

Buhari's First Year Anniversary in the Eyes of Nigerian Newspapers: An exploratory analysis of the most relevant frames

Fatima I. Abubakre

Abstract

One of the most popular and robust areas of research in mass communication is the framing theory. Framing, which is used by the media to organise media content has attracted researchers' interests particularly in the domain of media and politics, towards the investigation of strategic dimensions of news framing for social construction, negotiation and social renegotiation which ultimately, has implications on the socio-political disposition of a society. This is a qualitative study which sought to explore how Nigerian Newspapers framed the Buhari administration's first year anniversary in office using five national dailies - *Daily Sun*, *Daily Trust*, *The Guardian*, *The Nation* and *The Punch*. It adopts a qualitative comparative approach to answer the research question on the pattern of coverage accorded three main content categories- security, state of the economy and corruption in the corpus (N= 144). Findings show that, although media reportage on Buhari's first year in office was generally favourable especially as it pertains to the fight against corruption, it was also critical of the administration particularly in its handling of the economy which had threatened to overshadow the achievements of the administration's first twelve months. While security was framed using majorly conflict inflammatory headlines/stories particularly with regard to the Fulani herdsman-farmers' conflict, the media, had also set agenda for the government through its constant reminder of the abducted Chibok girls who remain in captivity.

Keywords: *.Framing .Buhari's administration .Corruption .Economy*

Introduction

Since democracy was restored in 1999 in Nigeria after the transition from military to civilian rule, the People's Democratic Party (PDP) had dominated the nation's political landscape. That the 2015 national election was a watershed in the history of the country is not in doubt. This is because 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 elections. The APC eventually won the Presidential election which held on March 28, 2015, with Muhammadu Buhari emerging the President-elect.

One of the critical functions of journalism is holding elected political office holders accountable and the Nigerian mass media is no exception to this duty. The history of the rich contributions of Nigeria's mass media, in particular, newspapers, towards shaping the socio-political disposition of the society has been well documented (Omu, 1978; Gambo, 2006; Adesoji, 2010; Oso, Odunlami and Adaja, 2011; Daramola, 2013). Through reportage provided by journalists of what government officials, politicians, professionals amongst others, are saying, the citizens seek political information and knowledge from both print and broadcast media, about the achievements or non-achievements of political

office holders. Hence, the position of Schudson (2002, p.251) that, "effective politicians must learn to master the arts of media publicity" becomes imperative.

Media practitioners and journalists are also not left out, because they have their opinions and beliefs which are products of their experiences as well as their interactions with political elites which manifest on the contents produced by the media (Tuchman, 1978; Shoemaker and Reese, 2014). As a privileged profession, Oseni (1992, p.133) highlighted ten objectives that media and media practitioners must satisfy in a democratic society among which, is to, "monitor the performance of government with a view to preventing deviation from agreed objectives."

The first year anniversary of the Muhammadu Buhari's presidency was on May 29, 2016. In advanced democracies such as the United States of America and Britain, the concept of first 100 days or one year of a presidency is a significant phenomenon and occupies a central part in its political culture. It is a period that is considered as a standard to gauge the early success of a president. From the days of Frank D. Roosevelt to that of Clinton, Bush and Obama presidency, the first 100 days is a period often marked with high anticipation by Americans (Farnsworth, Lichter and Schatz, 2011; Farnsworth and Lichter, 2004).

In Nigeria, the first 100 days in office took on a symbolic significance during former President Olusegun Obasanjo's first term in office (1999-2003) at the end of a prolonged military rule. The present study rests on the assumption that, new presidents and governors of states in Nigeria endeavour to make a good first impression. Following the immense goodwill and high expectations after his electoral victory and his subsequent inauguration on May 29, 2015, the study focused on the Buhari administration's first year in office.

Research Question

On the basis of the three developed content categories, the central research question to guide the study was posed:

RQ: What is the pattern of coverage of security, state of the economy and corruption of the Buhari administration's first year anniversary in the *Daily Sun*, *Daily Trust*, *Guardian*, *The Nation* and *The Punch*?

