

# Political Rivalry Signification in Newspaper Reportage: An Xray of the 2015 Presidential Election in Nigeria

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## Abstract

Scholarly submissions are rife in political communication literature that conflict escalation in a political system is a reflection of the manner in which the media handle issues of conflict; and that a full blown conflict can have its antecedent in political rivalry. There have been scholarly works on the gate keeping and agenda setting roles of the media in political conflicts, but the actual role the Nigerian media play in political rivalry is inadequate in available empirical works. Thus, this study was carried out to determine how newspapers deployed meanings and gave significance to political rivalry in the reportage of the 2015 presidential election. The study period was November 2014 to December 2015 when the rivalry heightened between the All Progressives Congress (APC) and the People's Democratic Party (PDP). Three Nigerian national newspapers were selected for the study, namely: *The Punch*, *The Nation* and *Daily Trust*. Purposive sampling was used to select 273 editorial items in 90 editions of the selected newspapers. The study used two research approaches: quantitative content analysis and dialectical hermeneutics in data gathering and analysis. This was done to determine the extent to which selected newspapers reported stories on political rivalry in respect of the 2015 presidential election and also to investigate what the selected newspapers signified in their reportage of the political rivalry that marked the 2015 presidential election. It was discovered that the vast reportage of the rivalry was largely negative as the selected newspapers overwhelmingly published stories that promoted rivalry between the presidential candidates of the two political parties. The reportage was largely unhelpful as it tended to promote calumny, hate speeches and vituperations between the parties. Thus, the reportage was at variance with the tenets of a conflict sensitive press.

**Keywords:** *.Political rivalry .Newspaper reportage .2015 election.*

## INTRODUCTION

Given media's expected performance as watchdogs in the society, they ought to be providers of information about events and conditions in the society; indicate relations of power, and facilitate innovative, adaptation and progress. Also, while carrying out their responsibilities of correlating parts of the society in response to the society, the mass media are expected to explain, interpret, and comment on the meaning of events and information. The mass media are also expected to provide support for established authority and norms, socialize, coordinate separate activities, build consensus and set orders of priority and signal relative status (McQuail, 2011). Thus, the mass media are charged with the responsibility of helping people to monitor the events going on in the society, thereby giving them ideas about the threat and opportunities in the society. However, the mass media do not only provide people with information with which they take rational decisions about their lives, but they also perform the functions of interpreting the daily events that are reported as a way of analyzing the events in terms of the context in which they occur. In other words, the surveillance function of the mass media provides only the tips of information as various events occur in the society. However, this tip of information can only become useful to the people in the society when they are expanded and broken into useful analysis that contain the context, genesis, and outcome of a particular event in the society. These functions of mass media therefore provide the basis for

assessing the performance of the mass media in the political rivalry that characterized the just concluded 2015 presidential election in Nigeria.

However, in scholarly works of Popoola (2012; 2013; 2014a; 2014b and 2015) he submits that elections in Nigeria have been characterized by the use of do or die approach that entails the deployment of the most desperate and despicable tactics to clinch and maintain political power. According to him and as reinforced by Ake, cited in Chukwuma and Philip (2014), lawlessness, violence and impunity have become indispensable elements of the electioneering experience.

With a population of over 160 million (World Bank, 2012) divided among three major religions (the Muslims, Christians and Indigenous beliefs) and over 250 ethnic groups, Nigeria can be described as a diverse society. These characteristics may account for the differences in opinion and the high rate of political rivalry in the country. Politically, Nigeria has been systematically challenged in its aspiration for democracy since her independence in 1960 (Chukwuma & Philip, 2014). It has been faced with enormous political instability and most of the time, military rule. The fourth republic which started amidst great hope and expectations is yet to significantly convince the generality of the Nigerian populace its democratic success especially with respect to the conduct of free, fair and credible elections devoid of electoral violence. In fact, Nigeria's desire for democracy has materialized into various democratic transitions and dispositions, amidst sundry crisis and contradictions. This is noticeable in the various cases of electoral violence, which have claimed several lives, displacement of innocent people and wanton destruction of property. Unfortunately, much of the political and civil unrest recorded in Nigeria since the return of the country to democratic rule in 1999, had been rooted in unhealthy political rivalry. Interrogating literature on causative factors of political conflict, Popoola, (2009; 2013; 2014a; 2014b and 2015) likens political rivalry to political conflict in many respects. Political rivalry, which is evident in forms of hate speeches, campaigns of calumny and outright vituperations, among party candidates, often occurs in Nigeria because the society is made up of political actors with differing interests and values. When political gladiators have divergent views and are working at cross purposes to achieve a political goal, it is natural that there would be discontent, opposition and controversy which find expression in speeches and statements that will advance one political cause in disdain of the other. (Afegbua, 2010).

