

INFLUENCING THE MESSAGE:

the role of Media Ownership on the press coverage of the 2015 Presidential Electoral Campaign in Nigeria

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Brasileira de Pesquisadores em Jornalismo

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DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.25200/BJR.v13n3.2017.1009>

ABSTRACT - This study focuses on the role of media ownership on the press coverage of the 2015 presidential election campaign in Nigeria. Using content analysis, the aim of the study was to identify the themes and examine the direction of the coverage of election campaign news items between the two main political parties in the country-Peoples' Democratic Party (PDP) and the All Progressives Congress (APC) published in The Nation on one hand and the Nigerian Tribune on the other hand, between January 2015 and March 2015. Findings from the study indicate coverage replete with biases, although with some remarkable incidents of objectivity and balancing, and show that the two newspapers analysed in this study merely reflected the political leanings of their respective publishers.
Key words: Nigerian Media. Ownership. 2015 Presidential Electoral Campaign.

INFLUENCIANDO A MENSAGEM: o papel da propriedade da mídia na cobertura da campanha eleitoral presidencial em 2015 na Nigéria

RESUMO - Este estudo se centra no papel da propriedade da mídia na cobertura jornalística das eleições presidenciais de 2015 na Nigéria. Por meio de análise de conteúdo, seu objetivo é identificar os temas e examinar os direcionamentos dos itens noticiosos relacionados à cobertura da campanha entre os dois principais partidos do país – Peoples' Democratic Party (PDP) e o All Progressives Congress (APC) – e que foram publicados entre janeiro e março de 2015 nos jornais The Nation e Nigerian Tribune. Os resultados do estudo apontam para uma cobertura repleta de vieses, apesar de alguns incidentes relevantes de objetividade e de equilíbrio, e mostram que os dois jornais analisados simplesmente refletem os direcionamentos políticos de seus respectivos proprietários.

Palavras-chave: Mídia nigeriana. Propriedade. Campanha da Eleição presidencial de 2015

INFLUIR EN EL MENSAJE: El papel de la propiedad de los medios en la cobertura de prensa de la campaña electoral presidencial de 2015 en Nigeria

RESUMEN - Este estudio se centra en el papel de la propiedad de los medios en la cobertura de prensa de las campañas electorales presidenciales de 2015 en Nigeria. Utilizando análisis de contenido, el objetivo del estudio fue identificar los temas y examinar el direccionamiento de la cobertura y de las noticias sobre la campaña electoral entre los dos principales partidos políticos del país: el Peoples' Democratic Party (PDP) y o All Progressives Congress (APC), publicadas en The Nation y en el Nigerian Tribune, entre enero de 2015 y marzo de 2015. Las encuestas de estudio indican una cobertura repleta de sesos, aunque con algunos incidentes relevantes de objetividad y equilibrio, y muestra que los dos periódicos analizados reflejan simplemente las directrices de los respectivos propietarios.

Palabras clave: Media Nigerian. Proprietarios de los Medios. Campaña Electoral Presidencial de 2015.

1 Introduction

Media scholars across the globe have established through extensive research studies, the interface between the mass media and the political process (Schudson, 2002; McNair, 2003). A critical function of the media is to provide members of the public with adequate information to enable them to not only monitor and evaluate their political leaders, but also, to make informed choices during elections and outside election years. The landmark 2015 presidential election campaigns in Nigeria could be likened to a fountain which provided the citizenry with rich sources of political knowledge and information and news reports about political parties and their candidates; inundated them with political advertisements, predictions, opinion polls, amongst others, that enabled the voters to make informed decisions to either vote in the “*Change*” mantra of the All Progressives Congress (APC) or stick with the “*Transformation Agenda*” of the then former ruling party - the Peoples’ Democratic Party (PDP).

That the 2015 Nigerian Presidential election is a watershed in the history of the country is not in doubt. This is because, this “will be the first time that the opposition will have a realistic chance of wresting power from the ruling Peoples’ Democratic Party” (Adibe, 2015, p.3) after Nigeria’s transition from decades of military rule to civilian leadership since 1999. Prior to the formation of the APC (a coalition of three major regional opposition parties) in 2013,

Adibe (2015) notes that, opposition parties in Nigeria “were mostly fragmented along regional and ethnic lines, making it impossible for them to mount a credible challenge to the ruling PDP.” (p.3)

Essentially, this present study seeks to understand and explain media content during the 2015 Nigerian Presidential election from the perspective of the role of media ownership in influencing election campaign messages. Media owners and providers could be the Government, individuals, and groups, corporate organizations with huge financial resources who use the media to further their interests which could be for public interests, political influence peddling and more especially, for commercial purposes. Nevertheless, Schudson (2002) is quick to point out that, the relationship between ownership of news organizations and the character of news coverage may not be easily determined given the interplay between public and commercial systems of ownership mix which intersects in a growing variety of ways in a contemporary society.

Popularly referred to as the Press in the ‘Lagos-Ibadan axis’, the South-West of Nigeria has the highest concentration of influential media outfits in the country. Thus, the two newspapers selected for the study were the *Nigerian Tribune* and *The Nation* both of which are located in South-west Nigeria. While *The Nation* newspaper is based in the country’s economic hub, Lagos, the *Nigerian Tribune* operates from Ibadan, one of Nigeria’s largest cities. Gambo (2006) stated that, the South-West region “enjoys a near monopoly of vibrant press which is largely in the Lagos-Ibadan axis. According to him, these and many other factors, combine to make the region politically more vocal than the others” (p.159)

Mass media content is influenced by political and economic factors which have direct implications on the electoral process. The political factor refers to the editorial independence and content of the media while the economic influence are the advertisers who constitute the economic force that also determines what should be and what can be the content of media messages (Shoemaker & Reese, 1996; Herman & Chomsky, 2002; Shoemaker & Reese, 2014). The ownership of the media is therefore, an economic imperative that influences not only the editorial independence of the media but also the generality of the content, including the selection of election news. This is why Lichtenberg (1990) submits that: “it would be naïve to think that the economic and political interests of these institutions do not get reflected in their informational products. To the extent

that they do get reflected, less powerful interests and perspectives get less than a fair hearing in the political forum” (p. 123).

