

Framing of the Anti-Graft War in Select Nigerian Newspapers

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Abstract

This paper is a content analytical study of newspaper framing of the anti-graft war in Nigeria by select Nigerian newspapers. The rationale for the study was to content analyse the framing of the anti-graft war by Guardian and Punch within the period of one year (June 2015 to May 2016). Systematic random sampling was adopted to select samples from the select newspapers. Findings showed that even though there were numerous corruption related stories in the two newspapers, prominence was not given to corruption stories. It was, therefore recommended among others, that more prominence should be given to anti-graft issues by Nigerian media in order to set and promote policy agenda and that more attention should be paid to in-depth analysis and investigative reporting of corruption related issues.

Keywords: Anti-graft War, Media Framing, Corruption, Accountability, Nigeria.

Introduction

Nigeria, like every other developing nation of the world, has had to cope with corruption and its attendant effects on political and socio-economic life of the citizenry since independence. The extent of the problem was highlighted when Transparency International declared the most populous black nation in Sub-Saharan Africa the most corrupt country in the world shortly after the commencement of the fourth republic which began in 1999 Enweremadu (2012). It was, therefore, logical that the leadership at the federal level then under the former President Olusegun Obasanjo established two anti-graft agencies-Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC) and Independent Corrupt Practices Commission (ICPC) - to lead the fight against this socio-economic vice. Successive administrations after then have inherited these two agencies to combat corruption.

The All Progressive Congress led administration of Muhammadu Buhari rode to power on the back of integrity and a resolve to wage a huge war against graft (Buhari, 2016). Onuigbo & Innocent (2015) say anti-corruption has been the major offering of Muhammadu Buhari for the four times he has attempted to lead

Nigeria. Having inherited a country badly blighted by corrupt acts in high places of governance under the watch of his predecessor, Goodluck Jonathan, it became imperative for President Buhari to focus on the litany of pending cases of corruption handed down to him by Jonathan. Described as the administration with the worst record of corrupt practices, a number of corrupt cases have been revealed since his PDP-led administration handed over power (Akowe, 2017).

The media play very significant roles in the political, social and economic life of a nation; apart from the famous traditional functions of education, information and entertainment, the media serve as the watch dog of the society. Thus, they have key roles to play in ensuring a corruption-free society. Halilu, Garba & AbdulMumin (2015) argue that the media play very important roles in the fight against corruption. The scholars note that the media are agenda setters and are crucial to opinion formulation and eventual outcomes of events. Stapenhurst (2000) also posits that the media roles in fighting corruption include investigating and reporting corrupt acts.

It is then obvious that no country can sustain and win the fight against graft without a vibrant free press. If the media determine the success or failure of any campaign or fight against corrupt practices, in what ways have they been able to assist the Muhammadu Buhari's administration in the fight against corruption in the last one year of his rule in Nigeria; what kind of coverage has been given to the fight against corruption by the Nigerian media? In what ways have the media framed corruption cases in order to promote anti-corruption fight? The study seeks to investigate the volume and direction of coverage as well as framing of corrupt cases in Nigeria since the assumption of office by Muhammadu Buhari in May 2015.

Statement of the Problem

Corruption has been identified as the bane of development in countries of the world Nigeria inclusive (Enweremadu, 2012; Transparency International, 2016). In fact, it is seen as the root cause of the stunted development of the country and one of the major threats to social, economic, political and human development (Buharimeter, 2015) of the most populous black nation in the world. Declared the most corrupt nation in the world shortly before the dawn of her new democratic dispensation in 1999 by Transparency International, Nigeria has not fared well in terms of corruption perception as the world anti-corruption body has seen no improvement in her standing in curtailing the monster of corruption. While reflecting on the 17th anniversary of democratic governance in Nigeria, the country moved just with three points in the 2014 ranking 136th to 133rd position in the 2015 Corruption Perception Index by Transparency International (Buharimeter, 2015).