In the 2015 presidential election in Nigeria, the rivalry which happened between the ruling government at the federal level, the People's Democratic Party (PDP) and the main opposition, All Progressives Congress (APC) was apparently marked with hate speeches and demonization that seem prejudicial and harmful to peaceful political order if not reported with carefulness by the media. There was Goodluck Ebele Jonathan, the incumbent president, as at the time of the election, who contested on the platform of the PDP and there was General Muhammadu Buhari who contested on the platform of the APC, the main opposition party. These two political gladiators contested in the 2011 presidential election, won by Jonathan. However, the 2015 election generated much tension across the country owing to the very stiff opposition of the two major presidential candidates to each other in the poll. While Goodluck Ebele Jonathan's strength rested on his incumbency and the sit-tightism of the PDP at the federal level for 15 unbroken years, the APC discredited the PDP, using security challenges and the spate of corruption in the society, and campaigned for change to be brought about by the antecedent and perceived credibility of Buhari, the party's presidential flag bearer.

### **Statement of Problem**

As it is to be expected during the election period in any democratic setting, the newspapers in Nigeria focused largely on the manner of portrayal of these two major candidates as they vied for the most coveted political position in the country. There have been assumptions that campaigns of calumny, hate speeches and vituperations all characterized the 2015 electioneering process in Nigeria. Adaba, (2015, p. 18) gives credence to this that the advertisements of candidates that circulated around were to say the least banal, puerile, uncultured and primitive. According to him, the greatest values the Nigerian culture is identified with are respect and honor, which should have been reflected in the portrayal of the two major political party candidates. Thus, this study examines the role played by selected

Nigerian national newspapers in the political rivalry that marked the conduct of the 2015 presidential election in Nigeria.

### **Research Questions**

With a view to addressing the problem of the study, the following questions were formulated:

1. What is the extent to which selected newspapers carried stories on political rivalry in respect of the 2015 presidential election?
2. What did the selected newspapers signify in their reportage of political rivalry in the 2015 presidential election?

### **LITERATURE REVIEW**

#### **Empirical Studies on Media and Political Contestations**

Iruonagbe, Immhonopi and Ahmadu (2013) in their conceptual review of mass media and political violence in Nigeria, examined the interplay between political violence and the role of mass media in addressing this. According to them, violence becomes political when it is intended to disrupt the immediate and future political process. Political violence thus, may involve a process of perpetuating an existing government in power and eliminating perceived opponents or it could be a response to frustrating circumstances and an inability of those in government to fulfill their campaign promises to the people. The researchers espoused that as the fourth estate of the realm and serving as the watchdog of the three arms of government, the media has often been hijacked by political office holders to manipulate and create falsehood including acts of political propaganda. Thus, they examined how the media are used by those in authority to perpetuate them in power; and how they try to eliminate perceived enemies including their inability to fulfill campaign promises. In addition to this, they examined issues concerning the hijacking of the media by political office holders to create falsehood and political propaganda while also circumventing the ideals and work ethics of the media thereby compromising press freedom. They submitted that the press has had difficulty fulfilling the role of watchdog in the country due to the demands of the various competing special interest groups.

Similarly, Nwozor (2014) in his study on “Redefining political terrorism: Nigerian media and the crisis of democratization”, contends that there is little dispute about the power and role of media as agenda setting agency. Rather, the dispute is whose interest the agenda ultimately serves – the elite or the masses? According to Nwozor, despite the avalanche of evidence that Nigeria’s electoral processes had not met the least benchmark of credibility since the country returned to civil rule in 1999, political analyses and advertising in the media tended to gloss over previous electoral flaws in their quest to ascribe invincibility to political elites. The effect of this according to him is that, the political elites are emboldened in their brazen manipulation of the electoral processes, which is a terrorism of sorts. Nwozor is however of the opinion that, while there is claim of balance between the media’s commercialistic interests and public good, evidence suggests that Nigeria’s political elite have used the instrumentality of the media to rewrite and embellish their political fortunes.

Amponsah (2012) examined how the *Daily Graphic* newspaper covered Presidential campaigns in Ghana from 1992 to 2004, of the National Democratic Congress (NDC) and the New Patriotic Party (NPP). Using content analysis, the study indicated that advocacy was the most frequent theme of the electoral campaign coverage. Amponsah notes that “discussion of candidates’ policy positions received more mention than discussion of their character. Positive statements (acclaims) were the most common function in the news stories, followed by negative comments (attacks), and then defenses.”