The study applies the concept of the framing theory to examine the first year anniversary in office of Muhammadu Buhari's administration which was intensely covered by the Nigerian media, using five national dailies-*Daily Sun*, *Daily Trust*, *The Guardian*, *The Nation* and *The Punch* published from 23-29 May 2016. This period is significant because it was the week which preceded when the Buhari presidency would clock its first year in office- May 29, 2016, Nigeria's Democracy Day, which is, one of the most defining moments of the Buhari presidency. The total number of editions used for the study is 35 (*Daily Sun* = 7, *Daily Trust* =7, *Guardian* =7, *The Nation* =7 and *The Punch* =7).

A census rather than a sample was conducted for this study in order to ensure that critical aspects of the media coverage of the administration during the period of study are retained. Riffe, Lacy & Fico (1998, p.51) submits that when examining a particular issue, the "probability sampling might miss key parts of the coverage." By understanding the role played by the media in the framing of this issue, this study seeks to contribute to the communication discipline by providing a better understanding of the relationship which exists between the Nigerian media and the authorities and how the former has mirrored the latter in the eyes of the citizenry.

Literature Review

Scholars and political pundits have devoted a large amount of attention to explaining the dynamics of the 2015 Nigerian national elections and electoral campaigns. The bulk of this scholarship has focused on media narratives and influence on the elections (Ibraheem,

Ogwezzy-Ndisika and Tejumaiye, 2015; Olayiwola, 2016), by observing citizens political engagement during the elections (Mustapha and Mustapha, 2017), examining political voting behaviour (Ojekwe, 2015; Abubakre and Oyewo, 2015; Ezegwu, Etukudo and Akpan, 2015) as well as political advertisements and election campaign expenditure (Alawode and Adesanya, 2016; Salman, 2015).

Nevertheless, literature is lacking on exploring how media shapes the agenda envisioned by political office-holders after they assume political office which is a major key to holding politicians accountable to the people. This paper is especially relevant because public support is often a necessary precondition for the implementation of governmental policies and the role played by the mass media in this regard cannot be underestimated (Druckman and Holmes, 2004). Therefore, the current study seeks to address this gap in the area of media research, politics and communication, by contributing to the burgeoning research area in journalism and political science in Nigeria.

The Nigerian Political System, Media, and the 2015 Presidential Election

The alliance of major opposition political parties, coming together to work for their collective interest by forming the All Progressive Congress to dislodge the former ruling party marked a critical turning point in the history of the country's political system. Among reasons advanced by pundits which contributed to the emergence of and the ultimate realisation of the central objective of the Coalition, was the decision of the then incumbent, Goodluck Jonathan, to seek re-election in the 2015 presidential election. Over the years, particularly after the restoration to civilian rule, the trends of electoral outcomes in Nigeria have always been a two-way race between an established dominant ruling party and major opposition parties fragmented along regional lines with other smaller political parties forming an informal bond with either the ruling party or the major opposition party. In this circumstance, elections at the Federal level have always been in favour of the incumbent and the ruling party, however, the 2015 presidential election is an exception to this, given the significant impact of the APC coalition.

Adibe (2015) highlights some issues which drove the 2015 presidential elections among which included the North-South, Christian-Muslim Divide vis-à-vis-the truncation of the unwritten zoning and power rotation arrangements by the Jonathan administration and the former ruling party, PDP. Owen and Usman (2015, p.466-467) however, advanced four factors which made the incumbent lost the 2015 presidential elections and these factors were:

1. The fragmentation of the ruling PDP as the main platform for elite coordination;
2. The government's dismal record in economic management, addressing human development challenges, tackling corruption and securing lives and property;
3. Divergent election campaign tactics employed by both parties; and
4. Better preparation by the electoral commission, in particular in its use of biometric voter cards.

Furthermore, the role played by the Nigerian mass media in setting agenda during the 2015 elections cannot be overemphasized. Even though some scholars like Ibraheem, Ogwezzy-Ndisika and Tejumaiye (2015) had contended that media ownership in Nigeria is driven more by political motives rather than profit, it can also be argued, however, that, Nigerian media institutions are also essentially capitalistic organizations, because they are motivated by profit and to the extent that they are propelled by profit, this will also have implications on the coverage and quality of news content and the information they render to members of the public in the shaping of public knowledge.

This is why, Pan and Kosicki (2001, p.36) explained that public deliberation is not a harmonious process, rather, it is "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." Thus, election campaign messages designed to

persuade undecided voters, by encouraging them and their supporters to turn out on Election Day to vote for a particular candidate 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) like some media organisations, such as the *Nigerian Tribune*, Africa Independent Television (AIT), played up the poor democratic antecedents of the APC presidential candidate, Muhammadu Buhari.

