nigeria.

Considering the fact that both the *DailySun* and *Nation* newspapers belonged to political actors from two different political background (PDP and APC), one will assume that the papers will tilt their contents to reflect their political alignments. There are chances that one of these newspapers would be in support of the ruling party, while the other would not. A cursory look at these newspapers reflects the above statements. Hence, the researchers sought to find out the nature of newspaper coverage of the 2015 general election in Nigeria, with the view of finding out whether the newspaper belonging to the opposition was more critical of the ruling party.

Statement of Problem

The Nigerian mass media are channels for dissemination of information and messages which usually get more attention when it comes to negative information: war, crimes and political clashes. In some cases, the content of the media can be hampered by media ownership because it appears that political parties seem to use the media that are sympathetic to their party to pilot ideas against the ruling party. Ironically, some of these media houses are owned by individuals who appear to be members or loyalists to the opposition party or the ruling party.

Gbogbo and Ibukun (2014, para. 2) says “All Progressive Congress, is the strongest opposition coalition mounted against the PDP since military rule ended in Africa’s biggest economy in 1999”. The party seems to have employed the services of newspapers belonging to its members to pursue its opposition drive.

The *Nation* newspaper belongs to a political actor from APC, whilst the *Daily Sun* belongs to another political actor from PDP and one will assume that the papers may tilt its contents to reflect the political ideology of its owner; thereby becoming more critical of the ruling party. One may ask: To what extent have political parties employed the media in fanning their opposition drive in the 2015

general election? Therefore, the researchers sought to find out the nature of newspaper coverage of the 2015 general election in Nigeria, with the view of finding out whether the newspaper belonging to the opposition was more critical of the ruling party.

Objectives of Study

Accordingly, this study sought to:

1. Ascertain the frequency of coverage of political messages that are critical or favourable to the ruling party.
 2. Find out the direction of newspaper coverage of political messages in relation to the ruling party.
 3. Identify the sources of political messages published in the newspapers studied.
 4. Find out the placement of political messages in these selected newspapers.
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Research Questions

The study formulated the following research questions:

1. What is the frequency of newspaper coverage of political messages that are critical or favourable to the ruling party?
5. What is the direction of newspaper coverage of political messages in relation to the ruling party?
2. What are the sources of political messages published in the newspapers studied?
3. What is the placement of political messages in these selected newspapers?

Literature review

Communication Defined

Communication is WHO says WHAT through what CHANNEL to WHOM and with what RESULT (Lasswell, 1948 as quoted by Ndolo, 2006). Dance (1970) as quoted by Ndolo(2006) also defined communication as the process of understanding others and in turn endeavour to be understood by them. It is dynamic, constantly and shifting in response to the total situation. Ndolo (2006)noted that communication is the act of transmitting information, ideas, and attitudes from one person to another. Verderber (1984) sees communication as a dynamic, on-going, transactional process. He argues that it is dynamic because it has no fixed beginning or end; it is transactional because the elements occur simultaneously and the people communicating are interdependent. Ndolo(2006)defined communication as the process of understanding and sharing of ideas, and feeling, or meaning or messages between people.

According to Sambe (2005) as quoted by Oona (2011) the mass media are the avenue or channels through which pieces of information are passed to the public example radio, television, newspaper, magazine, bill board, handbills etc. Mass is used to connote something involving large number of people in mass communication. The people (audience) are considered to be scattered, diversified, large, heterogeneous and anonymous. The media on the other hand

are those means of getting across messages to large people (audience). Consequently, when the two words “mass” and “media” are put together they become “mass media” meaning all technological means: radio, televisions, internet, newspapers, magazines, billboards of transferring information from one point to another.

The functions of mass media were summarized by Siebert, Theodore, and Schram as quoted by Suresh (2003) as:

1. Servicing the political system by providing information, discussion and debate by public affairs.
2. Enlightening the public so as to make it capable for self-government.
3. Safe guarding the right of the individuals by serving as the watch dog against government
4. Serving the economic system primarily by bringing together the buyers and sellers of goods and services through the medium of advertising.
5. Providing entertainment
6. Maintaining its own financial self-sufficiency so as to be free from the pressures of special interest

The mass media means channels or vehicles that carry information from the sources to the receivers.