Riding on the mantra of change and leveraging on the integrity of its candidate, the All Progressive Congress; the ruling party in Nigeria- has the fight

against graft as one of the cardinal campaign promises made to Nigerians in the 2015 presidential election. The party banked on the incorruptible perception of its candidate, Muhammadu Buhari, to sweep out of power one of the worst corruption-infested administrations in the country (pulse.ng, 2015). The battle against corruption perpetrated by people in power has since begun in the last one year since his assumption of office. A lot of revelations have since been made. Some of these include the indictment, arrest and prosecution of the immediate former National Security Adviser for awarding N271.8b fictitious arms procurement contracts; the investigation and prosecution of Senate President, Bukola Saraki, by the Code of Conduct Tribunal; award of \$40bn contract by former Petroleum Minister, Diezani Allison Madueke to her Ghanaian personal assistant among others (Buharimeter, 2016).

The media have been recognised as very good partners in the development of any society. Apart from playing the traditional roles of educating, informing and entertaining the people, they also serve as the watchdog that keeps the people in power in check in delivering their constitutional rights of ensuring good governance. In fact, the roles of the media in the anti-graft war have been acknowledged (Stapenhurst, 2000). As the fourth estate of the realm and a critical stakeholder in the Nigerian project, in what ways have the media helped the anti-corruption fight of the over one year old administration of President Muhammadu Buhari since his inauguration on 29th May, 2015 in their reportage and framing of corruption cases?

Research Questions

The following questions were designed to guide the study:

1. What is the volume of coverage of anti-corruption fight since May 29, 2015?
2. What is the newspaper framing of anti-corruption war since the assumption of office of Muhammadu Buhari?
3. What direction has media reports of corruption related cases taken in the last one year of the present administration?

Conceptualisation of Media Framing

The concept of framing has been described in extant literature as theory and practice vis-à-vis reportage of issues across media. Framing first emerged as a 'natural extension' (Weiss, 2009). Conceived as a practical concept, it is the process involved in selecting, organising and structuring a news story. In this process, both balance and objectivity may be called to question. Framing, "shaping how the audience sees the reality" is inevitable in media practice as it is practically impossible for reporters to cover all events in the social reality just as it is humanly impossible to document an event hundred per cent. Even though all news reports are subject to framing, Partisan framing is the easiest to spot

(Vivian, 2009). Citing other scholars, De Vreese (2005) concludes that framing is concerned with the presentation of the issue and it is of two types: issue specific news frame, which pertains to a single issue or topic and generic news frame, which transcends a single thematic confine and specific time frame. This points to the fact that journalistic or media framing can concern a specific issue within a defined period of time or something with undefined thematic and periodic boundary.

Summing the opinions of De Vreese (2005) & Entman (1993) on news framing, which involves selection, cutting and surfing, Salaudeen (2011) posits that the process of framing leads to the difference between (social) reality and media reality covering around one third, cutting about two thirds of the reality and at times surfing to identify with the opinion leading media. He deduced that there seems to be a link between framing and subliminal message where the media hide under framing to promote a cause covertly.

Review of Related Literature

One major consensus by scholars in literature that examine corruption as a concept is that there is no country, whether developed or developing, that is totally free from the scourge of corruption and corrupt practices (Babafemi & Bill, 2013; Transparency International, 2015; Halilu, Garba & Abdulmumin, 2015). This agreement is underlined by statistics from the 2015 Global Perception of Corruption Index released by Transparency International (TI). The numbers are, to say the least, staggering. Of the 168 countries assessed in the 2015 index, no single country recorded 'a perfect score' with two-thirds scoring below 50 in an index where the scale is "0 (highly corrupt) to 100 (very clean) TI (2015).

Occupying the 136th position on the Global Corruption Index, Nigeria, like every other nation of the world, has had to cope with corruption and its attendant effects on political and socio-economic life of her citizenry since independence. Rising from the label of the most corrupt country in the world in 1999, to becoming the 136th in 2015, is an indication of how unascertained the amount of her wealth lost to corruption is. In an in-depth analysis of state wealth lost by the Nigerian nation to endemic corruption, Enweremadu (2012) drawing from literature and other official sources, argues that corruption has been part of governance in the country since independence and that the monies lost to corruption from 1960 to 1999 could be conservatively put at \$400bn. The cost of corruption since then until 2016 can best be imagined. For instance, while reflecting on the 17th anniversary of Nigeria's democracy, *Punch* (2016) estimated that the country has lost N38tn to mismanagement, embezzlement and money laundering since the return to democracy in 1999. In another analysis, report reveals that \$7.2 billion of the US\$6.6 trillion illicit money that flowed out of Africa from 2003 to 2012 was from Nigeria. The endemic nature of corruption in Nigeria has justified the level of development of the country. Poor

infrastructure, low literacy rate, low life expectancy, widespread poverty are the hallmarks of poor governance foisted by well integrated corruption culture in Nigeria (Enweremadu, 2012; PricewaterhouseCooper, 2016).