For example, in examining the 2015 election campaign expenditure, *The Nation* newspaper (whose proprietor is an influential Chieftain within the opposition coalition) gave more advertising spaces to the APC presidential candidate (284) than the PDP candidate, who had 72 (Salman, 2015). In another study, Abubakre and Oyewo (2015) further showed that, *The Nation* newspaper gave more supportive coverage to the APC and its presidential candidate who is widely seen as not corrupt. In examining the framing of the APC *Change* campaigns during the 2015 Nigerian Presidential election, Olisa (2015) established that both *The Punch* and *The Guardian* newspapers used more positive frames to present the 'Change' mantra of the APC albeit in varying proportions. The bottom line from the foregoing is that, both political and economic motives, influenced media content during the 2015 presidential election campaigns.

Theoretical Framework

This study is anchored on the framing theory. More specifically, the present study is concerned with emphasis framing. Although the theoretical concept has overlapped with other similar but distinctive theoretical constructs like agenda setting and priming (McCombs and Ghanem, 2001), the concept of news framing has been incorporated in media studies for over four decades (Aaroe, 2011). It has been conceptualized in several ways –as a strategy for social construction (Pan and Kosicki, 1993) as well as processing of news based on journalistic routines (D'Angelo and Kuypers, 2010; Reese, Gandy and Grant, 2001; Druckman, 2001). It is the manner that a particular news item or news story is produced. The present study is concerned with how five different national newspapers (*Daily Sun*, *Daily Trust*, *Guardian*, *The Nation* and *The Punch*) framed the Buhari administration's first year in office by focusing on themes of the coverage in a general context.

Entman's definition of framing highlighted four functions of frames in the media which included defining problems, diagnosing causes, making moral judgments, and suggesting remedies (Entman, 1993, p.52).

Tankard (2001, p.101) proposed eleven ways by which we can identify frames in a news report. They are: headlines, subheads, photos, photo captions, leads, source selection, quotes selection, pull quotes, logos, statistics and charts, as well as concluding statements and paragraphs.

Segvic (2005, p. 472) content analyzed three well circulating Croatian newspapers to examine how politics was framed in that country for a period of eleven years. It specifically examined how the papers presented the Croatian Government from 1990 to 2000; by examining the adopted frame categories along Croatian government performance, economic situation in Slovenia, Bosnian war, Serbian government performance, international reaction and others. Results from the study indicated that *Vjesnik* newspaper presented the Government favourably in its reportage than the *Feral Tribune* which was highly critical of the Croatian Government.

In Nigeria, Okoro and Odoemelam (2013, p.86) also examined the print media framing of the Boko Haram insurgency in Nigeria using *The Guardian*, *Daily Sun*, *Vanguard* and *This Day* newspapers using content analysis. Findings from the study showed that Nigerian newspapers reported the Boko Haram insurgency in a predominantly policy response frame that were conspicuously manifest in *The Guardian*, *ThisDay* and *Vanguard* newspapers, as against the *Daily Sun* which emphasized ethnic and

religious frames. According to the researchers, "it was clear that Nigerian newspapers reported government interventions in positive terms. Such positive framings are germane to minimizing insurgencies like that of Boko Haram, while on the other hand, coverage which emphasized ethnic and religious frames are negative and are detrimental to peace initiatives in a secular and multi-cultural State like Nigeria." The researchers therefore recommended "the optimization of positive frames to promote the peace media initiative which forms the critical plank of positive media interventions." The concept of framing has also been applied to election campaigns. Abubakre and Oyewo (2015, p.141) elaborated in their findings that *The Nation* newspaper used 'Ineffective Governance' and 'Corruption' frames as leitmotif to negatively present the PDP in the 2015 presidential election. On the other hand, the country's oldest daily newspaper, the *Nigerian Tribune*, employed 'Democratic Profile' frame to positively present Goodluck Jonathan, while emphasizing the dictatorship past of Muhammadu Buhari.