Popoola (2014a and 2014b) in his work on role of the press in political godfather-son conflict in south western Nigeria; and in his study on the journalistic slanting of the Governor Chris Ngige and Chris Uba Pre Bendal Political Conflict in South- Eastern Nigeria, 2004- 2006”, used content analysis and dialectical hermeneutics to discover that selected Nigerian national newspapers reported scenarios that aided escalation of political godfather-son and pre-Bendal conflicts. The coverage reflected partisanship and the reportage predicted destruction of lives and properties and violent acts that were perpetrated by the supporters of the conflicting parties in Anambra and Oyo States of Nigeria between 2004 and 2006.

However, all these related works seem to focus on how the media are used by some people in the society to satisfy their own interests and how the media tend to escalate conflict in a crisis ridden area. It appears that there have not been any remarkable and substantial works on the political rivalry signification in the country. This study was carried out to fill part of this gap in knowledge by determining the extent to which selected newspapers reported stories on political rivalry in respect of the 2015 presidential election and also to investigate how conflict – sensitive and socially responsible the selected newspapers were in their reportage of the 2015 presidential election.

#### **Political Rivalry in the Milieu of Media Propaganda and Agenda Setting**

Drawing inspiration from Lippman, Jowett and O'Donnell (1999,p. 6), in McQuail (2013, p. 530), see propaganda as the deliberate, systematic attempt to shape perceptions, manipulate cognitions, and direct behavior to achieve a response that furthers the desired intent of the propagandist. Thus, if the mass media serve as a system for communicating messages and symbols to the general populace, it is their function to amuse, entertain, and inform, and to inculcate individuals with the values, beliefs, and codes of behavior that will integrate them into the institutional structures of the larger society. Thus, in a world of concentrated wealth and major conflicts of class interest, to fulfill this role requires systematic propaganda (Herman & Chomsky, 1988).

Ross (2002) in her article "Understanding propaganda: The epistemic merit model and its application to art" claims it is misleading to say that propaganda is simply false, or that it is conditional to a lie, since often the propagandist believes in what he/ she is propagandizing. In other words, it is not necessarily a lie if the person who creates the propaganda is trying to persuade you of a view that they actually hold. "The aim of the propagandist is to create the semblance of credibility". This means that they appeal to an epistemology that is weak or defective. Throughout history, those who have wished to persuade have used art to get their message out. This can be accomplished by hiring artists for the express aim of propagandizing or by investing new meanings to a previously non- political work. Therefore, Ross stated that it is important to consider "the conditions of its making and the conditions of its use". In relation to political rivalry signification in the 2015 presidential elections in Nigeria therefore, scholarly submissions have suggested that propaganda is apparently the tool used in making combative and rivalrous political speeches. Media have remained a major tool used by political contestants to advance their interest and also manipulate the audience to accept the dominant views propagated by them. Agenda Setting is a constant and recurring concept in the works of many propaganda scholars. This old media effects theory describes the ability of the news media to influence the salience of topics on the public agenda. That is, if a news item is covered frequently and prominently, the audience will regard the issue as more important. Agenda setting theory was formally developed by McCombs and Donald Shaw in a study on the 1968 American presidential election. In the 1968 "Chapel Hill Study", McCombs and Shaw demonstrated a strong correlation coefficient ( $r > .9$ ) between what 100 residents of Chapel Hill, North Carolina thought was the most important election issue and what the local and national news media reported was the most important issue. By comparing the salience of issues in news content with the public's perceptions of the most important election issue, McCombs and Shaw were able to determine the degree to which the media determines public opinion. Agenda setting hypothesis of McCombs and Shaw revealed that the mass media have the ability to transfer the salience (importance) of issues on their news agenda to public agenda. That is, the media audience judge as important what the media judge as important. Thus, if these hypotheses are true of agenda-setting, it is obvious that media emphases (and more specifically newspaper emphases) can also be responsible for any promotion of political rivalry in the society, consequent upon media reportage of such rivalry. Put in another way, the agenda setting tenets and propositions create a context in which public opinions about political rivalry as reported by newspapers are created and crystallized. Thus, how positive or negative are these opinions may be contributory to promotion and demotion of any political rivalry.

### Methodology

This study only focused on political rivalry signification in the newspaper reportage of the presidential election that took place within the period of November 2014 and March 2015. Specifically, matters of rivalry, as reported by selected newspapers, between the two major contenders for the presidential seat in the 2015 elections in Nigeria, were examined. These two candidates were: Goodluck Jonathan of the PDP the ruling party then, and Muhammadu Buhari of the APC. These two candidates and their parties were selected because the parties on the platforms of which they contested were the most prominent political parties in the country as at the time of the elections. The study was conducted using a combination of content analysis and dialectical hermeneutics; being quantitative and qualitative research tools respectively.