Part of the role of the media as the fourth estate of the realm is to keep tab on the politicians, thereby facilitating accountability and transparency (Vivian, 2009; Ciboh, 2014). As at 2012, the rate of corruption globally has risen to one out of every four persons (Osifo, 2012 citing Transparency International Survey, 2010). To buttress the need for waging war against corruption, Osifo (2012) cited its definition by World Bank as the single greatest economic obstacle to economic and social development. By this, it is logical to say that corruption is the reason for the slow growth of most nations of the world. Therefore, any government waging war against this most frequently discussed global problem in most developing countries is working in the right direction. Corruption is the bane of loss of trust in most Sub-Saharan African Countries (Alawode, 2008; Osifo, 2012). An analysis of corruption index in Africa puts Nigeria in the leading position among other countries from the North, the East, the South and the Central Region of the continent. Thus, Osifo (2012, p. 124) notes that the real corruption situations in Nigeria also in Western Africa, Cameroon in Central Africa and Tanzania in Eastern Africa are worrisome because they represent some of the worst cases in Africa and also the world. It is to this course that the various anti-corruption strategies have become imperative. Osifo (2012, p. 92) further notes that “the engagement in wider sensitisation via media as part of the national anti-corruption framework is one way of increasing trust and combating corruption at the societal level.”

To this end, media must play good roles in combating corruption in the nation. They must be seen to be promoting anti-corruption policies of the government, exposing corrupt people in the corridors of power and truthfully updating the public on government efforts at limiting or eradicating corruption (Eme, 2013). This is bound to build people’s trust in their political leader because there is a link between corruption and trust in governance. Yoza (2015) posits with other scholars who argue that with media scrutiny and popular election the citizens can be empowered to disqualify and remove corrupt politicians and public servants from their offices. In essence, Yoza (2015) aggregates perspectives from many scholars and theories to the effect that free media, media scrutiny of corrupt officers and media exposure of cases of corruption are believed to be helpful mechanisms for corruption reduction in any society. Alawode (2008) who states that corruption etymologically means to ‘destroy,’ identifies two types of corruption as institutional and political and points out that free media have a principal vehicle for informing the public about corrupt activities in the society is a “very important tool for fighting corruption. He highlighted the roles the press has played in the past to contain corrupt practices in Nigeria: News Reports and Analysis, Whistle Blowing, Reinforcement of Anti

Graft Values, Corruption Deterrent, Generation and Sustenance of Public Support for Anti-Corruption Agencies, Partnership with Civil Society Groups, Sustenance of Anti-Corruption Momentum.

Theoretical Framework

This study is anchored on the framing theory, which is a theory that makes propositions on how media coverage influences audience perception of issues in reality. The framing theory which has its roots in the works of the sociologist, Erving Goffman, examines two ways in which people employ interpretative designs, commonly called frames, to make sense of the world around them (Volkmer, 2009). Frames help to interpret and reconstruct reality Volkmer (2009). Citing Gitlin (1980), deVreese (2004) defines frames as persistent patterns of cognition, interpretation and presentation, of selection, emphasis and exclusion by which symbol handlers routinely organise discourse. In other words, framing has some connection with the agenda setting theory, which focuses on how the media direct attention to some issues through coverage and thus, alter the perceived importance of such issues in reality. However, while agenda setting relates with salience of issues, framing deals with the presentation of such issues (deVreese, 2004). Specifically, Scheufele & Tewksbury (2007) posit that framing is predicated on the assumption that how an issue is presented in media reports has the power to influence how such is understood by audiences.

Thus, deVreese (2005, p. 52-53) describes framing as “a process involving three key concepts - frame building, frame setting and its consequences; while frame building points to factors that influence the structural production of news, frame setting captures the interaction between media frames and individuals’ prior knowledge and predispositions.” The third leg of the process is the consequences of framing. This could manifest at individual or societal levels. While at the individual level, the consequence could be seen in terms of altered attitude about an issue based on exposure to certain frames, the societal level consequence leads to shaped political socialisation, decision-making and collective actions (de Vreese, 2005). Since the focus of the paper is to content-analyse corruption-related media content of select Nigerian newspapers with a view to determining what kind of frames used to relay such information, the study is driven by a tenet of the theory that links the presentation of an issue to the understanding of such issues by audiences and how such has the capability to alter attitude, shape decision making and affect collective actions of Nigerians on the hydra-headed monster of corruption and corrupt practices.