Methodology

This is a qualitative study which sought to examine how the Nigerian media has framed the Buhari administration's first year anniversary in office using five national dailies- *Daily Sun*, *Daily Trust*, *Guardian*, *The Nation* and *The Punch* published from 23-29 May 2016. The total number of editions used for the study is 35 (*Daily Sun* = 7, *Daily Trust* =7, *Guardian* =7, *The Nation* =7 and *The Punch* =7). As earlier stated in the body of literature, a census was conducted for the corpus in order to ensure that critical aspects of media coverage of the administration were not lost in the process of sample selection. The focus on these newspapers was based on the fact that they were always reviewed on the nation's leading electronic media (both television and radio stations) platforms, such as *Channels Television*, *AIT*, *Silverbird*, *Nigerian Television Authority (NTA)* among others, and *Radio Nigeria*, *Raypower FM*, and many others across the country.

Investigating themes of news articles of the Buhari administration on the cover pages of the selected dailies in the period under study, three content categories emerge. These content categories are: corruption, state of the economy and security. After the elimination of articles unrelated to the three content categories in the coverage, a brief quantitative analysis of the corpus show that, there were a total of 144 articles and these were analysed for the study. Of these (N=144), 53 (36.8%) were about Security; 43 (29.8%) about State of the economy and 48 (33.4%) on Corruption. The articles were the units of analysis for this study. Under the Security category, three major issues stand out and these are: the issue of militancy in the Niger Delta region, the Fulani herdsmen-farmers conflicts and the rescue of the Chibok girls/ Boko Haram insurgency. On the State of the economy, two issues were distinct; first, was the industrial action embarked upon by the Nigerian Labour Congress (NLC) which was caused by the increase in the fuel pump price from N86 and N86.50k to N145.00 by the Buhari administration and, second, the exchange rate policy which marked the threshold of the country's slide into recession. Reportage about corruption under the Corruption content category was classified in terms of 'exposure', 'consequence' and 'accountability.' Two graduates of Mass Communication from the University of Ilorin assisted the researcher in the coding process.

Since this study is concerned with emphasis framing, the next step was ascertaining the level of prominence accorded to the three content categories in the five dailies; this was done by ascribing to front page major headlines/stories- 5points and front page minor headlines/stories were credited with 3points. This data is captured in Table 1. This was done because newspapers report in an order of significance and this has implications on the framing of such issue(s). This was then followed by performing a close textual analysis of the words used in the headlines of the stories. Takahashi, Hartman, Amann and Meisner (2017, p.119) submit that, newspaper headlines are "designed to incite interest and catch readers' attention with the goal of having them read the text of the article, they serve as relevance optimizers. Because the headline is typically the first

element read, it also frames the topic and influences readers' perceptions of the news article." Through the presentation of factual accounts of burning issue(s), newspaper editorials constitute an extremely vital part of the print media genre which usually, is the position endorsed by the newspaper organization that seeks to galvanize, persuade and influence the opinions of members of a society. Editorials of the selected dailies published in the period under study were used to also buttress the analysis in the study.

This study adopts a qualitative comparative approach to answer the research question by providing results that are rich and detailed. Palmberger and Gingrich (2014, p.95) wrote that the qualitative comparative approach draws attention to both the "differences and similarities, to consider endogenous as well as exogenous factors, and to carve out diversity as well as similarity." As the scholars puts it: "Qualitative comparative methods are well equipped to tackle questions that require complex and combinatorial explanations" (2014, p.95)

Findings

Table 1: Categories, front page major & front page minor headlines/stories: overall results

Dailies	Categories	Front page Major Stories	Front Page Minor Stories
<i>Daily Sun</i>			
	Corruption	7	3
	Economy	2	3
	Security	6	2
<i>Daily Trust</i>			
	Corruption	3	4
	Economy	10	0
	Security	2	9
<i>The Guardian</i>			
	Corruption	1	4
	Economy	4	2
	Security	5	3
<i>The Nation</i>			
	Corruption	6	8
	Economy	7	4
	Security	6	9
<i>The Punch</i>			
	Corruption	11	1
	Economy	9	2
	Security	6	5

Source: Researcher's computation of data from content analysis of the *Daily Sun, Daily Trust, Guardian, The Nation and The Punch, 2016*

Analysis of Findings

Table 1 shows the level of prominence accorded to the three content categories in the five dailies on the Buhari administration's first year anniversary.

