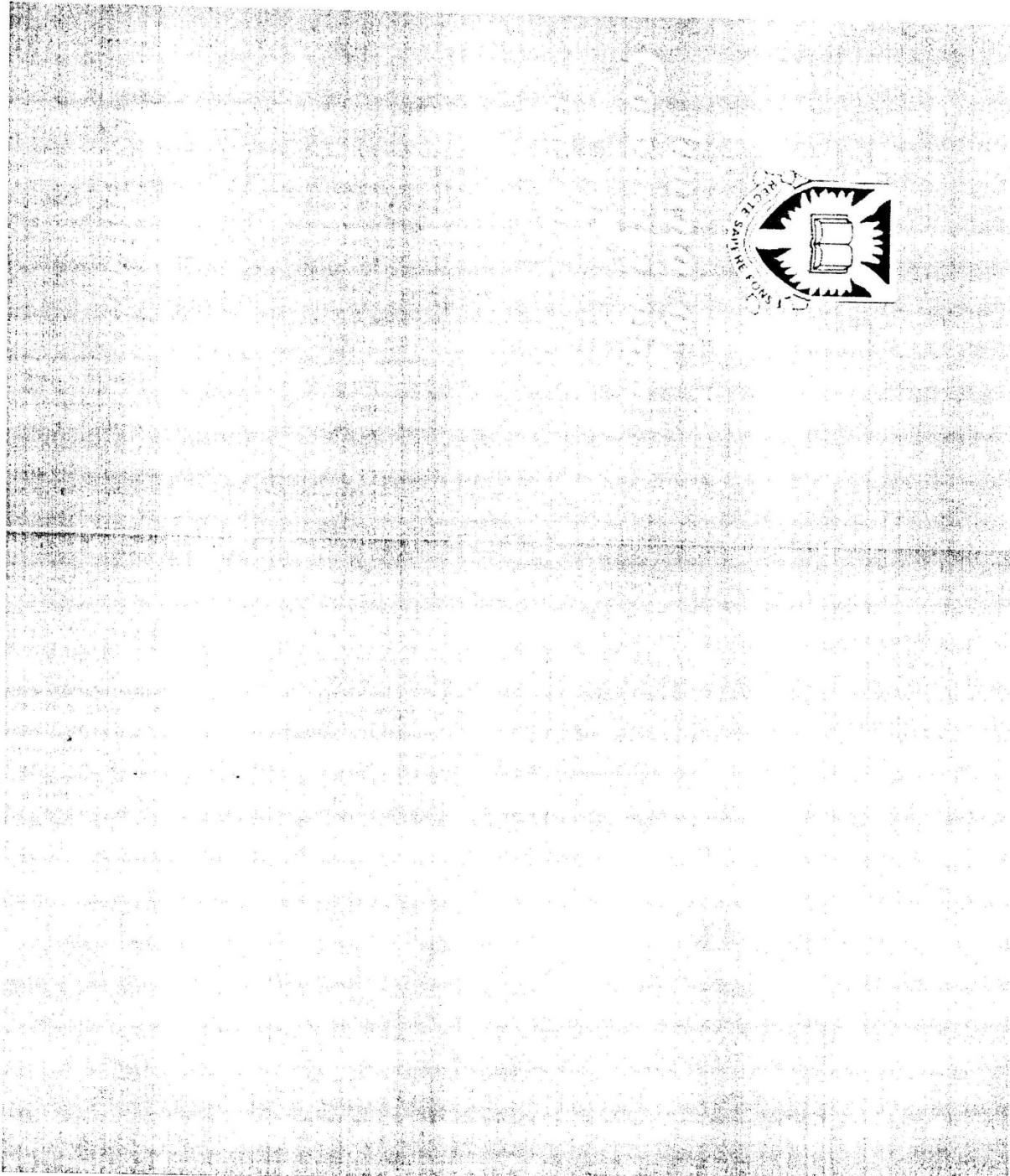






Scope & Editorial Policy

Scope

Journal of Communication and Language Arts (JCLA) seeks to stimulate and promote a cross fertilisation of scholarly research and academic discourse among media educators and researchers in the fields of mass media/media studies, specifically broadcasting, speech communication, public relations, marketing, development communication/journalism, publishing, creative writing/children's literature, indigenous communication and cross cultural communication.

Well researched articles employing qualitative and/or quantitative methods and critical analytical articles providing enriching insights are particularly sought. Occasionally, there will be special editions dedicated to a selected theme. For such editions, a guest editor may be invited to coordinate the call for papers, assessment, selection and final editing of submissions.

Journal of Communication and Language Arts will also welcome relevant film and book reviews, as well as conference reports.

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The journal is published yearly by the Department of Communication and Language Arts, University of Ibadan, Nigeria. JCLA is available in both print and electronic versions. The e-version can be accessed on the website of the University of Ibadan (www.uibadun.org) or by following this link: http://library.uibadun.org/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=114&Itemid=120. Most good search engines will pick JCLA online articles. All articles will be peer-reviewed blind. Research articles will be reviewed by at least two assessors; film and book review by one assessor.