Political Party

A political party is an organized group of people with at least roughly similar political aims and opinions that seek to influence the public policy by getting its candidate elected to public office (Likoti, 2005). Edmund Burke defined political party as a body of men united for promoting their joint endeavours and national interests upon some particular principles in which they all agreed (cited in Ojo, 2009). The existence of political parties according to this definition must be based on the principles of promoting national interest. This is because political parties are often expected to have their membership spread across the country. This explains, for instance, why Nigerian constitution required political parties to reflect federal character before they can be registered (Tordoff, 1999). Similarly, Osumah (2009) conceives political party as a voluntary association organized by persons bind by common interests or aims, which seeks to acquire or retain power through the election of its candidates into public office. Here political party was perceived as an instrument of acquiring political power in order to implement government policies.

Political Parties, according to Huntington (1968), perform the functions of ordering the political system; they serve to structure political process and ensure that citizen participation in that process is orderly; they seek to provide a distinctive collective identify for their followers, one that is premised upon acceptance of basic rules of the national political arena.

At this juncture, ideology becomes important feature of political parties. Party ideology, according to Sambine(2004). is moral systems that enshrine the sanctity of contact and promise between them (parties) and electorates; it constitutes the political doctrine from which a programme of political actions emanates and on which basis citizens choose how they will like to be ruled. In his opinion, Nnoli (2003) posited that ideology is very important aspect of politics, not only by serving as a cognitive structure for looking at society generally and providing a guide to individual action and judgment, but as a powerful instrument of conflict management, self-identification, popular mobilization and legitimization. The party's policies plus strategies for achieving them and code of conduct for party members are encapsulated in ideology. On this basis,

Simbine (2005) as quoted by Bello and Lamidi posited that parties and their manifestoes need to espouse the ideology on which they plan to run the government in order to give the electorates a clear picture of where the country is heading to and to decide whether or not to work in that direction. Absence of ideology in parties will therefore make it difficult for political parties to harmonize members view on political issues.

According to Nwaokafor and Okunoye (2014), political opposition has most often been limited to one specific arena in the classical literature: the parliament; to one specific actor: the minority parties with one supposed major goal: taking power.

Empirical Review

In a study carried out by Ojebuyi and Ekennia (2013) titled “Godfatherism ownership influence and media treatment of political influence in Oyo State Nigeria”, the study investigated the prominence given to political conflicts and also to claim that ownership affiliations of newspapers influenced how these political conflicts are reported and presented. The content analysis was used to present the study in other to ascertain discerning patterns, making statements about specific media contents, and identifying trends in communication media over an identified period of time. This research question aims at finding out the prominence or the degree of importance the selected newspapers accorded the political conflict issue under study. The issue of prominence is measured based on the newspapers’ placement of the reports on the front page, editorial page, back page, and inside page. The enumerated categories are sequentially arranged in accordance with their degree of importance with the first bearing the highest level of importance and the last, the least level of importance. (Ojobeyi&Ekennia, 2013).

Another study that is empirically analysed in this research work is carried out by Udende (2011) titled “mass media, political awareness and voting behaviour in Nigeria 2011 presidential election”. The study sought to determine level of political awareness among the Nigerian electorate and to verify factors responsible for the voting behaviour of electorate. He found that the respondents admitted that they had general knowledge concerning all the presidential contestants and the platform on which they contested for in the 2011 April polls. This, notwithstanding, 47.8% of the respondents lacked basic knowledge about their (contestants) respective manifestoes. This could not be too far from inability of respondents to interpret or distinguish the various manifestoes which to a large extent are inter-related. (Udende, 2011)

Another study titled “Media Power in elections: Evidence of role of agenda setting theory in political communication in Nigeria evolving democracy” written by Nwaokafor and Okunoye (2013) Sought to analyze the impact of media during elections and provided evidence as to the role agenda setting plays in political communication in Nigerian. After the research, the researchers demonstrated how media’s power most importantly during elections has resulted in positive changes on those parties and group of people who were exposed to content. The paper reviewed agenda-setting research and its transformational mode in influencing the general population’s perception of what issues are important (salience)

during an electioneering campaign. Looking at the April 2011 general election in Nigeria, It is evident from the data collected during and after the election results were published that the Nigerian media most especially the Nigerian Television Authority (NTA) utilized its power of getting to a mass audience within a limited time period to influence the audience by not only telling them of what news item or issue is important to believe but also how to measure the candidates based on their leadership ability. (Nwaokafor&Okunoye, 2013).