Pattern of Coverage

1. Security

The most frequently coded category among the selected dailies was the issue of security, 36.8% of the corpus. The issues of reportage under this category are classified along the lines of militancy in the Niger Delta region, the Fulani herdsmen-farmers' conflicts and the rescue of the Chibok girls/ Boko Haram insurgency which was particularly a major issue in the build-up to the 2015 general elections. As a presidential candidate and during his early months as president, Buhari pledged that

no effort will be spared in his administration's commitment to rid the nation of terrorism and restore normalcy in the areas affected by Boko Haram.

- **Militancy**

In the *Daily Sun*, headlines/stories about militants in the Niger Delta who demonstrated their grievances to the government through the destruction of oil installations in that region, were dominant. A micro analysis of word usage in the headlines of the paper concerning the issue, reveal emotive terms such as, 'blow-up' 'war' 'bombings' 'fire' 'go gaga' and 'negotiate.' Stories about militancy were usually covered using front page major headlines while law enforcement agencies response to the threat were covered using front page minor headlines. In contrast, the *Daily Trust* newspaper reported about the militancy in the Niger Delta in terms of the response of law enforcement agencies to the threat of vandalism and the Federal Government's position and were usually covered using front page minor headlines. A micro analysis of word usage in its headlines indicated terms such as, 'tough response' 'go after' which portrayed the Buhari administration from the position of strength.

The Punch newspaper portrayed the Federal Government as seeking dialogue with the militants as a micro analysis of word usage in its headlines show terms like 'plan talks', 'open talks' 'tension'. Stories about militants attacks were usually covered using front page minor headlines while the Federal Government reaction to the threat was covered using front page major headlines. While *The Guardian* newspaper on its part; reported militants attacks using front page major headlines and used same in terms of the responses of law enforcement agencies as well as from the Federal Government. Terms used include- 'blow-up', 'crush', 'destroy', 'vandals'.

The Nation reported the issue of militancy using both major and minor headlines in nearly equal proportions. However, reports in the paper tend to stress the consequence of militancy in terms of loss of oil revenues and derailment of the Federal Government programmes which could have improved the lives of the citizenry. A micro analysis of word usage in its headlines indicated terms such as, 'blow-up' 'crisis' 'derail' 'shock' 'battleline.'

On the whole, the study finds that the militants spectacular act of using the destruction of oil installations in the Niger Delta region which will gravely impact negatively on the nation's mainstay as an oil dependent-economy, to grab media attention (as evident in *Daily Sun's* cover pages in the period under study). While the Federal Government used the media to champion their views of using a mix of violence, persuasion and bargaining in dealing with the militants, the law enforcement agencies on its part employed the media to justify their use of force/violence against the militants, delegitimising the actions of the militants in the vandalism of oil facilities.

- **Fulani Herdsmen-Farmers' conflicts**

The frequent clashes between the Fulani herdsmen and farmers/indigenes of the communities where the herdsmen cattle graze had not earned the Buhari administration positive reviews from the Nigerian media. *The Punch* newspaper drew attention to this issue through its front page major headlines/stories reportage in the period under study. Abubakre (2016) noted that, media reportage about the Fulani herdsmen-farmers' conflict "was especially intense from late February 2016, following the Agatu communal conflict in Benue State."

Both the *Daily Sun* and *The Punch* moved the issue of the conflicts to the front burner as they published the photographs of suspected herdsmen responsible for the killings in Nimbo, Enugu State, who were apprehended and paraded by the Police as front page major picture stories for the day (see: *Daily Sun* and *The Punch*, Thursday May

26, 2016, cover page). *The Guardian* employed a non-conflict inflammatory approach in its reportage of the issue while the *Daily Trust* chose to highlight the challenges confronting pastoral life characterised by cattle rustling and sectarian violence.

The Nigerian media had also set agenda on this issue as they queried the Federal Government's silence on the conflict. The *Vanguard* newspaper which is widely read in the South-South region of Nigeria published an editorial on the issue when it stated that Buhari's silence was "not golden." And when the medium undertook a review of the President's first year in office, a news analysis written by Ugoji Egbujo, with the title: "Rampaging herdsmen, bloody massacres and a bias President", had accused the Buhari administration of indifference to the spate of massacres allegedly perpetrated by Fulani herdsmen across the country. The report reads:

The herdsmen are predominantly Fulani and Buhari isn't just an ordinary Fulani. He was once a patron of the herdsmen and their vocal advocate on herdsmen/farmers disputes. After the Agatu massacre, Federal Government agents spoke in manners that suggested that they were conflicted. But more depressingly, no meaningful arrests were made, no declaration of serious intent by government to find and punish murderers. After Nimbo Enugu, the presidency fell into an embarrassing and dangerous silence. Why would the president find the loss of many Nigerian lives in an incident that had such potentially inflammable consequences so trivial that the president issued not an immediate statement? (*Vanguard* May 28, 2016, p.12).