Traditionally, the *Nigerian Tribune* newspaper which was established by the late Chief Obafemi Awolowo, a former Premier of the Western Region was the mouthpiece of the ideology of the progressives since the fight for independence in Nigeria. The paper became the proponent of the ideology of the conservatives, People’s Democratic Party (PDP) which sponsored ex-President Goodluck Jonathan in the 2015 general elections. The latter appointed the scion of the founder and now its publisher into a Federal Government top job. The lacuna created by this was filled by *The Nation* which was established by the former Governor of Lagos State, Bola Ahmed Tinubu, the survivor of the progressives and an important partner in the merger of the All Progressives Congress (APC) which presented Muhammadu Buhari, a retired, former military General and Head of State of Nigeria between 1984 and 1985.

2 Media ownership and Nigeria’s political space

In Nigeria, the ownership of the mass media- print and broadcast and more recently, online media platforms, has different historical origins. Most analysts agree that media ownership in Nigeria is driven more by political motives rather than profit (Ibraheem, Ogwezzy-Ndisika & Tejumaiye, 2015; Olisa, 2015; Chukwu, 2015). From the inception of Nigeria’s first newspaper, *IweIroyin fun Awon Ara Egbaati Yoruba* (Newspaper for the Egbas and Yorubas), established by a British missionary, Reverend Henry Townsend from Exeter, in November 1859, the role of ownership in influencing media messages, thereby setting the agenda for public discussion, which ultimately has a significant impact on the political process, cannot be underemphasized. Daramola (2013a) wrote that, the “Iwe Iroyin was Townsend’s chief weapon in his ambitious political propaganda and shrewd manoeuvring for power in Egbaland” (p.15). Extending the discussion, he pointed out that:

Although Iwe Iroyin began more as a small, provincial newspaper, devoted to evangelism, community news and anti-slavery news, it exerted considerable influence in the political sphere. It mobilized pro-Egba sentiment in Yorubaland against the colonial government in Lagos. The paper’s political stance and capacity for agitation led to attempts by colonial administration

to control it and muzzle succeeding newspapers...the Nigerian press, right from Iwe Iroyin, was founded as a nationalist, freedom-fighting press. It was founded to fight for democracy. This is responsible for the psyche, mentality and the *raison d'être* of the Nigerian press right from colonial days. Right from its early days, the press was in conflict with the colonial government and that has remained the relationship even indigenous government till today (Daramola, 2013a, p.16).

From colonial era to independence period, to the post-military interventions, the Nigerian press had been seen to be overtly furthering the cause of partisan politics. In other words, politics and news institutions in the country have been closely interconnected. This is also marked by the activities of various Nigerian nationalists who also were prominent journalists during their lifetime. These included the likes of Herbert Macaulay, Nnamdi Azikiwe, Samuel Ladoke Akintola, Anthony Enahoro, to mention but a few. Thus, a former Chairman of the Daily Times of Nigeria Plc, late Alhaji Babatunde Jose, who, popularly is regarded as the doyen of Nigerian journalism, had asserted that, the fight for Nigeria's independence was fought and won on the pages of newspapers (Ibraheem, Ayedun-Aluma & Adewoye, 2013) cited by Ibraheem, Ogwezzy-Ndisika and Tejumaiye (2015).

Ibraheem, Ogwezzy-Ndisika and Tejumaiye (2015)'s, sketch of private media proprietorship in Nigeria, established "ownership concentration in the southern part of the country's north-south political divide" (p.4). They further stated that:

...although the Lagos-Ibadan axis in the south-west geopolitical zone has the highest concentration of media outfits in terms of location, the south-south geopolitical zone (often regarded as ethnic minorities in the Nigerian political calculation), ironically has the highest number of media proprietors, if we consider the states of origin of these media proprietors (Ibraheem, Ogwezzy-Ndisika & Tejumaiye, 2015, p.4).

In the case for the print media, it is instructive to mention here that, nearly all newspapers in Nigeria started in association with political parties (Olayiwola, 1991). In the beginning, the three major geopolitical regions in Nigeria - Western, Eastern and Northern, had political parties which made use of newspapers to further their political objectives and influence public opinion. Just as the *Nigerian Tribune* and *The Daily Service* was used in projecting the Action Group (AG) of the Western region under Chief Obafemi Awolowo during the colonial and post-colonial Nigeria, the *West African Pilot* established by Dr Nnamdi Azikiwe, who is from the Eastern

region, was the media outlet of the National Council of Nigerian and Cameroun (NCNC) later named National Council of Nigerian Citizens. Dr Azikiwe also established the *Daily Comet*, *Defender* and *The Outlook* to advance the views of the region (Oso, Odunlami & Adaja, 2011). The Northern Peoples' Congress (NPC) headed by Sir Ahmadu Bello and Sir Abubakar Tafawa Balewa established the *New Nigerian Newspaper* to propagate their political interests at this time.