Methodology

This study used content analysis to determine the newspaper coverage of anti-corruption war in Nigeria since the inauguration of President Muhammadu Buhari’s administration. Multistage sampling technique was employed. The first

stage was selecting two newspapers namely; namely: *Punch* and *Guardian* from a list of 43 widely circulated newspapers in Nigeria using simple random sampling technique. A total number of 92 editions formed the sampling frame. These were selected through a systematic sampling at interval of four. This gave a total of seven editions per month for each of the newspapers and a total of 92 editions per year for each newspaper. Thus, a total sampling frame of 184 issues (92 issues per newspaper) were selected from the two newspapers within the study period of one year- June 2015-May 2016.

The study sample, therefore, was 452 corruption issues selected from the two newspapers through purposive sampling technique and analysed in this study. These were in form of news stories, features, editorials, and letters to the editor or opinion. The stories addressed issues including bribery, embezzlement, influence-peddling, appropriation of public resources for private gain, patronage, pork barreling, bureaucratic conflict of interest, impropriety and court cases on corruption and activities of the anti-graft agencies-the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC), the Independent Corrupt Practices Commission. Every other editorial matter in the newspapers that did not fall into any of these categories was regarded as non-corruption related stories and thus was excluded from the sample. The units of analysis were articles or news stories on corruption/corrupt practices. An analysis of the relevant stories/articles was carried out viz-a-viz frequency of coverage, prominence and the sources of the information.

Frequency of coverage in the context of this paper refers to the number of times a sub-category appears in the newspapers. But prominence relates to degree of salience attached to the part of the newspaper in which a sub-category appears. For instance, the news story sub-category may appear as the front page lead story, front page other story, back page or inside pages. The sources of information as published is to determine the originator of the information in order to ascertain and confirm whether it is these newspapers that have interest in the issue by detailing their in house sources in reporters; or they got these information from secondary sources like news agencies or whether they were sent in by readers as letters to the editor. Tone, therefore, relates to the angle the story or the content is taken from by the newspapers. For this purpose, categories like favourable (support); neutral (indifferent) and unfavourable (against) are used to depict the tone of the content.

Data Presentation and Analysis

Table 1: Distribution of Editorial Items

Items	<i>Guardian</i>		<i>Punch</i>		Total	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
News story	164	89.1	232	86.2	396	88
Feature	1	0.78	4	1.5	5	1.1
Editorial	4	2.3	10	3.7	14	3
Opinion article	11	7	10	3.7	21	4.4
Letters to the editor	3	0.78	13	4.8	16	3.5
Total	183	100%	269	100	452	100

The data in table 1 show that *The Guardian* has a total of 128 editorial items on the anti-corruption crusade of President Muhammadu Buhari. In this figure, news stories take the most prominent position with 89.1%. This shows that the newspaper concentrated on news story in presenting the anti-corruption war more than any other item in the newspaper for the period under review. The table, however, shows that editorial piece in the newspaper only had 2.3% of the entire anti-corruption mention for the period under review. The table also shows that the feedback of readers in form of letters to the editor had only one mention which amounts to 0.78%.

Table 2: Prominence of Editorial Item

Locations	<i>Guardian</i>		<i>Punch</i>		Total	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Front page lead	14	8.6	28	10.4	42	9.3
Front page other	6	3.1	1	0.4	7	1.5
Inside pages	161	86	236	87.7	397	87.8
Back page	2	2.3	4	1.5	6	1.4
Total	183	100	269	100	452	100

Table 2 considers the location of the editorial items that deal with corruption issues and cases for the period of six months. The table shows that the inside pages has the highest number of mentions of the issues relating to the anti-corruption war of President Muhammadu Buhari with 86% of the entire figure. This includes the opinions, news stories, letters to the editor and editorials published during the period under review. The table also shows that 11.7% of the whole location of the newspaper was on the first page. This includes the main or lead story and other stories on the front page. Also, the table shows that only 2.3% of the entire mention of anti-corruption issues in the newspaper for the period was at the back pages.