Although *The Nation* newspaper had used front page minor headlines to report the Fulani herdsmen-farmers' conflict, the paper accorded priority to this matter by publishing two editorials (See: *The Nation*, May 24, 2016, p.17; *The Nation*, May 27, 2016, p.17) within a week, on the issue to counter the establishment of grazing reserves for herdsmen, a proposed measure by Government to curb the bloody clashes between Fulani herdsmen and farmers. The paper, argued strongly in both editorials that, "cattle rearing is private business."

- **Chibok Girls and Boko Haram Terrorism**

The Nigerian media has placed emphasis on the rescue of the abducted Chibok girls. The *Daily Trust* newspaper and *The Guardian* newspapers stand out in this regard as they have constantly put the Government on its toes. In every edition of both papers, they indicated an enumeration to the number of days the Chibok girls have spent in captivity of the terrorist group Boko Haram. Even though the Nigerian President has been commended generally in his fight against boko Haram, the *Daily Sun* newspaper framed the issue in such a manner that the efforts of Buhari on this matter cannot be divorced from the role played by his immediate predecessor, Goodluck Jonathan. Thus, in its editorial on the day Buhari clocked one year anniversary in office, the paper had stated: "Nigerians owe him a debt of gratitude for working hard to maintain the vital alliances forged by his predecessor to enlist the help of foreign friends in the fight against terrorism" (*Sunday Sun*, May 29, 2017, p.13; *The Punch*, Tuesday 24, 2017, p.20)

2. State of the Economy

The state of the economy can be viewed in terms of the Nigerian Labour Congress (NLC) and the floating foreign exchange rate policy.

- **NLC Industrial Action**

Discussing the economy against the backdrop of the failed strike embarked upon by NLC following the increase of the fuel pump price to N145/litre from N87.50/litre, the study finds that the media lent support to the Buhari-led administration by deflecting the blame and the hostility generated by the policy against the government. The theme of the discourse was generally favourable towards the Buhari-led administration. An analysis of the editorials published on May 23, 2016,

by both the *Daily Trust* and *The Punch* revealed that, while the former tended to portray the Nigerian President as being helpless in the matter, it framed him as a 'victim' who was left with no other option than to increase the fuel pump price. *The Punch* framed the NLC strike as being 'insensitive' while simultaneously casting the former President, Goodluck Jonathan as the 'villain'. The *Daily Trust* editorial reads:

Many Nigerians appear to have accepted the reasons advanced by government for the increase in the pump price of petrol to N145/litre. Many Nigerians also opine that the recent increase must have been the **only option left for government**; believing that President Muhammadu Buhari who has consistently opposed subsidy withdrawal is now **compelled by realities** to accept the increase and subsidy withdrawal.

Framing devices employed in this editorial includes- "only option left for government" and "compelled by realities" which were used to fend off criticism and absolve the government of culpability in the fuel pump price increase; while that of *The Punch* reads:

There is a **genuine feeling of betrayal** among the populace that the NLC felt unconcerned when the treasury was looted... Nigerians have shown that they **accept** that petrol prices had to increase because of a sharp decline in government's revenue, heavily raided treasury and depleted foreign reserves. And Jonathan government must be blamed for this.

The framing device as identified by the researcher in *The Punch* editorial which dismissed the failed strike as "unprincipled and unnecessary" is, the "genuine feeling of betrayal" of Nigerians by the NLC before the paper's closing argument which maintained that there was no alternative to the increase in the fuel pump price policy. Furthermore, four dailies (*Daily Sun*, *Daily Trust*, *The Nation* and *The Punch*), reported the aborted strike as a front page major story while only *The Guardian* reported it as a front page minor story. Thus, on this aspect of the economy, the Buhari administration got the support of the media in fostering albeit an unpopular policy on the public effortlessly with seemingly apparent seamlessness.