The media war engendered a proverbial joke in Nigeria when Dr Nnamdi Azikiwe visited Helsinki, the AG newspaper edited by Chief S. L. Akintola, taunted the trip to report as Azikiwe went to *hell sinking* to which the NCNC newspaper replied with another verbal jugglery that when Azikiwe reached Helsinki, the zebra crossing there reminded him of the facial tribal marks of Chief S.L. Akintola. The scenario lingers on in the subsequent political developments in Nigeria as Omu (1978) notes that:

...the feud between the *Pilot* and the *Daily Service* edited by Ernest Ikoli (1938-1944) and Akintola, S.L., contributed to the regionalisation of nationalism and crystallization of inter-group tension and animosity which characterized political developments for a long time (OMU, 1978, p. 247)

Adesoji (2010) corroborates this assertion when he stated that, "...as it was with the *Nigerian Tribune* from the 1950s to 1980s and *Concord* from the 1980 to 1990s, some section of the press became actively involved in partisan politics either by virtue of their ownership or the use to which they were put or both" (p.29). In support, Ende (2013) explained that, "there are many more with not very clear ownership links to politicians, yet with assumed partisan undertones-sectional, tribal and religious and which can easily be deployed for political purposes" (p.43). Yet, in a bid to gain influence and exert control, politicians, business leaders, and those with the financial wherewithal, often seek to acquire media organisations in order to articulate their views and advance their interests, those of their friends and political party members, while simultaneously delegitimizing and attacking the positions of those considered as opponents or perceived enemies. Chukwu (2015) argues that, "media proprietors employ their loyalists to run their media outfits in such a way that only their interests are protected. These employees for the fear of being sacked always succumb and this has been detrimental to journalism practice in Nigeria" (p.9).

For the broadcast media in Nigeria around the time of the 2015 presidential election was largely replete with contents which

substantially reflected the wishes of their founders. This is more because most broadcast media outlets are largely state-owned. Media houses owned by the Federal Government such as Radio Nigeria, Voice of Nigeria and Nigeria Television Authority (NTA), were mouthpieces for the PDP which controlled Government at the Centre. Conversely, all State-owned broadcasting networks of radio and television propagates the political ideologies of the parties in power in those States. Private media ownership, more than corroborates or negates the activities of the Government - owned media with their unfettered freedom to project the political leanings of their founders. Among such media houses included the African Independent Television (AIT) and Raypower FM in Lagos and Abuja, both of which were established by Raymond Dokpesi, a chieftain of the PDP.

On the side of APC, were Television Continental (TVC), Lagos, established by an influential national leader of the APC, Bola Ahmed Tinubu, his protégé, Mr Rauf Aregbesola, established the Unique FM, Ilesa, before he became Governor of Osun State on the platform of the APC. Both projected the political ideologies of their founders. The media hostility generated by this allegiance to the two major political parties around the time of the election reached its climax when a paid advertorial was run against Bola Ahmed Tinubu captioned 'The Lion of Bourdillion' which run repeatedly every night by both the state-owned Nigerian Television Authority (NTA) and African Independent Television (AIT) which resulted in litigations at a competent court of law after the election. This advertorial also affected the fortunes of the APC at Lagos which was traditionally its stronghold as the party managed to get a simple majority in all the elections contrary to its antecedents of landslide victories in the previous elections.

Broadcast media of different political ideologies often outplay each other in their daily broadcast of newspaper reviews where the strength of their political leanings and weakness of their opponents are propagated. Even before the specific study to follow, an exception could be made of some broadcast and print media whose ownerships are not traceable to politicians and who allowed journalism and media work to follow their golden rules. Such media houses include Channels Television rated the best in Nigeria by the viewers eleven times out of its 21 years of broadcast and *The Punch* newspaper which is considered the most widely read newspaper in contemporary Nigeria.

Nwammuo, Edegoh and Iwok (2015, p.87) conducted a study on the Nigerian Press coverage of the 2015 elections which revealed

that, newspapers owned by politicians paid attention to the coverage of political events in order to protect the interests of their financiers while those owned by businessmen covered more of economic related stories because their financiers are more interested in business-related stories and profit-making. This conclusion seems sweeping as there is no newspaper that will not contain business, economy, health, technology and other social themes. The manoeuvre of the owner of the media ends at the political reportage. Ojo (2013, p. 434) highlights four ways by which political elites in major ethnic groups manipulate and control the media to suit their purposes which include: a deliberate distortion of the information they disseminate to their audience, the citizens; the deliberate exclusion of some vital pieces of information, especially if those pieces are likely to lead the citizens into drawing a conclusion that does not favour the leadership; they can simply remain quiet over some crucial issues where the population is thirsting for information and they seek to divert the people's attention from very important issues by crowding the people's mind with trivialities.' Ejupi, Siljanovska, and Iseni (2014), also opined that: "media effects on politics are realized through manipulative and propagandistic techniques of persuasion, contrary to the professional standards and criteria of the functioning of the mass media of communication" (p. 636). All the foregoing assertions are subjected to an acid test in this study to establish the veracity or otherwise of each of them, and to also venture into other elements of framing.

3 Nigeria's 2015 Presidential Election as a mediated event

Political scientists as well as media researchers have frequently examined campaigns issues during elections. They usually study matters such as the salient characteristics of the originators of political messages; the backgrounds and the attitudes that receivers bring to the interpretation of messages; the form and substance of messages; the impact that various types of communication channels leave on the messages that flow through their networks, and, ultimately, the impact of the messages on political processes at individual and societal levels (Bennett & Entman, 2001; McNair, 2003; Graber, 2004; Wolfe, Jones & Baumgartner, 2013). McNair (2003) also underscored the critical role played by the media as "transmitters of political communication" when he asserted that, "political actors must

use the media in order to have their messages communicated to the desired audience” (p.12). Examining the 2015 Nigerian Presidential election as mediated events reveals the nature and underscores the importance of the mass media as an intermediary between the governed and the government particularly in a democracy.