In a study by Ekeanyanwu (2007) titled “The Nigerian Press Coverage of Political Conflicts in a Pluralistic Society” sought to evaluate Nigeria’s press coverage of political crises and conflicts during the President Obasanjo (Second Term) regime of 2003-2007. With the use of the content analytical research method as the main instrument of data

generation, the researcher found out that the Nigerian press has not fared very well in reporting political conflicts and crises because of the advocacy position adopted by most of them, and also that editorial influence on the part of publishers may not be unconnected with this trend. The researcher therefore concluded that the Nigerian press has operated more as active players in political crises and conflicts than as an impartial judge of such crises and conflicts and recommended that cautions against advocacy journalism in the Nigerian media industry and suggests more public participation in the media industry through “people” ownership. The press should also strive towards better professional and ethical practices in the industry and ensures that it only engages in constructive and balanced reporting of conflicts and issues (Ekeanyanwu, 2007).

In another paper by Diedong (2013) titled “political communication and print media coverage of political campaigns in Ghana” Sought to examine the influence of press in space allocation to political parties and the implications thereof to their political fortunes and the strengthening of the democratic process in Ghana. By employing content analysis method the study found out that though the private print media had more space in their front pages on political campaigns and party related issues, they failed to focus on other equally important issues: health, education, environment and agriculture. The researchers therefore recommends future studies to expand the current study beyond print media to include electronic media. (Diedong, 2013)

Onoja (2005) in a study “The Political Economy of News Reportage and Presentation of News in Nigeria: A Study of Television News” investigates how ownership of television stations, the social structure of the Nigerian society and the deregulation of the broadcasting industry influence the reportage and presentation of news on television in the country and also how preferential access in news reportage is given to different social classes in Nigeria. Findings from the Content Analyses show that all the stations were protecting the interests of their owners. The researcher also found out that no matter the professional ethics and difference in the ownership structure, all broadcast stations have one thing in common which is to preserve the existing relations of production in the state. The study recommended that community ownership of broadcast stations will improve accessibility of the ordinary people to broadcasting; it is then that the voice of the ordinary people can be heard (Onoja 2005).

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical foundation of this study was based on the agenda setting theory. Agenda setting theory which was propounded by Lippman, McCombs and Shawn (1972, 1976) state that audiences not only learn how much importance to attach to mass media messages, but how to go about it (Ndolo, 2006). This theory is relevant because this research work tends to analyse the content of newspapers with the aim of knowing the frequency of political messages critical or favourable to the ruling party (PDP).

Bernard Cohen generally credited for refining Lippmann's ideas into the theory of agenda-setting (Baran & Davis, 2006, p. 316) as quoted by Obayi, and Onyebuchi (2014, p.149) noted that "the press is significantly more than a purveyor of information and opinion. It may not be successful much of the time in telling people what to think, but it is stunningly successful in telling its readers what to think about. And it follows from this

that the world looks different to different people, depending not only on their personal interests, but also on the map that is drawn for them by the writers, editors, and publishers of the paper they read.” Had Cohen’s ideas not been further researched, it would have lingered in total abandon. McCombs and Shaw, also had further studies in this area and it reveals that “in choosing and displaying news, editors, newsroom staff, and broadcasters play an important part in shaping political reality. Readers learn only not about a given issue, but how much importance to attach to that issue from the amount of information in a news story and its position. The mass media may well determine the important issue-that is, the media may set the agenda for the campaign” (McCombs & Shaw, 1972, p. 176 as cited in Baran& Davis, 2006, p. 317).

The relevance of this theory to the work under review is that the media can focus on the issue of analysing the manifest content on political opposition in Nigeria in the print media by studying the two Nigerian papers. (*Daily Sun* and *the Nation*). Based on this, the media can then take a stand in its reports in form of headlines, news stories and editorial writing and cartoons with the aim of tailoring the attention of the people towards a particular direction.