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Patterns of Media Coverage of Nigeria's 2015 General Elections

Aremu Fatai Ayinde¹, Bakare Adebola Raifu²
and Abayomi Kolapo Quadri³

Abstract

Studies have established that the media is one of the core institutions in democratic sustenance. It is in light of this that this study attempts to analyze the patterns of media coverage of the 2015 general elections in Nigeria in order to identify the causal factors and the loopholes surrounding extant laws and policies guiding the media in the Nigeria democratic regime. Employing sequential explanatory strategy of the mixed method research design, data from four (4) major national newspapers (Nigerian Tribune, The Sun, Punch and Daily Trust) were analyzed through content analysis technique. The media outlets were found to violate the regulatory frameworks on publication of hate speeches and character murdering advertorials for political and economic gains. The study therefore recommends that a strong ethical standard mechanism backed up with sanction be put in place. Similarly, periodic sensitizations should be done by the Broadcasting Organisation of Nigeria (BON) and other regulatory agencies on the need to eschew publications capable of undermining the peaceful existence of the country and the survival of the hard earned democracy.

Introduction

The mass media is one of the critical stakeholders in the electoral process.

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Its centrality cannot be over-emphasized on the fact that electoral outcome clearly rests on how the media project it to the public. Studies have shown that election periods are defining moments in the democratic survival of any nation whether developed or developing (Bertou, 2008). However, whether a particular election will make or mar the democratic existence of any nation is largely dependent on the conduct of the media among many other factors such as independence and unbiased electoral umpire, credible election etc. To this end, the issue of media freedom has continued to enjoy the support of scholars, practitioners and election related organisations.

Mass media play the important role of enlightening, exposing, informing, and moulding the opinion of the electorate for the choice of thorough and well-coordinated candidate among the numerous contenders for few political positions available (Newman, Dutton, and Blank, 2012). The media is a vital part of the system of checks and balances in democracy; acting as the watchdog for the people and as the Fourth Estate (Chaparr, Ngah and Abdullahi, 2013). Because of its role, it was argued that the media must be able to enjoy freedom and not constraints. Becker, Viad and Nusser, (-2011) argued that the most essential norm of media freedom is that media should have certain independence sufficient to protect free and open public expression of ideas and information. It must be an organ to inform and not to misinform the public for the promotion of true participation while guiding against a manipulated wrong choice.

However, the restriction on media is an early indicator that governments intend to assault other democratic institutions (Freedom House, 2014). Its output must be guided by objectivity and not partiality regardless of where one belong. Former Secretary General of the United Nations, Kofi Annan, states that for an election to be truly fair, different parties and candidates should have equal access to the media. Neither state power nor the power of money should determine that one party gets a hearing while another is denied it. The media must actively seek out the truth on the public's behalf, and be free to tell it as they see it (Annan, 2000: 7).

Series of elections (general, state, bye-elections etc.) have been held in Nigeria since the country's return to democracy in 1999, including the 2015 general elections. In all these, Nigerian media has been a critical element playing a robust and important responsibility of reportage on the organisation and holding of all elections in the country (Umaru, 2015). Like in all democracies, elections and electoral processes in Nigeria are usually

accompanied by numerous activities that involve series of claims and counter claims among the stakeholders, political parties and candidates. As such, election periods are known to be prone to conflict and violence (Newman, Dutton, and Blank, 2012). It is therefore expected that media reports on elections should be decent, fair, accurate and balanced. Above all, the media "shall not publish or air political adverts, advertorials and sponsored political news that seek to create hatred or incite violence" (The Nigerian Media Code of Election Coverage, 2014:18-22). For this reason, the media is expected to be guided by legal and ethical mandates to discharge its role in integrating the country rather than causing disintegration. In fact, NMC/EC (2014) stated that endorsement of a candidate or political party ideology should be treated by media as its own opinion and not impair the balanced coverage of campaigns by all parties and candidates contesting elections. The basic role of the media, according to Morris (2007) is to enlighten and educate the public and act as a neutral, objective platform for the free debate of all point of view.

Since the inception of democracy in Nigeria, election periods have constituted a basic challenge to the media, putting its impartiality and objectivity to test. The media practitioners have to decide between profit making, news values, and the public right to know national secrecy and at the same time, serve the interests of the ruling elites. While many authors have criticized the performance of the media as often being partisan, non-critical, personality focused, unethical, elite and urban centered, and highly commercialized (Daramola 2013; Ojo and Adeboyo, 2013; Adibiyi, 2009; Dare, 2006). Some scholars have however acknowledged the role of the media in educating the people to be able to decide during election, and in investigating and challenging wrong doing in the process (Nwosu, 2003; Oso, 2010; Yusuf, 2001). There seems to be increased disillusion with the mainstream media in Nigeria in particular, with the role it played in the 2015 general elections. The media was perceived as echoing the voice of the government, not giving a balanced coverage of issues and ignoring the opposition's point of view. These raised some doubt and questions the role of the media. Thus, this study scrutinizes the patterns of media coverage of 2015 general elections in Nigeria, putting at the front burner the question of code of ethics compliance and the necessary regulatory mechanisms available to curtail subjective reportage.