The quantitative approach was adopted because of the need to emphasize measurement and allow observations that were subjected to statistical analysis (Osuala 1982; Imoisili 1996 in Bobade, 2003: 97). Consequently, content analysis was used to ascertain the level of prominence and prevalence given to political rivalry in the selected newspapers during the 2015 presidential elections. Dialectical hermeneutics, a textual analysis method of research in critical-cultural studies was used as a qualitative strategy to examine contents of calumny, hate speeches and vituperations and incitement into conflict inherent in the newspaper reportage of the rivalry issues in the said elections; and also to explore the influences of ownership or control of the newspapers on such political stories. Such contents were subjected to hermeneutical interpretations organized around Jensen's semiotic framework, which is adopted in communication sciences and cultural studies (Baran and Davis, 2003, pp. 356-357). This literary analytical method affords deeper and better understanding of the contents of the selected newspapers in relation to the socio-cultural and political environment within which the newspapers operated during the study period. This analytical tool is favoured over quantitative tools because it enables the researchers to reach and expose hidden and embedded meanings behind contents which have far-reaching effects on the socio-cultural context within which the producers and recipients of texts interacted.

The newspapers selected are *The Daily Trust*, *The Nation*, and *The Punch*. The selection of these newspapers was based on some factors. First, any rivalry involving individuals at the top hierarchy of government in federalism, such as Nigeria's will have implications for national development (Popoola, 2014). Hence, newspapers that were chosen in this respect have to be national in their spread and circulation. This is the rationale behind the choice of the newspapers which are rated as national newspapers by the Nigeria Union of Journalists (NUJ), Nigeria Guild of Editors (NGE) and Nigeria Press Council (NPC). Remarkably, *The Daily Trust* and *The Nation* newspapers selected had some form of political affiliations as a result of their ownership during the period of study, and this largely informed their selection for the study. Also, *The Punch* was chosen because of its wide spread and circulation and its prominent coverage of political issues. All the newspapers were also English language newspapers. This factor is important since most of the political discourses among political elites were conducted in English language, which makes the coverage of such discourses easier for journalists to report.

Also, purposive sampling was used to select 90 editions of the selected newspapers over a five-month period: November 2014, December 2014, January 2015, February 2015 and the election month, March 2015. Thus, for a segment of one month, starting from November to March, at least eighteen (18) editions of newspapers were sampled and as such there were at least six (6) editions of each newspaper per month and at least thirty (30) editions of each newspaper for the five-month frame. However, in order to ensure that the sampled editions were editions that carried stories on the political rivalry, purposive sampling was used to select editions of the newspapers that carried mainly stories that signified political rivalry. A total of 273 journalistic items of news, features, editorial comments and opinions were examined in the 90 editions. This was done to ensure that only the editions of the newspapers that carried the matters of rivalry in the said election were selected and examined. The focus of analyses of the sampled newspapers was mainly on political and election related stories with implicit or manifest contents.

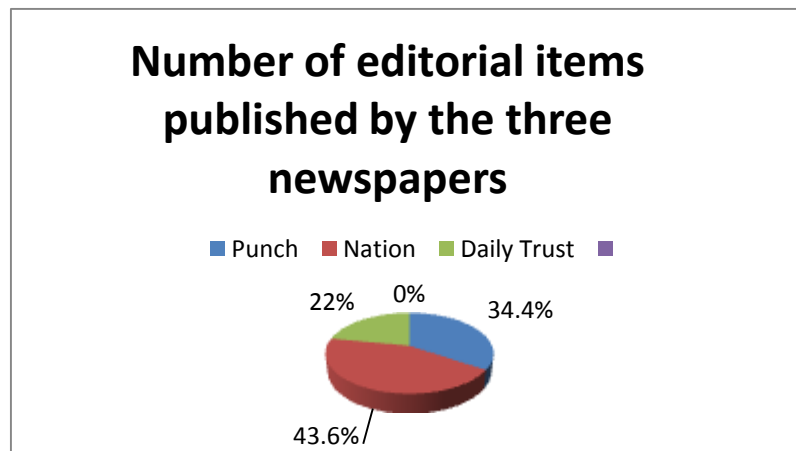
### Research Question 1

What is the extent to which selected newspapers carried stories on political rivalry in respect of the 2015 presidential election?