Methodology

Research Design

This study was anchored on content analysis. Ohaja (2003, p. 14) writes that “content analysis refers to the examination of the manifest content of communication to discover the patterns existing therein. Such manifest content could be advertisements, news stories, features, opinion articles, editorials, letter-to-the-editor, cartoons, photographs and other illustrations in a newspaper or magazine”. This informed the use of content analysis in determining newspaper coverage of political campaign in Nigeria.

Population of Study

The population of this analysis here has to do with all the issues on newspaper coverage on political campaign in Nigeria. This study analysed national dailies that are in the business of informing, educating, entertaining etc. of the people.

Therefore, the population for a work of this nature was all the registered thirty eight (38) newspapers in Nigeria. However, for the purpose of this study, the population was limited to the two selected national dailies namely: *The Nation and Daily Sun*. These newspapers were studied for a period of six months (October 2014 to March 2015), which was the major periods of the 2015 presidential election. These newspapers were selected because they have national coverage and deeper circulation. *The Nation* is rated as an elite newspaper and as such has wider patronage by the elites. *The Daily Sun newspaper*, on the other hand, is seen as one of the most circulated newspaper patronized mainly by those who are not the elites in the society but that is not to say that it is not usually read by the elites. Most national issues are carried by these newspapers (Akpan, Anorue, Obayi, Onyebuchi, Odoemelam, Anorue, & Ekwe, 2012).

The Nation is owned by a member of APC political Party. This party, as at the time of this study, is an opposition party. The Daily Sun, on the other hand, is owned by a

politician who belongs to the PDP political party, which as at the time of this study, is the ruling party. These newspapers were chosen to analyse how these political parties affiliated to them use these media outlets to facilitate their political campaign.

Sample size/Sampling Technique

Ohaja (2003, p.74) agrees that “selecting a sample size is very important considering the impracticability of studying the entire population...” In line with this, the composite sampling technique was used to determine the sample size of the study. In determining the sample size for quantitative analysis, the composite sampling technique was employed. These newspapers were studied for a period of six months (Oct. 2014 to March 2015), which was the major periods for the 2015 presidential election campaigns which usually have extensive political campaigns.

In determining the sampling frame, therefore, the composite week procedure was adopted. Riffe, Aust and Lacy (1993) as cited in Wimmer and Dominick (2011, p. 163) demonstrated that “a composite week sampling technique was superior to both a random sample and a consecutive day sample when dealing with newspaper contents”. Therefore, the editions of newspapers for the month under investigation were grouped according to the days of the week and each of the editions within the days of the week was selected at random.

According to Wimmer and Dominick (2014), the lower the incident the more dates must be sampled and the higher the incidents the lower dates to be sampled. In the case of this research work where the period of study is during the peak of political campaign due to the 2015 presidential election less national dailies were studied. Wimmer and Dominick (2014) believe that there would be much coverage during the period of high incidents than during the period of low incident.

In all, 70 editions were studied, resulting to 35 editions for each of the newspapers sampled. The composite sample was designed in such a way that the editions randomly selected for the *Nation* were applied to *Daily Sun* newspaper. The study included weekend newspapers because it is a matter of national

interest; issues of national importance do not leave the pages of newspapers even though it is weekend.

Unit of Analysis

Unit of analysis is the separate manifestation of materials in newspapers. For each edition of the newspapers sampled, the researcher looked at the following unit of analysis: news stories, features and articles. These units are required to determine closer agreement coders and fewer judgment calls.

Content Category

The content analysis is the category system used to classify media content. Berelson (1952) points out “that particular study have been productive to the extent that the categories were clearly formulated and well adapted to the problem and the content” (p.147). The researchers categorized their content in direction, placement, source and

frequency so as to determine the direction of newspaper political messages towards the ruling party, also to ascertain the frequency of coverage of political messages that is critical or favourable to the ruling party. The content of this study was also categorized into placement to find out the placement of political messages in these selected newspapers and also to identify the sources of political messages published in the newspapers studied.

This study used one major instrument which is the coding sheet. The code sheet as well as coding guide/instruction was designed to aid the ascribing of numerical figures to manifest contents. For this study, the researchers coded the manifest content of the newspapers. Coding in content analysis make use of a standardized sheets to ease coding. These sheets allow coders to classify the data by placing check marks or slashes in predetermined spaces. These sheets are called coding sheet.