Section 22 of the Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria (1999) articulates the important role that the mass media play can in the Nigerian society, as it states that: “The press, radio, television and other agencies of the mass media shall at all times, be free to uphold the fundamental objectives contained in this chapter and uphold the responsibility and accountability of the Government to the people” (FRN, 1999, p. 8). Against the backdrop of heightened emotions in the public sphere during the 2015 election period, research conducted by various media scholars in Nigeria have shown how the news media reportage of the election provided the citizenry with saliency cues regarding the importance of political issues which dominated political discussions (Abubakre & Oyewo, 2015; Olisa, 2015; Nwofe, 2016).

Such issues according to Adibe (2015) included amongst others, the North-South, Christian-Muslim divide, the North-South regional inequalities, money and power of incumbency, the performance of the then incumbent President, Goodluck Jonathan, the performance of the electoral umpire-Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC). Indeed, a few years before, Daramola (2013b, p.44) had maintained that newspaper ownership in Nigeria was closely linked to ethnicity and by extension, an ethnic consideration in political reporting.

While the mass media has been used to maintain the dominance of those already in power, the media during the 2015 elections provided a platform to reflect debates among political elites and their rivals. Hence, political actors and their opponents strove to gain access to the news. However, contrary to the position of Adibe (2015) which observed that the then ruling PDP’s greatest strength lies in its ‘power of incumbency’, as well as stressing the critical role that money plays in political campaigning, media reach and vote-buying. Nwofe (2016) argued that, the former opposition party, All Progressives Congress (APC), which won the election at the centre, “may have had some level of influence on the media that earned it more positive coverage than the incumbent’s party - the People’s Democratic Party” (p.10). This, however, negates the submission of Levendusky and Malhotra (2015, p. 283) who stated that, “when citizens are exposed to media coverage depicting mass polarization, they dislike members of the opposition more, and

rate them negatively on a number of dimensions.” Even though much attention has also been devoted to the impact of political advertising in the 2015 Nigerian presidential election (Alawode & Adesanya, 2016), findings from a study conducted by Ojekwe (2015), which examined the political advertisement campaigns of the Lagos State Governor, Akinwumi Ambode, and voting behaviour among electorates during the 2015 elections, revealed limited effects on voting behaviour. Ojekwe submitted that, “irrespective of whether political candidates advertise or not, the electorates have a preconceived choice of candidate and exposure to Ad campaigns of other contestants does little in changing that preconceived choice” (2015, p.13). Furthermore, Salman (2015) conducted a study on “Issues in campaign expenditure: tracking political advertorials for the 2015 Presidential electioneering campaigns in Nigeria from the print media.” And findings from that study revealed that, the PDP had the lion share (77.7%) of advertising spaces in the country’s newspapers while its major opponent, APC had just 22.3%.

Against the backdrop of media ownership, this study nonetheless argues that, the coverage or reportage dedicated to the campaigns of the two major political parties (APC and PDP) in the country, will suggest how issues in the 2015 elections would be thought about and understood by the citizens (Entman, 1993; Entman, 2003; Entman, Matthes, & Pellicano, 2009). This is central to understanding public opinion not only about the electoral campaigns but more so because, a well-informed electorate is key to democratic governance. Furthermore, in evaluating what makes a political party messages fit for reportage by journalists, it has been established that, the power status of a party, the unexpectedness as well as, the magnitude of the political action announced, was most likely to influence journalists’ perception of news worthiness or news values (Helfer & Aelst, 2016).

Essentially, election campaign messages seek to persuade undecided voters, thereby encouraging them and their supporters to turn out on Election Day to vote for a particular candidate. These messages are also carefully crafted by media experts and politicians to highlight the strengths of such candidate, shield him/her against potential negative attacks while simultaneously, playing up the flaws and weaknesses of the opponent and rival political party (Arbour, 2014). It is on this basis that the present study is guided by the framing theory.

4 Media Framing and Nigeria's 2015 Presidential Election

The concept of Framing in Communication Studies and as a theory of media effect, is apposite for this study given its description as “one of the most fertile areas of current research in journalism and mass communication” (Matthes, 2009, p.349). Scheufele (1999) submits that framing effects refer to communication effects that are not due to differences in *what* is being communicated, but rather to variations in *how* a given piece of information is being presented (or framed) in public discourse. Pan and Kosicki (2001, p.36) corroborates this assertion when they posited that, public deliberation is not an harmonious process “but an ideological contest and political struggle” where “actors in the public arena struggle over the right to define and shape issues as well as the discourse surrounding these issues.” A popular definition of framing rendered in academic literature is the one advanced by Entman (1993) who stated that, “framing essentially involves selection and salience. To frame is to select some aspects of a 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 of the item described” (p.52).

Unlike previous national elections in the country, the Nigerian media during the 2015 Presidential poll had gone a step further to project outcomes of the election. Ibraheem, Ogwezzy-Ndisika and Tejumaiye (2015) examined the disparity between media projections of the outcome of the Presidential election and the actual result announced by the electoral umpire, INEC, using three national dailies - *The Guardian*, *The Nation* and *The Punch*. Findings from the study revealed that, the media projected either of the two major political parties (APC or PDP) to win. While *The Guardian* newspapers envisioned that the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) was going to win, both *The Nation* and *The Punch* took a contrary position, projecting that the major opposition party, All Progressives Congress (APC), was set to win the presidential election. Ibraheem et al (2015) noted that, although the predictions of the latter newspapers were “valid”, they further pointed out that there were variations in the actual states that *The Nation* and *The Punch* news papers projected would be won or lost. The scholars' puts it thus:

For instance, *The Nation* newspaper projected Adamawa, Benue, Kogi and Plateau states were going to be battleground between the two major parties but the APC won. The newspaper also projected that Rivers and Edo states were going to be battleground but PDP won. As a matter of fact PDP

won a landslide in Rivers state. One significant variable in the newspapers projection is that they all projected that the two major candidates, Goodluck Jonathan and Muhammadu Buhari will win in their strongholds of South-South for Jonathan and the North for Buhari and these projection came to be. The newspapers were united in projecting that the South West was going to be won by the APC while the South East was going to be won by the PDP and this was correct as well based on the final result (Ibraheem et al, 2014, p.6)

Nevertheless, this study contends that, the projections made by the newspapers, has implications in the different manner they will structure campaign issues prior to the Election Day. Herman and Chomsky (2002) also explained that media frames can play an important role in presenting, shaping or destroying the picture of an event. Obijiofor (2012) lends credence to this when he noted that:

(...) limitations of the media in African countries...have contributed to growing public distrust of the media as pipelines of credible and reliable information; it is not surprising therefore, that, Africans are using new media to break free from the inadequacies of the media as well as the constraint imposed on the media by market forces (e.g. advertising) and political leaders. (Obijiofor, 2012, ¶ 5)

The media coverage of the campaigns during the 2015 elections represented a significantly marked difference from that of the 2007 presidential election campaigns in Nigeria. Employing three Southern-based concentrated newspapers –*The Daily Independent*, *The Guardian* and the *Vanguard* in exploring the Nigerian press coverage of the 2007 presidential election campaigns, Eze (2010) found that, the PDP did not only obtain the highest level of coverage, it also enjoyed the most favourable reportage from the three newspapers. Abubakre and Oyewo (2015, p. 141) also conducted a study on media coverage, voting behaviour and the 2015 presidential election in Nigeria, using as a case study, electorates at the University of Ilorin. Findings obtained from the study showed that, fighting corruption was the strongest point of the APC presidential candidate Muhammadu Buhari. *The Nation* newspaper continually emphasized this strength of the APC candidate, while the *Nigerian Tribune* newspaper on its part, played up the weakness of the APC candidate by highlighting vigorously, Buhari's dictatorship past.

Using *The Punch* and *The Guardian* newspapers, Olisa (2015), examined the news framing of the APC Change campaigns during the 2015 Nigerian Presidential election. Findings from that research indicated that *The Punch* framed the campaign theme of the APC, 'Change' more positively (63%), than *The Guardian* (53%). However, it was established

that both newspapers used more positive frames to present the 'Change' mantra of the APC in the 2015 electoral campaigns.

5 2015 Presidential Election in Nigeria: A Historical Backdrop

The 2015 Nigerian Presidential elections, which was first slated to take place on 14th of February 2015, but postponed by six weeks, to 28th of March 2015, was contested by immediate past President, Dr. Goodluck Jonathan (then incumbent seeking re-election) and a former military Head of State, General Muhammadu Buhari (Akinrefon, Oke, Nwabughioqu & Olowopejo, 2014). The postponement of the elections built up a serious controversy which the Nigerian media impute different opinions in support of different political camps. The media in support of the ruling party believed that Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) was not fully ready for the election while the opposition parties taunted the PDP as not ready for the election and wanted to buy time with the postponement.

Following the molding of opinion by the PDP sympathetic media, Former President Goodluck Jonathan ran unopposed in the party primaries. The media outputs of the APC projected Muhammadu Buharias the only presidential candidate that can safeguard victory for the party. The media had on both sides influenced the opinions in the two political camps to see that primaries of the two parties should hold on the same day to avert the danger of defection. Thus, presidential primaries for the two parties were held on the same day - December 10, 2014 at Abuja and Lagos respectively. While Professor Yemi Osinbajo was selected as the running mate to General Buhari (Aziken, Umoru, & Nwabughioqu, 2014), Architect Namadi Sambothe immediate former Vice-President was the running mate of Goodluck Jonathan.

Since democracy was re-established in 1999 in the country after the transition from military rule to civilian rule, the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) had dominated Nigeria's political landscape. While the opposition parties had over the years failed to present any serious opposition in the past, the All Progressives Congress (APC), (an alliance of five major political parties) was considered as a serious challenge to the PDP - led Federal Government in the 2015 national elections. To avert this, government grant aided most media houses on the heels of the election to influence public opinion in its favour. Nevertheless, the APC eventually won the Presidential election. While

the two parties got through to the voters through media, those other parties that had next to low influence on the media performed woefully in the elections. The parties are: the Peoples Party of Nigeria (PPN), HOPE Party, African Peoples' Alliance (APA), United Progressives Party (UPP), KOWA Party, Allied Congress Party of Nigeria (ACPN), United Democratic Party (UDP), African Democratic Congress (ADC), National Conscience Party (NCP), Alliance for Democracy (AD), Citizens Popular Party (CPP) and Accord Alliance (AA).

Further to the apprehension of possible electoral violence orchestrated by nearly all the media outlets on the 2015 Nigerian presidential election, which could be described as one of the most keenly contested in the history of the country, an electoral peace accord (Abuja Accord) was signed by the presidential candidates of the two leading political parties, Goodluck Jonathan of the Peoples' Democratic Party (PDP), Muhammad Buhari of the All Progressives Congress (APC) and eleven other presidential aspirants from other parties on January 14, 2015. Mindful of the potential danger of overheating the polity through biased political reportage, the content of the accord as captured by the Nigerian media was the commitment from all presidential candidates' to proper conduct which is a sine qua non to a free, fair and credible elections. In the Accord as reported in the media, the politicians agreed to "run an issue-based campaign and pledged that our electoral campaigns will not involve any religious incitement, tribal or ethnic profiling, both by ourselves and all agents acting in our names." (Vanguard, 2015, ¶, 4). Commentators in the media were optimistic that: "The Accord was widely hailed as an encouraging development that provides civil society, the media and the international community with a yardstick against which to hold candidates and parties accountable for their conduct in violence-free polls" (NDI, 2015, p.6)

However, recurrent events after the electoral peace accord indicated that, the electoral campaigns had been anything but issue-based. The peace accord, which was observed in breach by the two major political parties, were characterized by religious incitement, tribal and ethnic profiling. The foregoing directs us to the research questions formulated for the present study.