**Table 1: Total number of editorial items**

Newspapers	Frequency	Percentage
The Punch	94	34.4%
The Nation	119	43.6%
Daily Trust	60	22%
<b>Total</b>	<b>273</b>	<b>100%</b>

Table 1 above and Figure 1 below show the number of editorial items that signified political rivalry in the selected editions of the newspapers used for this study. Out of the 273 editorial items representing 100 percent, the *Nation* published the highest number of 119 stories representing 43.6 percent followed by the *Punch* with 94 stories representing 34.4 percent, while *Daily Trust* published the lowest number of 60 stories representing 22 percent.



**Figure 1: Pie Chart showing the total number of editorial items.**

**Table 2: Forms of Political Rivalry**

Forms	The Punch		The Nation		Daily trust		Total	
	F	P	F	P	F	P	F	P
Abusive Language	9	9.5%	13	11.2%	8	12.9%	30	11%
Aggressive Opposition	26	27.4%	33	28.4%	15	24.2%	74	27.1%
Calumny	32	33.7%	23	19.8%	17	27.4%	72	26.4%
Hate Speech	4	4.2%	8	6.9%	1	1.6%	13	4.8%
Vituperations	24	25.3%	39	33.6%	21	33.9%	84	30.8%
<b>Total</b>	<b>95</b>	<b>34.8%</b>	<b>116</b>	<b>42.5%</b>	<b>62</b>	<b>22.7%</b>	<b>273</b>	<b>100%</b>

**Keys: F= Frequency, P= Percentage**

Table 2 above and Figure 2 below reveal the forms of political rivalry in the 273 editorial items representing 100 percent published in the *Punch*, the *Nation* and the *Daily Trust* newspapers. Out of the 95 representing 34.8 percent editorial items published by the *Punch* newspaper, 9

representing 9.5 percent were on abusive language, 26 representing 27.4 percent were on aggressive opposition, 32 representing 33.7 percent were on calumny, 4 representing 4.2 percent were on security issues, and 24 representing 25.3 percent were on vituperations. Out of the 116 representing 42.5 percent editorial items published by the *Nation* newspaper, 13 representing 11.2 percent were on abusive language, 33 representing 28.4 percent were on aggressive opposition, 23 representing 19.8 percent were on calumny, 8 representing 6.9 percent were on hate speech, and 39 representing 33.6 percent were on vituperation. Out of the 62 representing 22.7% percent editorial items published by the *Daily Trust* newspaper, 8 representing 12.9 percent were on abusive language, 15 representing 24.2 percent were on aggressive opposition, 17 representing 27.4 percent were on calumny, 1 representing 1.6 percent were on hate speech, and 21 representing 33.9 percent were on vituperations.

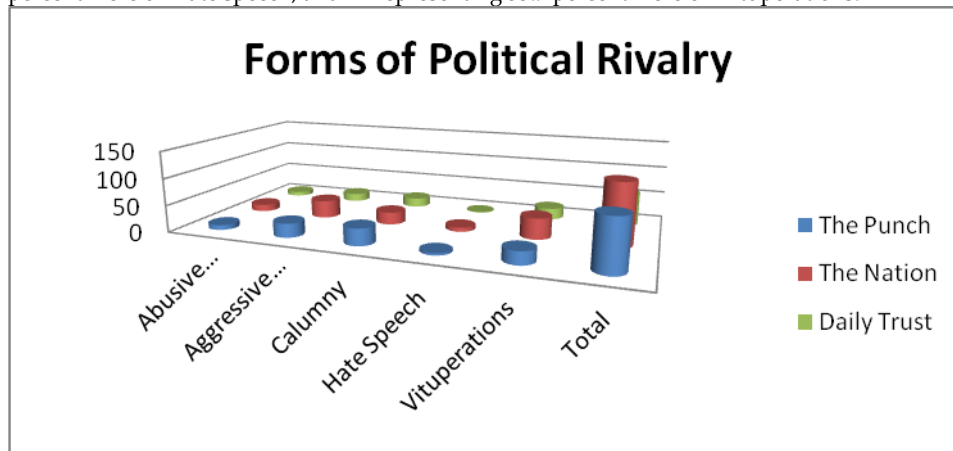


Figure 2: Bar Chart showing the forms of political rivalry in the editorial items of the selected newspapers.