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accuracy and fairness; sources of information: favours and special treatment; role of media owners; opinion polls; hate speech and incitement; minorities; state media; private media; separation of fact and opinion; advertorials; identification; attacks and threats; journalists and assignments; electoral processes and malpractice; informing and educating voters; human rights, political activity (UNDP-Kenya, 2007).

Furthermore, Colloquium on African Elections final report in Ghana (2009: 12) submitted that freedom of expression and access to the media have been acknowledged as essential in providing opposition parties a chance to compete on equal footing in an election, but regrettably, access remains limited in many African countries. Also, it stated that biased reporting commonly seen on the continent robs citizens of the accurate information they need to make informed decisions on election day (Colloquium on African Elections, 2009: 12).

That is why there has been increasing public debates about the unethical behaviours of journalists as observed among some media practitioners. This is the issue Bello Adejola and Ianni (2012) come across with. Morris (2007) explained that in Africa the media generally should not work solely for any government body, political party or particular candidate. Its basic role is to sensitise so as to contribute to public opinion meaningfully. However, elections have constituted a serious challenge to the media, balanced information putting its impartiality and objectivity to test.

That is why there has been increasing public debates about the unethical behaviours of journalists as observed among some media practitioners. This is the issue Bello, Adejola and Jamini (2012) critically examined as a fundamental social responsibility of media in a democratic regime. They believe that journalism is a profession guided by ethics, conscience and code of conduct. Umanu (2015) explains that Nigerian media plays critical roles in the electoral process by acting as a major source of information, providing essentially costless details leading to a more balanced education and opinion formation among the voting public.

famous "Four Theories of the Press" in 1950 (cited in Durand, 2013). The central point of the theory is that the absence of control of the press and its practitioners would make their irresponsible. The social responsibility theory came on board to advocate that media practitioners themselves and their proprietor should control the media to prevent irresponsible acts, and thus help to make them socially responsible.

This means that the press should be free to perform the functions stated in the libertarian theory but this freedom should be exercised with responsibility (Okunna & Omeungha, 2012). If the media fail to meet their responsibilities to society, the social responsibility theory holds that the government should encourage the media to comply by way of controlling them. Bitner (1989) believes that though the press has a right to criticize government and other institutions, it also has a responsibility to preserve objectivity by properly informing the public and by responding to society's needs and interests.

Secondary Research Methodology

The scope of this study covers a 132-day period of the elections and placement of campaign reports and advertisements of four national newspapers (The Punch, The Sun, Daily Trust and Nigerian Tribune). The choice of these media outlets stem out of their prominence by both ruling and opposition parties and their nationwide coverage. The period of study spanned December 1, 2014 to March 28th, 2015 (amounting to a 132-day campaign period). The study adopts sequential explanatory strategy of the mixed method research design using both primary and secondary data to investigate the pattern, cause and effect of media coverage of 2015 general elections in Nigeria. A 3-layer data collection technique is adopted which comprises Content Focus (Qualitative) and Primary-Quantitative (131) methods. Quantitative Research Instrument and Primary-Quantitative (131) methods (the first layer of data collection) studied a content search of campaign advertisement and reports news reports editorial, feature, advert and advertisement spread post editorial, opinion writings, pictures and cartoons) from the four newspapers to quantify and analyze their patterns through language schemes, picture placement, and logic of reports. This process is guided by four Key Variables of Interest: Balance, Conflict Sensitivity, Decency and Objectivity. The contents were categorized based on these key variables and were measured using a specifically designed measuring scale linearly structured (3, 0, -1, -3), moving from both left and right to centre (0). While zero (0) is 100 per cent neutral, 3 represents positive extreme, 2 represents very positive while -1 represents positive and -3 represents



Figure 1: Measurement Scale 1

The findings are complemented with interviews conducted on the Editor-in-Chiefs of the four newspapers to provide causal factors and explanations on the variables.

Data Analysis and Discussion of Findings

1. Patterns of 2015 General Elections Media Reportage in Nigeria

The study quantifies pattern variations of 2015 general election coverage of major newspapers (The Punch, The Sun, Daily Trust and Nigerian Tribune). The content scrutiny was restricted to the election-calling period in the last 2015 general elections (1st December, 2014 to the day of presidential election, March 28th, 2015). This amounted to a 132-day campaign period, and thus, coverage it quantifies and analyzes the patterns through language use (hate speech and incitement), sensationalism, conflict sensitivity and stereotype. See Table 1 below for the themes/explanatory notes.