- **Exchange Rate Policy**

All the selected newspapers reported the adoption of the flexible exchange rate policy as front page major stories; however, the *Daily Sun*, *The Guardian* and *The Punch* stressed warnings on imminent recession in their respective headlines. Discussing the economy against the backdrop of the introduction of the flexible exchange rate policy, the media set agenda on the issue. *The Guardian*, in particular, wrote an editorial entitled "For a realistic exchange rate" on the policy. The paper posited that the Federal Government has taken the "worst option" regarding the exchange rate policy issue while the paper also led in news reports of generally unfavourable themes of the Buhari administration as regards the exchange rate policy by drawing attention to the absence of safety net by the government. Framing devices used by *The Guardian* included 'unclear', 'southward trend' 'negative rating' to justify the unfavourable themes against the Buhari administration. An example is drawn from the lede in a front page major story which stated that the Nigerian economy was on the brink of recession as a result of the "low level of economic activities in the country occasioned by the late passage of the Federal Government budget by the current administration which has made the country to suffer two successive negative quarters" (see, *The Guardian*, Wednesday May 25, 2016; see *Daily Sun*, same date, cover page & p.42).

Nonetheless, the Nigerian media appears to also give Buhari a voice when he was quoted as saying that the nation's economy is in a "volatile situation" as a result of crash in oil prices (see, *Daily Trust*, *The Punch* Thursday May 26, 2016; covered as front page major stories). The import of this admission does not generate hostility against the administration, as it was simultaneously and frequently tempered down by front page minor reports in the following dailies- *Daily Trust*, *The Punch*, *The Nation*, Thursday May 26, 2016 as they demonstrated the Federal Government's capability and its commitment towards alleviating the situation as evidenced from both the Federal Government and the NLC's constitution of a panel on minimum wage and palliatives; stability in the naira and gains recorded by the Nigerian Stock Exchange (NSE). Furthermore, when the researcher compared the prominence given to the exchange rate policy to that of the NLC strike, findings showed that *The Guardian* played down on the generally favourable themes of the Buhari administration. The paper noted that it "remains unclear" the economic policy thrust of the Buhari administration after one year in office, while *The Punch* and *Daily Trust* quoted Buhari as admitting that the Nigerian economy is in a 'volatile' situation on its cover pages. However, it was also observed that even though the *The Punch* and the *Daily Trust* offered cheering news generally favourable to the Buhari administration in reporting the gains recorded by the NSE, there was a disparity in the figures published by *The Punch* and *Daily Trust* as the former reported that the NSE gained N354bn while the latter reported a N358bn gain.

3. Corruption War

The major plank that brought in Buhari and the APC government into office was the 'anti-corruption' war (Abubakre & Oyewo, 2015). Issues in media reportage about corruption are classified in terms of 'exposure', 'consequence' and 'accountability'.

Exposure refers to media reportage on corruption. In the period under study, we also identify exposure of actors- both institutional (such as, NNPC), and individuals (key players of the immediate past administration of ex-President, Goodluck Jonathan);

Consequence in terms of allegedly accused infractors being held liable and subjected to sanctions such as declaring them 'wanted', 'remand' in the custody of the EFCC and 'freezing' of assets.

Accountability in terms of publishing Federal government budget expenditure; a feature report by *The Guardian* evaluating the score card of the government puts it this way that, "...compared to the expenses of the previous administration, Buhari government has cut down heavily on the cost of governance" (see, *The Guardian*, May 27, 2016).

The study also finds that selected newspapers also covered corruption cases differently. A case study which is worth mentioning here is that involving the role of a Managing Director of Fidelity Bank, Nnamdi Okonkwo in the disbursement of funds allegedly acting under the instructions of former Petroleum Minister, Mrs. Diezani Allison Madueke. Although *The Punch* and the *Daily Sun* both cited 'unnamed sources from EFCC' (see, *The Punch*, *Daily Sun* of Thursday May 26, 2016) *The Punch* newspaper reported the issue from the angle of the giver or facilitator/distributor of the funds while *Daily Sun* reported the same issue from the angle of receiver/beneficiary of funds. In so doing, *the Punch* which framed the funds as "loot", reported that Okonkwo (from the South- Eastern part of the Nigeria) has been remanded in EFCC custody while the *Daily Sun* on its part, framed it as "campaign funds", and also intentionally omitted the name 'Okonkwo' from the report, rather choosing to highlight that the alleged beneficiaries of the funds- Madaki, Adamu, Kumo and Abubakar (all from the Northern geopolitical axis), have been detained by the EFCC in connection with the campaign funds.