Table 3: Sources of Information

Sources	<i>Guardian</i>		<i>Punch</i>		Total	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Own reporters	169	92.2	245	91.1	414	91.5
News agencies	-	-	1	0.4	1	0.4
Readers	3	0.8	13	4.8	16	3.5
Columnists/opinion writers	11	7	10	3.7	21	4.6
Total	183	100	269	100	452	100

The data in the above table show that most of the issues on anti-corruption war in the two newspapers were sourced locally as primary reports. These include editorials, news stories and feature articles.

Table 4: Editorial Tone

Tone	<i>Guardian</i>		<i>Punch</i>		Total	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Harsh/unfavourable	48	26.2	73	7.1	121	26.8
Neutral	15	8.2	38	13.4	51	11.3
Soft/favourable	120	65.6	160	59.5	280	61.9
Total	183	100	269	100	452	100

Table 4 shows that the reportage of corruption related issues during the period of study was majorly favourable. The newspapers' tone suggests they support the war on corruption. 61.9% of the contents were in favourable tone, suggesting that the newspapers were favourably disposed to the anti-corruption agenda of President Muhammadu Buhari's government. However, that the newspapers were harsh in tone in some of the contents equally showed that perhaps there are some things that need to be done by the government to receive full support of the media.

Discussion of Findings

The study revealed that the two newspapers chosen covered numerous corruption related stories, features and editorials during the period of study. Meanwhile, front page attention was limited for the two newspapers. For instance, 11.7% of corruption related stories in *The Guardian* and 10.8% in *The Punch* gave front page attention; which means that prominence given to corruption stories was low by the two newspapers. By this finding, the two newspapers appear to be neglecting their roles of supporting government policies on the war against graft as posited by Eme (2013) & Yoza (2015) who identified adequate media exposure as a strategy in fighting corruption.

Also, the study revealed that the two newspapers depended heavily on their own reporters for majority of the corruption related stories during the period of the study. For instance, staff reporters of *The Punch* and *The Guardian*

respectively wrote 91.1% and 92.2% of corruption related reports found in each of the newspapers. However, there was no report that was credited to news agencies either local or international. This may lead to what Vivian (2009) regarded as “partisan framing” depending on the interest or political affiliation of the media houses and their reporters. Similarly, this ‘persistent pattern’ (deVreese, 2004) of staff reporter framing may only represent the philosophy of the selected newspapers.

Furthermore, the study revealed that majority of the content considered portrayed a favourable tone towards government policies on graft. While *The Guardian* had 66.7%, *The Punch* featured 59.4% of corruption related stories falling into the favourable category. Averagely, the two newspapers had 62.2% favourable tone for the contents considered for this study. This frequency of coverage is considerably high and a reflection of media persistence on fighting corruption in Nigeria. As noted by deVreese (2004), persistence is a key variable for media framing to be impactful.

Additionally, news story accounted for 88% of the total contents considered in this study that was corruption related in the newspapers. This shows that the newspapers were actually interested in reporting the issues that relate to corruption and by extension using their resources to gather contents on corruption. This, on one hand, is in tandem with Yoza’s (2015) position that massive media coverage is supportive in exposing corrupt practices in corridors of power. However, the contents analysed were deficient of much media scrutiny and analysis of corrupt practices in governance which Alawode (2008) & Yoza (2015) also recommended to fight graft.

Conclusion and Recommendations

This study set out to examine newspaper framing of anti-corruption war of President Muhammadu Buhari’s administration. Two national newspapers; *The Guardian* and *The Punch*, were content analysed for the period of his first one year in office. Findings revealed that the two selected newspapers paid adequate attention to the reportage of corruption related issues though without much prominence. However, the newspapers relied heavily on their reporters for majority of the contents found in them. The implication of this is the possibility of partisan framing as noted in extant literature and theory. By and large, it could be concluded that the select newspapers employed more of hard stories at the expense of soft stories and in-depth analysis of the issues may deprive the audience of varieties of nuances and opinions on anti-graft war in Nigeria.

Based on the findings, the study recommends that more prominence should be given to anti-graft issues by Nigerian newspapers, in order to set and promote policy agenda. It is also recommended that more attention should be paid to in-depth analysis and investigative reporting of corruption related issues.

Moreover, media houses should accommodate considerable amount of news agencies' report to facilitate balance in their reportage of salient national issues.

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