Table 1: Themes of Enquiry

S.N	THEMES OF ENQUIRY	EXPLANATORY NOTE	SAMPLE OF PATTERNS IN THE NEWSPAPERS
1.	Sensationalism	The study observed some of the reports that are deliberately blown beyond normal proportion to sell newspaper	1. "Violence is APC's ideology: PDP alleges" (Daily Sun, December 28, 2014). 2. Biduan is described as a "dictator" (Daily Sun, December 29, 2014). 3. 2015 Presidential Elections: Ex-Military Meet, threaten war (Daily Trust, January 25, 2015, front page)
2.	Conflict Sensitivity	To observe whether headlines, news, adverts and other contents that can instigate people into violence are used. Summarily, are the reports capable of inflaming passion?	1. Will you allow history to repeat itself? Enough of state burnis. (Daily Sun, Jan. 19, 2015, page 1).
3.	Language (Hate Speech & Incitement)	To observe level of bias, bar or against the subject being reported. To observe in the media, use of words that are discriminatory or capable of inflaming passion or hatred on the basis of race, ethnicity, belief, gender, orientation etc. before, during, and after the poll. Summarily, are offensive words being used?	2. Bid. Major General Biduan's Promise: To Turn Nigeria To Shona Nation. Beware! In Shere's Clothing (Saturday Star, Jan. 27 and Jan. 31, 2015, pages 24 and 60). 3. Biduan's Promise to Turn Nigeria to Shona Nation... Beware of Sherep in Wolf's Clothing (Nigerian Nigerian Tribune, Jan. 26, 2015, page 52, The Punch, Jan. 27, 2015, page 54). 4. Nigeria Needs A True Nationalist To Pilot Its Affairs: Not An Ethnic Jingoist Or Disguised Religious Fanatic... (Nigerian Tribune, Jan. 26, 2015, page 5). 5. ...Don't fall for this deception or its agents of darkness... (Daily Sun, Jan. 24, 2015, page 57). 6. Re-electing Jonathan will be a national disaster- By The Muhammadu Buhari Volunteers Group (The Punch, Feb. 9, 2015, Pg. 18). 7. "Buhari can't tackle Boko Haram except he's first commander- OSLPE (The Punch, Feb. 7, 2015, Pg. 31). 8. "We are going to war, everyone of you should go and fortify himself" - MajidAsani-Dokado (Nigerian Tribune, Feb.6, 2015, Pg. 19)
4.	Stereotype	To observe whether certain expressions are used for certain individuals such as a	1. CARER COUPIST Referring to Biduan-The Punch, Feb. 15, 2015). 2. "Should former dictator be offered

Source: Authors compilation from the four newspapers.

From the table 1 above, it is observed that the media outlets accorded varying degree of priority to public interest issues in the 2015 elections while there was high interest in election related issues, hate speech and incitements. Virtually all the newspapers stereotyped all to reporting such languages, raw. Though the media outlets exhibited different levels of professionalism in the reporting of political parties and candidates, media access was generally in favour of the biggest two political parties while the other political parties were often overlooked. Twenty six political parties were published by Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) that were duly registered and partook in the 2015 general elections. But, the mention of political parties in the reports was highly in favour of only two parties, the All Progressives Congress (APC) and the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP). Meanwhile, the finding corroborates International Press Centre (IPC) and Nigerian Press Council's (NPC) (2015) reports. It states that out of 8,318 headlines in the 12 newspapers studied, the APC had the highest mention with 3,911 or (47%) closely followed by PDP with 3,710 or (44.7%). All other 24 political parties shared the remaining (8.4%) of mention with a significant number without mention at all (See Figure 2 for pictorial view)

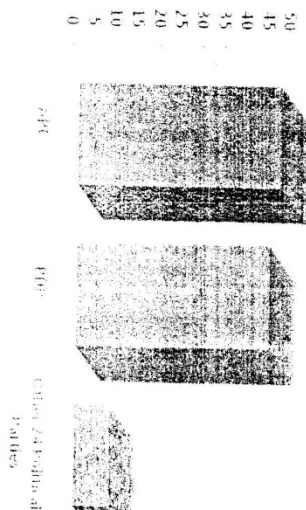


Figure 2: The Highest Mentioned Political Parties in 2015 General Elections

Source: International Press Centre (IPC) and Nigerian Press Council (NPC) Reports (2015), page 5

There were a total of 5,987 election and electioneering concern words appearances compiled in the studied newspapers. Conflict sensitivity has 567, while sensationalism, language use (hate speech & incitement), stereotype-positive and neutrally featured stories all have, 1,658; 276; 1,045; 1,721; and 720 reports respectively (See Figures 3 below).