Inter Coder Reliability

The researchers conducted an inter coder reliability check. Lorr and McNair (1966) suggest that inter rater agreement for a new set of judges given a reasonable but practical amount of training would present a more realistic index of reality. For this reason, the researchers conducted a test based on the content coded by two of the researchers to ascertain the reliability of the instrument. Pearson r Correlation Coefficient was used to test the relationship between two coders. The reliability result of the study indicated 0.8, 0.8 and 0.9 reliability for frequency, placement and direction.

Data Presentation and Analysis

Data collected with code sheet were analysed using tables to represent the *Daily Sun* and *The Nation* newspapers for better understanding of this study. The table analysis used N1 to represent *The Nation* newspaper and N2 to represent *Daily Sun* newspaper. The analyses of data were directed to answer the following research questions:

1. What is the frequency of newspaper coverage of political messages that are critical or favourable to the ruling party?
2. What is the direction of newspaper coverage on political messages towards the ruling party?
3. What are the sources of political messages published in the newspapers studied?
4. What is the placement of political messages in these selected newspapers?

Question 1: What is the frequency of newspaper coverage of political messages that are critical or favourable to the ruling party?

Table 1: Analysing the frequency of coverage on political opposition in Nigeria

	N1	N2	TOTAL	PERCENTAGE
Boko Haram	42	41	83	19.2%
Good Governance	70	41	111	25.7%



Political Opposition	96	142	238	55.1%
Total	208	224	432	100

In order to determine the frequency of coverage in content analysis, Wimmer and Dominick (2011, p.170) opined that “the investigator needs some benchmark for comparison”. To do this, the researcher decided to produce a content analysis of good governance which happened to be the second most covered issue in the newspapers and Boko Haram which that happened to be third.

Table 1 provides an analysis on how the media covered issues of political opposition, the frequency of media coverage was seen as the best way to ascertain that. From the table above, it became obvious 55.1% of media contents were committed to the coverage of political opposition, while the remaining 44.9% stories were given to the coverage of Boko Haram and good governance. Based on this result, it was revealed that the amount of coverage given to political opposition is quite high.

Research question 2: What is the direction of newspaper political messages towards the ruling party?

Table 2: Analysing the Direction of Coverage of Political Opposition in Nigeria

	N1	N2	TOTAL	PERCENTAGE
Favourable	32	111	143	33.1%
Unfavourable	112	54	166	38.4%
Neutral	64	59	123	28.4%

Total	208	224	432	100
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Table 2 above provides an analysis of the direction of media coverage on the issues of political opposition in Nigerian democracy. From the analysis, it is obvious that 143 contents of the newspaper coded which amounting to 33.1% of the general contents were in favour of the ruling party in Nigeria, while 166 contents amounting to 38.4% were against the ruling party (PDP), which means they were against the policy of the federal government. Whereas, 123 contents amounting to 28.4% of the general coverage on political opposition in Nigerian democracy were neutral (reporting both sides of the events without necessarily taking side).

From the analysis above, it is evident that media coverage on political opposition in Nigerian democracy was really against the ruling party (PDP). This is anchored on the fact that 38.4% of all the coverage on political opposition were against the ruling party (Peoples Democratic Party).

Research Question 3: What are the sources of political messages published in the newspapers studied?

Table 3: Analysing the Source of Political Opposition in Nigeria

	N1	N2	TOTAL	PERCENTAGE
All progressive congress	32	17	49	11.3%
Peoples democratic party	18	28	46	10.6%
Journalists or press release	92	99	191	44.2%
Personal article	66	80	146	33.8%
Total	208	224	432	100%

The analysis on table 3 revealed that most content of the newspapers were from the field/research work of the journalists or press release, given that it has 44.2% of the contents coded. Other source like PDP had 10.6%, APC had 11.3% while personal articles amounted to 33.8%. This implies that 44.2% of the covered stories were from the effort of the journalists or press release. ,,

Research Question 4: What is the placement of political messages in these selected newspapers?