RQ₁: What was the direction of the coverage of electoral campaign news items between the Peoples' Democratic Party (PDP) and the All Progressives Congress (APC) published in *The Nation* and the *Nigerian Tribune* between January 2015 and March 2015?

RQ₂: What were the campaign issues published in *The Nation* and the *Nigerian Tribune* between January 2015 and March 2015?

6 Research Method

The analysis of the data collected for this study was done through quantitative and qualitative methods. Quantitative method refers to the data that aim at establishing the nature of the variable by attaching numerical value (quantification). The qualitative method refers to the data that aim at establishing the nature of the variable by not attaching numerical value. The scope of this research covered a period of three months from January 1, 2015 to March 31, 2015 which was when the electoral campaigns became highly intensive. The print media was chosen for this study because of their influence on national issues from the pre-independence period to the post-independence era in Nigeria. The newspapers which were selected for the study are the *Nigerian Tribune* and *The Nation* which are both based in the South-West geopolitical zone of Nigeria. Both media were purposively selected because of their political leanings and extensive coverage of national issues.

Thus, both the quantitative data generated from the content direction of the electoral campaign news items in *The Nation* and *Nigerian Tribune* newspapers, as well as the qualitative analysis of the different themes during the election campaigns, which was undertaken using textual analysis, will enable us to understand the impact of media ownership on the coverage of the 2015 Presidential election campaign in Nigeria. The analysis of the data for this study was obtained through a systematic random sampling method. The systematic random sampling method is a process of selecting the sample size in a way that the population is divided into intervals and the same number of unit is selected from each interval.

The process of selection of sample drawn from *The Nation* newspaper began by dividing the total editions (90) published within three months (January, February and March 2015) of intensive electoral campaign into three intervals. From each of the interval which is equivalent to a month, 12 editions were selected randomly to make a total of 36 editions from *The Nation* newspaper for the study. Likewise, the process of selection of the sample drawn from the *Nigerian Tribune* newspaper began by dividing the total editions (90) published within three months (January, February and March 2015) of intensive

electoral campaign into three intervals. From each of the interval which is equivalent to a month, 12 editions were selected randomly to make a total of 36 editions from the *Nigerian Tribune* newspaper for the study. This choice was made to give a fair representation of the population of study. Cumulatively, the sampling process produced a total sample of 72 editions out of the total population of study (180) editions of both newspapers. The 72 editions were then content analyzed for the study.

The analysis of the data collected in this study was done through quantitative method. The instrument of data collection for the content analysis employed in this study was the coding sheet. The study also employed the use of statistical methods indicating frequency and percentages encapsulated in Tables for analyzing the data that were generated from the study. A bar chart was used to further illustrate the data generated from the study.

7 Presentation of Data

Table 1: Direction of electoral news items between the Peoples' Democratic Party (PDP) and the All Progressives Congress (APC) published in *The Nation* between January 2015 and March 2015.

Direction	Frequency	Percent
Favourable to PDP	25	3.5
Favourable to APC	99	13.8
Unfavourable to PDP	361	50.5
Unfavourable to APC	11	1.5
Neutral to PDP and APC	219	30.6
Total	715	100.0

Source: Researcher's computation of data from content analysis of *The Nation*, 2015

Table 1 shows that, out of the 715 items identified in *The Nation*, 25 (3.5 percent) electoral news items were favourable to the PDP and 99 (13.8percent) electoral news items were favourable to the APC. 361 (50.5 percent) electoral news items were unfavourable to the PDP and 11 (1.5 percent) were unfavourable to the APC. 219 (30.6 percent) electoral news items were assumed to be neutral to both the PDP and the APC.

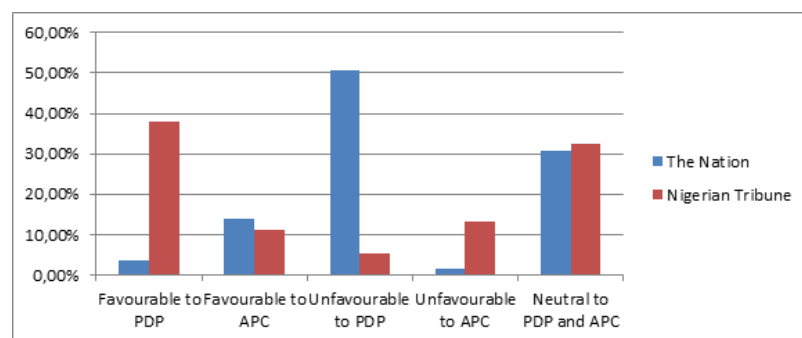
Table 2: Direction of electoral news items between the Peoples’ Democratic Party (PDP) and the All Progressives Congress (APC) published in the Nigerian Tribune between January 2015 and March 2015.