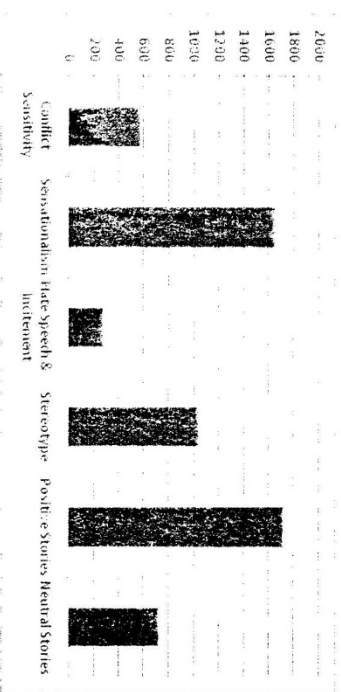


Figure 3: Nigerian Newspapers Patterns of 2015 General Elections Reportage (General)

Source: Data generated from Nigerian Tribune, Punch, Daily Trust and The Sun Newspapers

The study separates the data into positive, negative and neutral words in order to isolate sensationalism. This is because sensationalism was said to have been used by every media to sell its newspaper. According to some leaders of the Nigerian Union of Journalists (NUJ) Lagos State

there is no way to bury the act of sensationalism in media practice anywhere in the world. 'We journalists amplify every detail in order to secure the maximum attention of the readers. The issue of sensationalism can never be eradicated. It is a general practice anywhere in the world. It's our strength; we cannot survive without it.'

However, the former NUJ Chairman in Lagos State, Mr. AbdulQuader Wahab Oba said the issue of sensationalism is important in media practice but if not total eradication, it can be minimized, having been aware of its implication to the existence of our nation. He said further that

Nigeria is highly sensitive and too religious and ethnically vulnerable, and as such, care needs to be taken.

Moreover, the study isolates sensationalism to see the pattern of the reportage. The positive words retain its initial figure (1,721), negative words consist of conflict sensitivity and hate speech and incitement and stereotype (567+276+1045=1,888) and neutral 720 (See Figure 4 below).

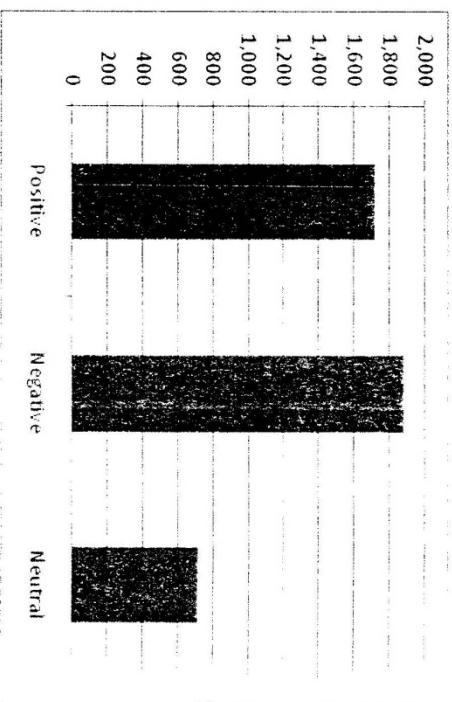


Figure 4: Nigerian Newspapers Patterns of 2015 General Elections Reportage

Source: Data generated from Nigerian Tribune, Punch, Daily Trust and The Sun Newspapers

These features, most importantly conflict sensationalism, hate speech, incitement and stereotype related stories occupied Front Page (133-4), Headline (583), News Story (1577), Advert (10), and Picture and Cartoon (32) (See Figure 5). Most of the words or expressions that constituted hatred or incitement were used in political advertorials, adverts, captions, cartoons and headlines. Several of such even featured at the front pages of the scrutinized newspapers. The monitored media outlets made use of

sensational headlines that even had little or nothing to do with the content, some of which had strong potential to inflame passion or instigate the people into violent acts.

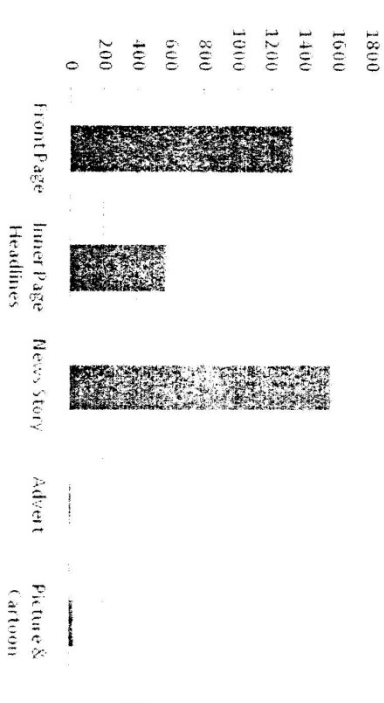


Figure 5: Nigerian Newspapers Patterns of 2015 General Elections Reportage (Location & Character of the Reckless Words)

Source: Data generated from Nigerian Tribune, Punch, Daily Trust and The Sun Newspapers

The relatively positive headlines and stories were centred on the information dissemination on the electorates, procedures from either electoral body (Independent National Electoral Commission) or civil societies. They were more of government issued statements and pronouncements to sensitize the citizenry on every process and patterns of the electorates and elections. Some took the form of positions of the stakeholders meeting outcome on some of the important discourse of the campaign and election by electoral body, political parties, civil societies and the legislative body.