#### Research Question 2:

**What did the selected newspapers signify in their reportage of political rivalry in the 2015 presidential election?**

This question sought to further substantiate the data obtained and analysed in addressing the first research question. The question also sought to bring out the manifest or implicit rivalry contents of the newspapers with a view to identifying hate speeches, abusive language, calumny and vituperations, as reflected in the newspapers in reporting political rivalry in the said election. Also, the question sought to ascertain how adherent the selected newspapers were to the tenets of a socially-responsible and conflict-sensitive press. The data that provides answers to these questions are hereby presented and analyzed qualitatively using the dialectical hermeneutics style of textual analysis. However, in order to make the data manageable and sizeable, a few of the contents of the sampled editions of the newspapers are analyzed thus:

#### Newspaper: *The Punch*

In the heat of the political campaigns, this newspaper seemingly ignored its expected role of being socially responsible because it published hate speech in the story below:

##### **"We won't support in 2015 – Northern elders"**

As President Goodluck Jonathan declares his intention to run for second term in 2015, leaders of the North, under the auspices of the Northern Elders Forum, have expressed their decision to support any presidential candidate presented by the All Progressives Congress in the 2015 election. They expressed their grievances with the ruling People's Democratic Party over the automatic ticket issued to President Goodluck Jonathan to seek a second term in the election. This, the elders said, had prevented aspirants from contesting on the platform of the party... (Sunday, November 2, 2014, page 6).

This was one of the news stories that initiated the rivalry between the APC and the PDP. The blatant rejection of President Jonathan as the presidential candidate for the PDP by a particular group in the society is capable of inciting conflict between contesting parties. The media thus stimulated the appetite of the public for the rivalry between the two parties and set agenda for public discourse as depicted below:

**"Buhari can't solve Nigeria's problems"**

One of the aggrieved governorship aspirants in the People's Democratic Party in Rivers State, Chief Dumo Lulu- Briggs, has disagreed with the claim that a former Head of State and the presidential candidate of the All Progressives Congress, Maj. Gen. Muhammadu Buhari (retd.), is the best for the country...He recalled how Buhari truncated the nation's democracy 31 years ago and expressed surprise that the former Head of State was showing interest in becoming the President of country through the ballot... He said, "Thirty- one years after, should we still have Buhari as the face of this country? The APC is not sincere with Nigerians. Buhari does not have the energy to tackle the problems of this country. Nigeria is a very complex country." Expressing dissatisfaction over the level of criticism against President Goodluck Jonathan, Lulu- Briggs appealed to Nigerians to engage in constructive criticisms targeted at nation building (Monday, January 5, 2015, Page 7).

The reportage of the 2015 presidential elections in this newspaper was mainly a case of attacks and counter attacks between the APC and the PDP. The media are expected to be conflict-sensitive in reporting issues that could engender conflict in the society. Rather than report the 2015 electoral issues, the *Punch* gave voice to the PDP governorship aspirant viciously and verbally attacking the personae of the APC presidential candidate, Buhari. Below is another news story on the PDP campaign aimed at discrediting the APC presidential candidate:

**"I won't fight graft by putting people in crates - Jonathan"**

President Goodluck Jonathan began his re- election campaign in Lagos on Thursday, saying he would not fight corruption by arresting and putting people in crates. Jonathan, in his 33- minute speech that centered more on responses to criticisms of his administration by some prominent Nigerians and the opposition, faulted a recent statement credited to the APC presidential candidate, Maj. Gen. Muhammadu Buhari, that he would send corrupt Nigerians to jail. Although he did not mention names, he was directly making reference to Buhari's role in the 1984 botched attempt to smuggle a Transport minister, the late Umaru Dikko, to Nigeria...(Friday, January 9, 2015, page 2).

Normally, antagonists (Jonathan and Buhari as the case might be here) in conflicts have certain misperceptions about each other. Coming out with a publication which sought to criticize the personae of Buhari, the *Punch* published stories like the one above taking sides with Jonathan. But instead of skillfully dispelling these misperceptions, the reportage aggravated the rivalry situation between both parties. This paper also published inflammatory outbursts from Niger Delta militants who were in support of President Goodluck Jonathan and the PDP, ignoring the potential consequences of such reportage in the conduct of a peaceful 2015 presidential elections. This is demonstrated below:

**"Niger Delta militants threaten war if Jonathan loses"**

Niger Delta militants have threatened to take up arms again if President Jonathan failed to win in the coming February 14 presidential election. The former militants spoke when they met with the Bayelsa Governor, Seriake Dickson on Friday. They said Jonathan's re-election was not negotiable (January 25, 2015, page 5).

Earlier before the above report, President Goodluck Jonathan who was seeking re-election under the platform of the PDP had said this of his major rival, General Muhammadu Buhari of the APC:



**“Buhari Can’t Remember His Phone Number - Jonathan”**

“Is it now that Buhari cannot even remember his own phone number that he can change the economy of the country?” Jonathan asked. The Peoples’ Democratic Party presidential candidate said that although he did not like to “go personal during campaigns”, “sometimes circumstances demand that certain things must be said.” Jonathan said that Buhari belonged to the medieval age, adding that he (the APC candidate) intended to run the Federal Government as a medieval king. (January 10, 2015, Front page & page 6).