Direction	Frequency	Percent
Favourable to PDP	214	38.1
Favourable to APC	62	11.1
Unfavourable to PDP	30	5.3
Unfavourable to APC	74	13.2
Neutral to PDP and APC	181	32.3
Total	561	100.0

Source: Researcher’s computation of data from content analysis of the *Nigerian Tribune, 2015*

Table 2 shows that, out of the 561 items identified in the *Nigerian Tribune*, 214 (38.1 percent) electoral news items were favourable to the PDP and 62 (11.1 percent) electoral news items were favourable to the APC. 30 (5.3 percent) electoral news items were unfavourable to the PDP and 74 (13.2 percent) were unfavourable to the APC. 181 (32.3 percent) electoral news items were assumed to be neutral to both the PDP and the APC. The Direction of election news items in *The Nation* and the *Nigerian Tribune* is further illustrated in Chart 1

Chart 1: Direction of election news items



Source: Researcher’s computation of data from content analysis of *The Nation & the Nigerian Tribune, 2015*

Chart 1 shows the positive-negative-neutral direction of the news items published in both newspapers. An election news item

was categorized as negative when it is not favourable to a political party or when the words used in the reportage suggested difficulties or when events were problematic or expected to be problematic.

Positive news items are considered to be favourable towards a political party when viewed events are good and in favour of that party on matters relating to the election. Electoral news items were assumed to be neutral when such neither favours nor repudiates either of the two political parties.

Overall, 400 election news items assumed to be neutral to both political parties formed 31.3 percent of the total election news items (1276) identified in both newspapers.

Table 3: Themes identified in campaign issues in *The Nation* and the *Nigerian Tribune*

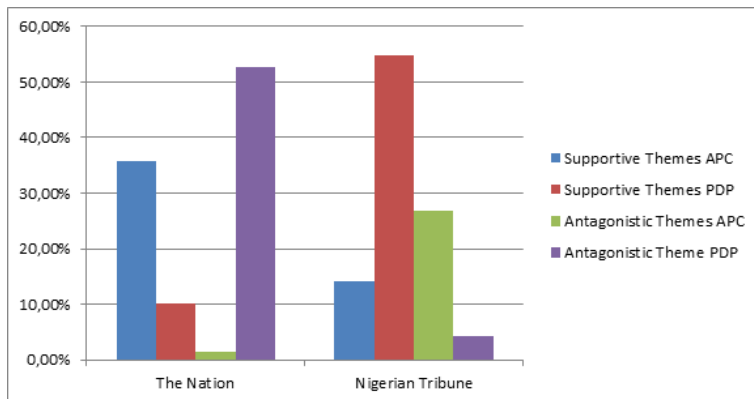
The Nation Nigerian Tribune

Theme Categories	Supportive APC %	Supportive PDP %	Antagonistic APC %	Antagonistic PDP %	Supportive APC %	Supportive PDP %	Antagonistic APC %	Antagonistic PDP %
Corruption	38.9	6.7	3.3	51.1	17.6	55.9	26.5	0
Religion	31.2	18.8	0	50.0	13.6	54.5	27.3	4.5
Ethnicity	34.2	22.9	0	42.9	9.3	51.2	34.8	4.7
Economy	52.4	7.1	0	40.5	21.6	48.6	24.3	5.4
Effective Governance	29.6	18.5	0	51.9	20.5	56.4	17.6	5.1
Ineffective Governance	28.4	9.5	2.6	59.5	10.3	48.3	24.1	17.2
Democratic Profile	39.0 15.3		0	45.8	4.4	64.7	30.9	0
Certificate Controversy	40.0	0	0	60.0	14.0	48.8	37.2	0
PVC/ ElectionShift	36.9	0	1.5	61.5	16.7	53.3	20.0	10.0

Source: Researcher’s computation of data from content analysis of *The Nation*, and the *Nigerian Tribune 2015*

The findings systematized and summarised in Table 3, shows the themes in the electoral campaign issues between the APC and the PDP published in *The Nation* and the *Nigerian Tribune*. The identified issues were: Corruption, Religion, Ethnicity, Effective Governance, Ineffective Governance, Economy, Democratic Profile, Buhari’s Certificate Controversy and Permanent Voter Card (PVC) /Election Shift. Chart 2 is used to further highlight the pattern of themes of campaign issues.

Chart 2: Pattern of themes of campaign issues in *The Nation* and *Nigerian Tribune*



Source: Researcher’s computation of data from content analysis of *The Nation & Nigerian Tribune, 2015*

Chart 2 shows that *The Nation* used more supportive themes for the APC than for the PDP, while it used more of the antagonistic themes against the PDP than the APC. The *Nigerian Tribune* on its part used more supportive themes for the PDP than for the APC, while it used more of the antagonistic themes against the APC than for the PDP.

8 Discussion and Conclusion

This study seeks to examine the impact of media ownership on the coverage of 2015 presidential election campaigns in Nigeria. Findings from the study shows that the *Nigerian Tribune* gave more favourable coverage to the PDP as it published more electoral news items favourable to the PDP and its presidential candidate than the APC and its presidential candidate. *The Nation* on the other hand, gave more favourable coverage to the APC and its presidential candidate, than the PDP and its presidential candidate. Furthermore, issues identified in the election campaigns in the period under study were: Corruption, Religion, Ethnicity, Effective Governance, Ineffective Governance, Economy, Democratic Profile, Buhari’s Certificate Controversy and Permanent Voter Card (PVC)/Election Shift. Generally, the study found that in the coverage of these issues, *The Nation* used more supportive themes for the APC than for the PDP, while it used more of the antagonistic themes

against the PDP than the APC. For the *Nigerian Tribune*, it used more supportive themes for the PDP than for the APC, while it used more of the antagonistic themes against the APC than for the PDP.