Stereotype is another important theme of the study. It opens our mind into whether certain expressions (most especially reckless words) are used for certain individuals, political party or gender which constitutes stigmatization, labelling, prejudice etc. The study has a total number of 1,015

under stereotype: APC, PDP and other 24 political parties share 483, 520 and 42 respectively (See Figure 6).

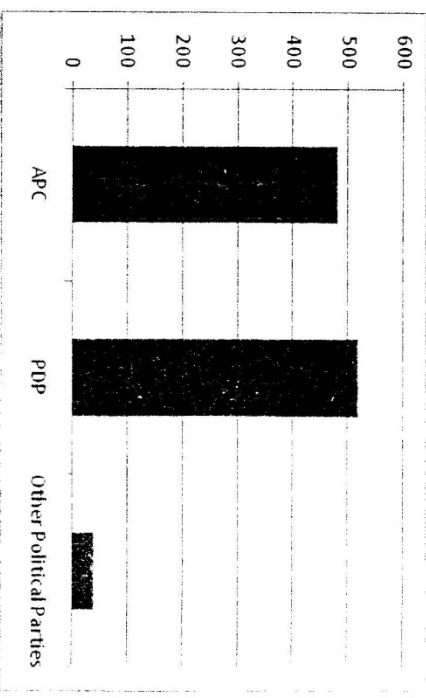


Figure 6: Patterns of 2015 General Elections Reportage (Stereotype by Political Party)

Source: Data generated from Nigerian Tribune, Punch, Daily Trust and The Sun Newspapers

These issues bother on acquisitions and counter acquisitions from the powerful political parties, APC and PDP to the table. Findings also show that higher portions of the newspapers' spaces were devoted to candidates and programmes of either APC or PDP.

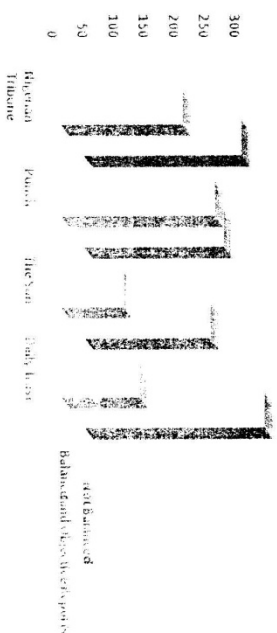


Figure 7: Patterns of 2015 General Elections Reportage (Objective and Balance Reports)

Source: Data generated from Nigerian Tribune, Punch, Daily Trust and The Sun Newspapers.

There were 1,085 election reports in the first 2015 general elections. Punch recorded the highest pattern in the objective and balance reports with 254 reports, 231 not objective reports while Nigerian Tribune, The Sun and Daily Trust newspapers recorded 202, 163 and 129 in objective and balance. 260, 268 and 297 in not objective reports respectively (Figure 7, explain further). The length and space provided for all political campaigns were allocated disproportionately. The most prominent candidates were those that were sponsored by the big two political parties (APC and PDP). Among these two, one could still notice some element of bias in the allocation of space, length of news, language use and to some extent the magnitude of the news and where it was placed (location).

In the media business, placement of news is a calculated practice. How a news story and information is given prominence is a deliberate practice in the media. According to Nigerian Tribune Opinion Editorial Page Editor (OPE-ED), Dr. Abiodun Awoga,

every content you see featured at the front page, most especially of a political party, is heavily paid for. Newspaper is not a Father's Christmas where we allotted

space and location for free. If you want prominence of your activities, you pay for it (interview May 11, 2017).

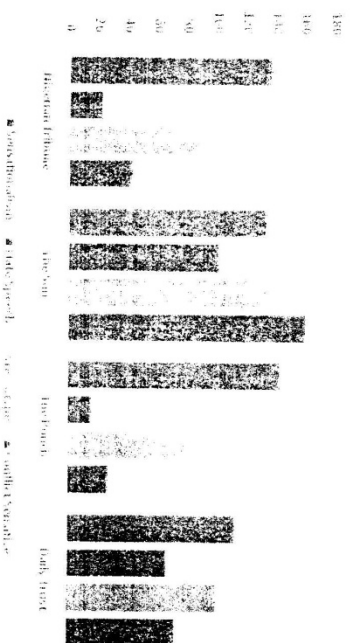


Figure 8: Patterns of 2015 General Elections Reportage (Themes by Newspaper)

Source: Data generated from Nigerian Tribune, Punch, Daily Trust and The Sun Newspapers.