This was another attack of the APC by the PDP. Even though the rivalry had already gathered momentum, the *Punch* should not have stimulated the appetite of the public for the rivalry as depicted above.

**Newspaper: *The Nation***

In the build-up to the 2015 elections, this newspaper published the following stories that tended to promote rivalry between the PDP and the APC. This is demonstrated below:

**Buhari: We’ll end impunity.**

All Progressives Congress (APC) Presidential candidate, Gen. Muhammadu Buhari yesterday promised to end the Dr. Goodluck Jonathan administration’s “impunity”. The former Nigerian leader said: “We intend to prosecute this campaign to win and we shall win. We undertake to end the impunity of the ruling People’s Democratic Party, PDP, a party that has proved clueless in every material particular. It has failed to address any of the important concerns of the people of this country (January 13, 2015, page 1).

The promise by Buhari to end the impunity of the Goodluck Jonathan’s administration is a deliberate attempt by the APC to criticize the PDP led government. The publication of this news story showcases the rivalry that exists between the two parties. Another similar news story published by this newspaper that tended to fuel the rivalry between the APC and the PDP goes thus:

**“Oshiomole: PDP will crumble Nigeria’s economy if...”**

Governor Adams Oshiomole of Edo State says the Peoples’ Democratic Party (PDP) will run the Nigerian economy aground if not voted out on February 14. He said already the party has killed the nation’s currency, the naira. Oshiomole said the PDP was clueless on how to handle the economy and have left the economy worse than they met it in 1999. He said: “When the PDP took over power in 1999, the naira was better than it is today (February 2, 2015, page 9).

This paper signified political rivalry with the publication of inciting and abusive words attributed to the two rivalry parties and their respective supporters.

Also in another edition of the newspaper, the PDP blamed the opposition, APC for the attack on President Goodluck Jonathan’s convoy by suspected thugs.

**“PDP decries attack on Jonathan”**

The People’s Democratic Party (PDP) has blamed the opposition All Progressives Congress (APC) and its presidential candidate, Gen. Muhammadu Buhari, for the attack, which occurred during the President’s rally in Katsina. OlisaMetuh, the National Publicity Secretary for the PDP in a statement said the attack was an indication that the APC was not ready to eschew violence in its desire to attain power, despite signing a peace pact a week ago in Abuja. It added that the PDP would no longer tolerate such acts of violence on any of its members (Thursday, January 22, 2015, page 7).

Also on page 60 of this same edition, the President’s campaign organization blamed Buhari and APC supporters for the reported attack by suspected thugs on the convoy of President Goodluck Jonathan during his campaign rally in Katsina.

"We consider that action despicable, barbaric, shameful and highly reprehensible. It shows very clearly the violent nature, disposition and character of those individuals that were involved and the presidential candidate that they support".

**Newspaper: Daily Trust**

In the heat of the political campaigns, this newspaper also apparently ignored its expected role of being socially responsible because it published the inflammatory outbursts of the PDP National Publicity Secretary, Olisa Metuh, who decried the attacks on the person of President Goodluck Jonathan by the opposition All Progressives Congress (APC) as unacceptable:

**"PDP to APC: Your attacks on Jonathan unacceptable"**

The PDP has been watching carefully as the rank and file of the APC, the governors, party leaders, presidential hopefuls and even sidekicks run amok, competing in a heavily subjective castigation of President Goodluck Jonathan with incendiary utterances, signposting its plans for the dastardly when it loses in next year's general elections... we had thought that the silver hair of its top leaders would caution the thoughtless delinquency of its youngsters. Unfortunately, the recklessness of the old is in competition with the imprudence of the young. What a shame the APC has turned! (November 26, 2014, page 20).

Similar to these accusatory outbursts were the remarks made by the All Progressives Congress (APC) presidential aspirant, General Muhammadu Buhari against the People's Democratic Party (PDP). According to him,

**"PDP will kill Nigeria if re-elected - Buhari"**

If Nigerians do not remove the PDP from government, it will kill Nigeria. I hope we will not make the mistake of voting for PDP next year. I want you to know that 30 years ago during the civil war when Gen Gowon was Head of State and Chief Awolowo was Minister of Finance, Nigeria did not experience the colossal destruction of innocent lives and property like we are experiencing now with the coming of terrorism most of whom we understand are from Chad... I am therefore, appealing to Nigerians that if we allow the PDP to continue, I have faith that we will kill ourselves because most of our people do not have food today, not to talk of tomorrow (December 2, 2014, page 4).