The study demonstrated that the direction of electoral campaign news items between the PDP and the APC which were published in both newspapers reflected the political leanings of their respective owners. For example, in its editorial of March 27, 2015, entitled 'For a peaceful, fair presidential election' a day before the presidential election was scheduled to hold, the *Nigerian Tribune* emphasized the dictatorship past of Buhari, stating that the APC's candidate past 'as a military dictator continues to cast a large shadow' while in another editorial of February 6, 2015, titled 'The ex-militants' threat', the newspaper tried to insulate Jonathan's bid from the Niger Delta militants who had threatened to go to war should Jonathan fail to win his re-election bid, stating that:

President Jonathan whose interest the ex-militants claim to be serving is fully conscious of the fact that he is operating in a democratic environment. This is why he has been on the hustings with messages of hope for a better future. He has not been intimidating the people to get their votes. In keeping with democratic principle and necessity, he has been courting them.

The Nation newspaper was quite critical of the ex- President Goodluck Jonathan's administration and the former ruling PDP. It constantly emphasized the perceived anti-corruption posture of Buhari by promoting news items that depict the Jonathan administration as corrupt and ineffective through the issues of corruption and ineffective governance, while less attention was paid to the poor democratic antecedents of the APC candidate as a dictator, by highlighting electoral news items that portrayed the Jonathan administration as one characterized by impunity.

Although a thorough discussion on the framing of electoral campaigns news of the 2015 Nigerian presidential election is beyond the scope of this study, the researcher undertook a preliminary analysis of selected coverage for the sake of comparison. The selected coverage for this brief comparison consisted of two news stories about the purported acquisition of a large expanse of land for farming by ex-president Goodluck Jonathan, published on February 22, 2015 and March 5, 2015, in *The Nation* and the *Nigerian Tribune* respectively. The two news accounts ranged from approximately from 263 to 748 words and provided significant coverage of the issue and reactions to it. The article in *The Nation* which was a front page major story opened with the headline and narrative:

“Jonathan in trouble over Abuja farm deal”

Despite moves to improve his sliding campaign fortunes, President Jonathan is battling to explain all he knows about a multi-billion dollar farm which a non-governmental organization (NGO) says belongs to him in alleged violation of the 1999 Constitution (Imam, 2015).

The article had quoted extensively, the non-governmental organization Purpose Driven Initiative (PDI) on the acquisition of the land by the former President, saying the action had put the ex-President in a position where his personal interests conflicted with his duties and responsibilities, stating: “Do we need any more evidence of how the Jonathan administration has been fighting or will fight corruption?”. Nonetheless, the final section of the piece was devoted to a statement of defence by a pro-Jonathan group, New Generation Coalition, that the Nigerian constitution allows a public officer to engage in farming while alleging that former President Olusegun Obasanjo during his tenure, was also a beneficiary of such. A presidency source was quoted as saying: “Let them reveal more, we will also expose more. Whoever lives in a glass house must not throw stones. The battle line is drawn, no one can rubbish or stain President Goodluck Jonathan, we have records of personal demands by these so-called anti-corruption saints in the country.” What is significant in this article is the antagonistic theme of corruption in reportage of the story. Note the prominent use of the phrase “Jonathan in trouble” in the headline.

On the other hand, the *Nigerian Tribune* reported the same issue in the following manner:

“Abuja natives flay APC over media attack on Jonathan”

Original inhabitants of Abuja have condemned the All Progressives Congress (APC) over media attack on President Goodluck Jonathan, following his ownership of a farm land in the Federal Capital Territory (FCT) which has thrown up controversies...The indigenes described APC's kick against the allocation of the land as cheap blackmail, while affirming that the acquisition of the farm land by President Jonathan was to boost employment and address food security in the country (Nigerian Tribune, March 5, 2015, p.47).

The article, which quoted only the statement of the Secretary-General of the Abuja Original Inhabitants Youth Organisation (AOIYO) Yunusa Yusuf, throughout the report, was slanted against the APC. In the final section of the article, the AOIYO scribe reportedly stated that inspite of the “cheap political blackmail by the opposition, the indigenes of the territory would vote overwhelmingly for President Jonathan in the forthcoming election.”

Findings from the present study also lend support to the outcome of a research carried out by Nwammuo et al (2015, p.87),

that *The Nation* newspaper gave higher coverage to the APC which is the party of Bola Ahmed Tinubu, its financier. In terms of commercial influence, Salman (2015), found that, *The Nation* newspaper gave more advertising spaces to the APC presidential candidate (284) than the PDP candidate, who had 72. On the other hand, the *Nigerian Tribune* newspaper gave more advertising spaces to the PDP presidential candidate (320) than the APC candidate, who had 39.

This study proffers discernable information as it relates to the impact of media ownership on the 2015 presidential elections campaigns in Nigeria. Again, this buttresses the point that the direction of the published electoral campaign news items between the two major political parties in Nigeria (PDP and the APC) which were published in *The Nation* and the *Nigerian Tribune* newspapers reflected the political leanings of their respective publishers. This has implications on the perspectives of readers who, then, may formulate their opinions on the basis of the ideological bias in the election reportage of the 2015 Nigerian presidential elections. Results obtained in the aftermath of the 2015 presidential election showed that the voting pattern in the South-West seem to be rather balanced though heavily in favour of the APC which fielded Muhammadu Buhari partly because of its wide acceptance in the zone due to its 'change' mantras and also because of the "anti-corruption profile" of its candidate. The scenario in most of the Northern zone was different as voting pattern was sweeping in favour of Buhari, while the South-East and South-South gave Goodluck Jonathan a landslide victory in their votes. The South-East/South-South voted en masse for Goodluck Jonathan, as evidences from this research reveal this as a situation of recognition and appreciation for his attitude to the ethnic groups which benefited most from his administration. To come to terms with the qualities and merits which attracted voters to either of the candidates, was a task which the newspapers analyzed in this study set out to achieve following the cliché of 'he who pays the piper dictates the tune.'

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RECEIVED ON: 15/05/2017 | APPROVED ON: 01/09/2017