The major themes of concern in the preliminary findings through content analysis involved sensationalism, false speech, stereotype and conflict sensitive (as illustrated in figure 8 above). In the tracking of sensational news stories, all the newspapers used a greater number of such features in their news reports, though highly prominent in some than others. Of the total 532 sensational news stories, the Punch newspaper reported with 145, followed by the Nigerian Tribune 138, while The Sun had 135 and Daily Trust with 114.

During the in-depth interviews with the newspaper editors, it was revealed that sensationalism is a normal feature of media throughout the world. They agreed that it is the means they usually employ to arouse the interest of the public to buy a copy of their newspapers. On the false speech theme, The Sun and Daily Trust also led with 102 and 68 while the Nigerian Tribune and The Punch recorded 25 and 17 respectively. Meanwhile, for stereotype, The Sun led with 138, followed by Daily Trust, Nigerian Tribune and The Punch, 102, 95 and 84 respectively. Lastly, on the conflict sensitive reports the Sun

led with 162, followed by Daily Trust with 74, Nigerian Tribune with 44 and the Punch with 28.

i. Discussion on Pattern of Media Coverage of the 2015 General Elections

The observed pattern shows bias and numerous discriminatory reports capable of inflaming passion or hatred on the basis of race, ethnicity, belief, gender, orientation in the last elections. There were too much offensive words, most especially, at the front pages of the study case studies. The Punch newspaper Daily Editor states that there is a lot of tempered fair news stories and adverts in the 2015 general elections. According to him, "there were tsunamis of bad language in the dailies, though, those languages were product of campaign and were quoted verbatim" (Interview Report, 2017). The Sun News Editor concluded "the language on the said publication is not civil". The feedback from the various field reports show that it was a pronounced phenomenon not only among the scholars and commentators but also among the media practitioners that the 2015 electroneering media coverage was chaotic and capable of inflaming passion and conflict in the country.

The height of it was the publications of The Sun and Punch newspapers front page sponsored advertorial of Ekiti State Governor Ayo Fayose on January 2015 where a death arrow was directed to a presidential candidate of an opposition party, General Muhammadu Buhari which also had the pictures of past Nigerian presidents who died in office: Murtala Muhammed, Sani Abacha and Umaru Yar'Adua. It was also accompanied by excerpts from the Bible book of Deuteronomy 30 verse 19 "Nigerians be warned! Nigeria... I have set before thee life and death. Therefore, choose life that both thee and thy seed may live." It said, suggesting that Mr. Buhari represents death while his rival, President Goodluck Jonathan represents life. The advert went ahead to put a huge question mark over the picture of Mr. Buhari, which was placed beside the pictures of the late leaders. The advert asked its readers: "Will you allow history to repeat itself? Enough of State burials." It then attempted to spur ethnic controversy by saying, "Northern presidency should wait till 2019."

At the time, Ayo Fayose had defended his decision to place the advert, saying it was all about politics. The governor's spokesman Lere Olayinka was quoted saying "The governor is a Nigerian. He has expressed his opinion.

Other people are also free to express theirs. It is politics. You market your own product and you also try to pull the opposing product down. That is how it is done. It is politics. Let everybody play his own game. What I don't support in politics is violence" (Premium Times May 8th, 2015).

An online news platform, Premium Times (2015) reported that hate speeches and campaigns were a major feature of the 2015 election, but the morbid advert sparked outrage across Nigeria with many individuals and groups condemning the governor's action (May 8th, 2015). Even the Peoples' Democratic Party, PDP, Presidential Campaign Organisation distanced itself from the governor stating that the advert did not represent the campaign of Mr. Jonathan's position. The newspapers which published the advert also came under intense criticism from Nigerians who questioned their judgment and professionalism.

During the interview, both newspapers, The Sun and Punch, helms personalities avoided commenting on it. They justified the publication based on the survival (profit), interest and signed indemnity form. Though, it was noticed in its pattern compared to other newspapers that it has lowest reckless pattern. Punch Daily Editor stated findings will buttress his submission that the Ayo Fayose's advertorial at its first page was an exception. When pushed to explain a little part of the exception for academic purpose, he got angry and states:

I've repeatedly states that I don't want to say more on that. It was an exception on our part. Go and check our record. Please, respect my view when I say it was an exception. It was an exception. It was actually an exception and we must publish it. Sorry, hope this your enquiry is strictly meant for academic purpose? I don't want to see my quote anywhere (Interview Report, 2017).