It is noteworthy that both the APC and PDP rather than focus on issues during the campaign periods, engaged in a war of words targeted to discredit each other. The press (Daily Trust) served as the major instrument for achieving this as it is evident in their publications which tended to fuel the rivalry between the two parties. In a column article titled "*Abu Najakku*", a comparison of Buhari and Jonathan was also made, which can be said was targeted at discrediting Jonathan. It goes thus:

Buhari (rtd) is tremendously popular in northern Nigeria and progressively so in the South West. He is the massive difference between the People's Democratic Party (PDP) and the All Progressives Congress (APC). Buhari is humble and this humility has been retained over time. Buhari's strong character is preferable to that of our flip-flopping President. Buhari's honesty and sincerity of purpose are astonishing. His fear of God is not tailored for television cameras and is beyond theatrics. His love for the country is demonstrable (December 2, 2014, page 3).

The opinion of this writer clearly shows the outright support for Buhari as the rightful Presidential candidate. This is evident in the spiteful criticisms leveled against Goodluck Jonathan as the "weakest presidential candidate in 16 years". Rather than propagate these vituperations, the article should have had reconciliatory undertones rather rivalry stimulating sensations between the two parties. Also in another edition of the newspaper was a rivalry attack by the PDP on the APC.

**Presidency to APC: You've nothing to offer Nigerians.**

In the 11 paragraph news story, the Special Senior Assistant to President Goodluck Jonathan on Public Affairs in a released statement to the newspaper dispelled the

accusation made by the APC that the Jonathan- led administration had planned to use the security agencies to harass and intimidate the opposition ahead of this year's election. Okupe described the accusation as unfounded and baseless, challenging the leadership of the opposition party to prove the accusations to Nigerians. He said the accusation showed clearly that the APC remained clueless with nothing to offer as the alternative that the party continues to preach" (Thursday, January 1, 2015).

Similarly in another edition of the paper is a news story report on allegations made by the APC against the PDP:

**"APC senators raise alarm over moves to oust Jega"**

All Progressives Congress (APC) senators yesterday raised an alarm that the Presidency plans to sack the Chairman of the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) Professor Attahiru Jega... The APC alleged that credible sources in the government circle have informed them that the Office of the Head of the Civil Service of the Federation has been directed to write Jega next week, directing him to proceed on three months retirement leave (January 27, 2015, page 9).

### **Discussion of Findings**

Research Question 1 attempted to determine the extent to which selected newspapers carried stories on political rivalry in respect of the 2015 presidential elections. The result indicates that the three selected newspapers published 273 news genres on political rivalry; the *Punch* published 34.4%, the *Nation* published 43.6% and the *Daily Trust* published 22 percent.

Research Question 2 sought to investigate what exactly the newspapers signified in reporting the political rivalry that marked the 2015 presidential election. From the findings, it was discovered that the newspapers signified to a very large extent political rivalry between the All Progressive Congress (APC) and the People's Democratic Party (PDP) in their reportage of the 2015 presidential election. In the heat of the campaign, political discourses in the selected newspapers were laden with hate speeches and demonization of rival candidates. The newspapers published apparent vituperative vitriolic contents that gave an earlier indication to the direction to which the election was likely to be concluded. The political environment was heated up while the public was surreptitiously educated on what to do if their wish to have the government they desired was frustrated. Before, during and after the election, several issues were thrown up in the newspaper reportage which generated negative exchanges between the two candidates. The jostle and quest for political power and ascendancy to the presidential seat caused pervasive anxiety among politicians on the side of the ruling party, the PDP and the stiffest opposition, the APC. This found expression in the contents of the *Daily Trust* and *Nation* newspapers sympathizing with the APC's Buhari. The *Nation*, owned by an APC party leader and chieftain, seemed to have deployed its contents to the support of the APC. All these were evident in the reported exchanges and altercations of the two candidates.

### **Conclusion**

Based on the findings of this study, the selected Nigerian newspapers gave high significance to political rivalry in their reportage of the 2015 presidential election, considering the extent of coverage, prominence and the depth of news genres on political rivalry in the editions of Nigerian newspapers; the *Punch*, the *Nation* and the *Daily Trust* analyzed. It was discovered that the selected newspapers deployed their contents to issues that tended to inflame rivalry between the two contesting parties.. The inflammatory stories showcased aggressive opposition, use of abusive languages, outright vituperation and campaigns of calumny. These contents could not have helped in subjugating the rivalry between the APC and the PDP, but rather promoted it to conflicting scenarios. Although, this finding reinforces the sacrosanct nature of 'conflict' and 'rivalry' as news determinants, but leaves much to be desired in respect of the role the media are expected to play in reporting conflictual issues in politics. Based on the findings of this study, the Nigerian press must embrace the principles of conflict-sensitive journalism in reporting political issues so as to help stabilize the nation's democratic governance.

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