Table 4: Analysing the Placement of Political Opposition Nigeria

	N1	N2	TOTAL	PERCENTAGE
Front page	25	21	46	10.6%
Inside pages	151	193	344	79.6%
Centre Spread	8	2	10	2.3%

Back page	24	8	32	7.4%
Total	208	224	432	100%

In this aspect of data analysis, the prominence accorded to media contents on political opposition in Nigeria was examined. From table 4 above, 46 contents amounting to 10.6% of all issues covered by the media were placed on the front pages of the newspapers sampled, 344 of the contents which amounted to 79.6% were placed on the inside pages, 10 contents amounting to 2.3% were placed on centre spread, while 32 contents amounting to 7.4% were placed on back pages.

This indicates that 79.6% of the contents on political opposition in the newspapers sampled were randomly placed on the inside pages of the newspapers.

Discussion of Findings

Research Question 1: What is the frequencies of covered stories that is against the ruling party

The analysis of data presented in this study revealed that the frequency of coverage on political opposition in Nigeria was certainly high. To arrive at this result, the researchers compared data collected from analysis on good governance and Boko Haram

crisis which happened to be covered in these newspapers. Findings revealed that coverage of good governance amounted to 25.7% and Boko Haram amounted to 19.2%, whereas 55.1% coverage was given to political opposition in Nigeria.

This implies that stories on political opposition were more in the newspapers covered, meaning that readers might have read more stories that were critical/against the ruling party, which eventually influenced the voting behaviour in 2015.

Relating this finding to the Agenda setting theory, which states that the media sets agenda for the public opinion by highlighting certain issues, the researchers argued that the repetitive nature of the stories critical to the ruling political party might have set an agenda in the perception of the readers; given that there were high numbers of political stories critical to the ruling party.

Research question 2: What is the direction of newspaper coverage on political messages towards the ruling party?

The study examined the direction of coverage of contents that is critical to the ruling party, which revealed that the manifest content of the newspapers were unfavourable to the ruling party, given that 38.4% of the contents were unfavourable. The direction of coverage according to this study, therefore, is unfavourable. This implies that the political stories covered during the 2015 general election were unfavourable to the ruling party. This earns the support of the Agenda setting theory. In other words, the media were responsible in directing the audience on what to think.

Research question 3: What are the sources of political messages published in the newspapers studied?

This study revealed that the source of coverage of political opposition was mainly from efforts of the journalists and press release which amounted to

44.2%, while other sources like personal articles amounted to 33.8%, advertorials from All Progressive Congress and People's Democratic Party amounted to 11.3% and 10.6% respectively. Basically the study reveals that most content critical to the ruling party are got from efforts of journalists and press release.

Research question 4: What is the placement of political messages in these selected newspapers?

Further analysis revealed that 79.6% of the stories critical of the ruling party were placed on the inside pages of the newspapers, while the front page amounted to 10.6% and centre spread amounted to 2.3%, whereas, the back page amounted to 7.4%. This implies that the level of prominence given to political opposition was not very high.

In corroborating this finding, Ojebuyi and Ekennia, in their study of "Godfatherism, Interest and Media Treatment of Political Conflict in Oyo State Nigeria" showed that

72% of stories on Godfatherism on the pages of the newspapers studied were placed on the inside page of newspapers; while the front page has 23.7%. This indicates that most issues on the pages of the newspaper were more likely to be placed on the inside pages, revealing low prominence. The relationship between this study and the study of Godfratherism is that both have similar prominence given to political issues.

Recommendations

The study recommends the following:

- It is true that ownership and other factors usually contribute to the content that is critical of the ruling party, but media houses should also remember that one quality of news is that it should be objective. News stories should be objective and balanced in event covering even in the face of media ownership.
- Politicians have done nothing wrong in taking part in political campaigns, but the media should give out news stories that are factual, accurate, objective and balanced in order to hold the credibility of the profession.
- Again, sources of coverage should not be limited to event coverage and press releases, Nigerian press should go further into investigative journalism to spice the content at the disposal of readers.
- Finally, political activities are important because they reflect the day to day activities of the government; thus, prominence should be given to political stories.

Conclusion

Given that the frequency of coverage on political opposition was high at 55.1%, the researchers concludes that the media tend to report more of controversial issues during electioneering as a way to enhance the sales of its newspapers and draw more readership or audience attention.

It was revealed that 38.4% of the content of the newspapers within the period under study were unfavourable to the ruling. This could be the reason why newspaper readers tend to have more negative disposition towards the ruling party, for which the party lost the 2015 presidential election.

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