Speaking at World Press Freedom Day in Lagos on the topic 'Influence of Media Owners on Fair and Balanced Reporting and Commentaries in 2015 Election' The Sun Editor-in-Chief, Femi Adeshina attributed the publication of the morbid advert to the influence of media owners. He even said that what was published was a heavily watered down version of what was originally sent. His response as captured in an online medium gave a vivid picture of the happenings, politics and intricacies of media practice in Nigeria. Excerpt:

"That hate advert, two newspapers published it, The Sun and The Punch. That advert came on a Sunday, January 18th, and we published it on January 19th. The advert that was eventually published had been watered down considerably. I came back from church. I opened my system and when I saw it I screamed. It had been sent to me from the office to clear for publication. When I saw it I screamed. I then called Bolaji Tunji, our Executive Director, Special Services. 'Can we publish this and Nigeria will not burn?' Then we began to discuss and we began to tone it down. We removed so many things from that advert. And what eventually appeared on January 19th was the toned-down version. So if we had published the original.... So it was the toned-down version that I approved that they eventually sent to The Punch that appeared the next day. I have been widely regarded as an --APC man" although he does not belong to the party, and that rejecting the advert would have meant trouble from Orji Uzor Kalu, the newspaper's proprietor and a founding member of the PDP. Now but if you ask me, why did I approve that advert? I knew that the toned-down version was still bad enough. But don't forget the ownership of my newspaper. A PDP chairman owns the newspaper. If I had rejected that advert, they would have told my publisher that this APC man has denied your paper revenue. He has rejected this advert because he doesn't like Jonathan. So, after we watered it down, we decided to take it. Punch also took it. But we know the uproar that still came after it. But I tell you, if you see the original of that advert, you would still then have to commend the media. So ownership will always matter where press freedom is concerned. There is no freedom without boundaries and the owners will always constitute the boundary" (Premium Times May 8th, 2015).

The Sun News Editor also subscribed to the profit and business survival when she says:

on the issue of profit as a determinant to publish such, it's indeed an important determinant. Media most especially print, survive on two things: ADVERT and CIRCULATION. Advert is what you bring for publicity and circulation is what we make from the sale of the newspaper. But sincerely, advert play an important role most of the time. This is because advert brings in more money than the circulation. How much are we getting from the circulation? Media survived on advert. Advert is cool cash that help mostly in the running of any media, especially during election period, which run into millions of naira. The temptation of that millions of naira will ordinarily push you to take the advert. So, profit can turn out to influence it too (Interview Report, 2017).

To publish such has been acknowledged by the publishers themselves that it is a serious threat to continuity of Nigeria association. The Editor-in-Chief of The Sun and Punch newspapers as at the time of the said controversial publication, Femi Adeshina and Martins Ayankola respectively seem to be aware of the likely implications and possible effects when Femi stated he pushed a question 'Can we publish this and Nigeria will not burn?' to his organisation's Executive Director Special Services, Bolaji Tunji, the moment he saw the raw advert in his mail. What eventually appeared on January 19th was the toned-down version, he lamented. Likewise, Martins also condemned and acknowledged that languages of 2015 general elections has the height of irresponsibility in Nigeria and said such should have been regulated. The present News Editor of The Sun, Adetutu Folasade-Koyi also caught up with a likely consequence of 2015 patterns of media coverage when she states, thus:

The likely consequence may be violent. It is no more a news that the case of Rwanda was hype by the media. And God forbid, if care is not taken, media can turn to a driver of a violent course in the country (Interview Report, 2017).

Conclusion and Recommendations

This study noted that electioneering period is a delicate time in all democratic societies. Often time, it is a period that political parties, candidates, and their followers exchange words in favour of supported

candidate(s) which often times resulted in political violence especially in developing democracies. The media is the primary catalyst of these dynamics through its manner of report. Thus, the findings of this study show that the 2015 General Elections in Nigeria also follows this path: a situation where the two major contending political parties (PDP and APC) used the four newspaper outlets to de-market each other's candidates. This trend contravened the statutory regulation on media contents and the assumptions of the social responsibility theory. Though, majority of the respondents (media practitioners) posited that it is not in their principle to accept reckless advert but often times profit maximization, intensive ownership dictate, and weak regulatory apparatus among others were responsible for the trajectory.

In view of these, the study recommends that a strong ethical standard mechanism, backed up with sanction within the profession should be put in place. In addition, the Broadcasting Organisation of Nigeria (BON), National Broadcasting Corporation (NBC) and other regulatory agencies should organise periodic sensitizations for the media practitioners on the need to eschew publications capable of undermining the peaceful existence of the country and the survival of the hard earned democracy. Finally, the media outlet owners should put public interest ahead of personal and profit making interest. This can be done by outright refusal of advertisements that contain hate speeches and other contents capable of undermining political stability in Nigeria.

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INHERITANCE

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Interview Report (2017) with The Sun News Editor. The interview took place on Friday 19th of April 2017 at the Sun's premises, No. 2 Coshants Street, Farnham Industrial Estate, Appleton, Lagos.

Interview Report (2017) with the Punch Editor-in-Chief. The interview took place on Wednesday 17th and Thursday 18th of May, 2017 at the Punch's Place, Lagos (broadly express road, near Berger Bus-Stop, Lagos).

Interview Report (2017) with Daily Trust Daily Editor. The interview took place on Saturday 21st of May, 2017 at the media corporate office, No. 2, P.O.W. Market crescent, off Solomon Lar Way, Behind CHIDAHotel, Uduak Junction, Abuja.