The study finds that, *The Punch*, *The Nation* and the *Daily Sun*, accorded the highest prominence to the President's anti-corruption war as it recorded more points for both front page major and minor headlines/stories. In a feature news article written by a Deputy Political Editor, Raymond Mordi, published a day to when Buhari's administration would clock one year in office, a pull quote for emphasis reads:

...the fear of Buhari and his anti-corruption crusade has also produced panic in the obscenely and opulently rich homes. Billions of dollars are galloping back into the national coffers as their illegal keepers are making returns in fearsome panic, even as the anti-corruption agents are revving their operational engines back to life. A good number of persons believed to have collectively stolen billions from taxpayers have also been arrested and are facing courts. (See, *The Nation*, May 28, 2016, p.2)

Other superlatives used to describe the President in the same article are that, he was viewed as "very forthright, full of integrity, and a man who stubbornly clings to causes he believes in...His no-nonsense and incorruptible posture is widely regarded as a benchmark for members of his cabinet. Given the President's Spartan lifestyle, his ministers have been under intense pressure since they came into office to maintain the standard of behaviour expected of them."

Daily Trust gave prominence to reportage about corruption with front page minor headlines/stories than front page major headlines/stories concerning corruption news. *The Guardian*, which had the least number of articles on corruption, gave prominence to these reports using more of its front page minor headlines than its front page major headlines. When the points are aggregated and evaluated cumulatively in a descending order of significant proportion, this study finds that *The Punch*, *The Nation*, *Daily Sun*, *Daily Trust* and *The Guardian* had generally supported the Buhari's administration anti-corruption war. This is because the government frames dominates public discourse in terms of the fight against corruption as the media had adopted and absorbed the line of argument put forth by the Buhari-led government that, successive PDP-led administrations, particularly, under the leadership of Goodluck Jonathan, had plundered the nation's commonwealth.

However, it has not always been a smooth sail for the establishment. The media had also been critical toward the Buhari administration particularly about issues on the state of the economy. An instance of this is taken from *The Punch* editorial published on May 29, 2016, with the headline: "Buhari: Still waiting for the real change." The editorial reads: "...while he inherited a disarticulated economy, Buhari has exacerbated our economic misfortune with his legendary and studious vagueness. The lack of a concise, proactive economic strategy, even till now, is glaring".

The paper, on the same date, also used an illustrative chart to project a score-card of the Buhari administration where it rated the government as poor on the indices of oil and gas, roads, aviation, education, health, sports, economy, manufacturing and telecoms while evaluating it as fair in the areas of railway, security and agriculture.

Beyond the foregoing comparison, the role of the main opposition party Peoples' Democratic Party (PDP) in Nigeria which is supposed to serve as a check to the ruling All Progressives' Congress (APC) during this period, is also worthy of study. However, this is beyond the scope of the present research. Nevertheless, it is important to mention here, that, the PDP, due to its intraparty squabbles, was greatly distracted by the bickering of major power brokers within its party since it lost the 2015 Nigerian presidential election; consequently, it could be argued that the main opposition political party failed to effectively fulfil its role and mandate of checkmating the ruling APC as expected in democratic norms and ideals.

Conclusion

The bottom line from the foregoing exploratory analysis is that, the Buhari administration's attempt towards ensuring security, improving the state of the economy and the anti-corruption war, are portrayed by the Nigerian media in such a way that reinforces and propagates specific meanings in defining the President's first twelve months in office. Through news framings of the identified content categories, the media has supported the Buhari government in building legitimacy of the process in the fight against corruption. Though critical of the Government's handling of the economy, the media framed the Nigerian President as a 'victim' while his immediate predecessor, Goodluck Jonathan was portrayed as a 'villain.' In terms of security, the Nigerian media framed the coverage more in terms of conflict inflammatory headlines/stories especially with regards to the Fulani herdsmen-farmers' conflicts while simultaneously setting agenda on the abducted Chibok girls' rescue.

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