



MEDIA PRIMING OF THE 2015 NIGERIAN PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION IN SELECTED NEWSPAPERS

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INTRODUCTION

The mass media is a veritable institution which influences the perceptions that the public have of other segments of society. Issues such as economy, religion, entertainment education, politics, among other are most time shaped by their representation in the media. Specifically, politicians need the media as a campaign platform to interact with people in the society to present their manifestoes and gain the support of the electorates. According to Center for Democracy and Governance Bureau for Global Programs, Field Support, and Research U.S. Agency for International Development Washington, D.C.:

Access to information is essential to the health of democracy for at least two reasons. First, it ensures that citizens make responsible, informed choices rather than acting out of ignorance or misinformation. Second, information serves a "checking function" by ensuring that elected representatives uphold their oaths of office and carry out the wishes of those who elected them. In some societies, an antagonistic relationship between media and government represents a vital and healthy element of fully functioning democracies.

The media is the primary means through which public opinion is shaped and at times manipulated". (ACE Newsletter cited in <https://aceproject.org/ace-en/topics/me>). The media can form, reverse or modify the public opinion of a people in various ways depending on the goals and objectives of the media. Therefore, candidates that can afford to pay for more airtime, space and advertisement in any media have more influence on people's opinion can more likely tilt votes. The ACE Newsletter on Media and Election posits that:

The media is very efficient when it comes to altering the perception of voters, information, attitudes as well as behavior. It is evident that the media could have an influence on the election campaigns and the evaluations that people would have of political candidates. The media would act as a spotlight on the various issues the public would be primed to pay attention to during elections. That is, the media would determine the key issues electorates are to focus on during elections and the criteria that can be used to judge politicians.

In political contestations the media engage various techniques such as prominence, frequency of reportage, slant, agenda setting, framing and priming to direct the attention of the audience towards

certain issues .Media sets public and political agenda by bringing issues to the attention of the audience and of policy makers (McCombs, 2004). By setting the agenda and priming an election campaign, the media also determine the criteria by which political parties and their candidates will be evaluated (Iyengar, 1991).

Priming refers to any systematic change in the weights attached to prospective voters' attitudes and perceptions in the formulation of vote intentions throughout the campaign (Bartels, 1992). In relation to usage in the mass media, priming is the process in which the media attend to some issues and not others and thereby alter the standards by which people evaluate election candidates (Severin and Tankard, 2001). The news media, although not particularly adept at telling viewers what to think, are persuasive in guiding viewers on what to think about. Also, by virtue of steering attention to certain issues, the news media are able to determine in part the standards by which people make evaluations about politics and politicians (Hill and Holbrook, 2005). Priming and agenda-setting are driven by an "accessibility bias" (Iyengar 1991; Iyengar and Kinder 1987; Kinder and Sanders 1996; Zaller 1992) cited in (Hill and Holbrook, 2005). Apparently, some issues are more easily retrieved from memory based on the characteristics of that information. An important determinant of this accessibility is the recency with which that information has been encoded or retrieved from memory (Hill and Holbrook, 2005). This bias is based on the assumption that individuals are only able to retrieve a small subset of relevant information from memory when called upon to form an impression of something or someone (Iyengar 1991; Zaller 1992). In Nigeria, elections such as at the national level are usually volatile such that the public is usually concerned about electoral violence, media coverage such as priming of elections.

Statement of the problem

Political activities in Nigeria, especially national elections are usually contested not only in the ballot box but prior to the voting proper in the mass media space. In the quest to influence the electorates, political parties strive to shape the rhetorics used by press to represent their candidates for elections. As such in presidential elections, billions of naira is voted by the two most prominent political parties for media placements in form of jingles, paid interviews and news reports. This is geared to influencing the voting decisions of electorates.

For instance, in the 2015 Presidential election in Nigeria, newspapers in prior to the election used techniques such as frequency, slant, prominence among other to bring issues to the attention of the would-be-electors. This study was borne out of the proposition that the more prominent and issue is in the media, the greater its reoccurrence and accessibility in a person's memory. Also, the mass media have the ability to convert news agenda into public agenda through attaching salience of some news events (Wahl-Jorgensen and Hanitzsch, 2009).

This study therefore interrogates news media priming of the 2015 Presidential Elections in Nigeria to provide empirical data on the various priming techniques or strategies that the selected newspapers used in the coverage of the polls.

Research Questions

1. What were the issues the selected Nigerian newspapers primed in the 2015 Presidential Elections?
2. What were the sources of the primed issues in the selected newspapers?
3. How were the political parties portrayed in the priming of the 2015 Presidential election by the selected newspapers?
4. What editorial formats was used in the priming of the 2015 presidential election?

LITERATURE REVIEW

News Media Role in Political Coverage

Newspaper along with other print media are particularly suited to the communication of what is been described as linear and sequential information. The media plays one of the most important functions of the

media is its information carrying functions (Omoera, 2010). The media has lived up to expectation in spreading useful information to the masses. This accounts for the tones of news stories, editorials, interviews and other information that are up for consumption by the people.

The media helps Nigerians to keep abreast of the developments in the political space of the country. It is described as a watchdog in recognition of its watchful and critical role against the bad practices of the government and private individuals, (Omoera, 2010). Since we live in a globalized world where information and communication technologies have further aggravated the influence of the traditional media, politicians strive to determine the content that is featured on radio, television, Magazine, newspapers and on the social media. The media in their agenda setting role help electorates to have an insight into the personalities of the political office seekers and their manifestoes or their plans (Omoera, 2010).

McCombs and Donald observe that in choosing and displaying news, editors, newsroom staff, and broadcasters play an important part in shaping political reality. They maintain that the mass media may as well determine the most important issue that is, the media may set the agenda of the campaigns.

Mass Media and Nigerian Electoral Process

The history of elections in Nigeria reflects the various roles of the media in the political process within the framework of our national political goal (Aghamelu, 2014). From the first republic to the ongoing fourth republic in Nigeria political parties strive to own media outfits through ensuring they win elections and take control of state owned media outfits, which they convert into the mouthpiece of their political parties. In addition, political parties ensure that wealthy members of their parties set up print or broadcast media outfits to create more platforms to reach the public with their political agenda.

Therefore against the backdrop of the politicization of the media landscape in Nigeria, it is germane that adequate research be carried out to understand the interplay between the media and the political process such as elections. This is as a result of the ugly incidences of various forms of electoral malpractices which have repeatedly threatened the possibility of credible elections and national integration in Nigeria (Aghamelu, 2014). It has, therefore, become very important to assess the roles of the mass media in the electoral history of Nigeria. Iredia (2007), explains that:

The people must be assisted to premise their choices of rationality and vote wisely during elections. They must have all information that is needed to elect the right candidates who can ensure good governance. Where such public awareness is lacking, those of us in the media must accept a share of the blame of failed elections in Nigeria.

Dukor (1999) bases his assessment of the role of the media in politics on the fundamental right to receive and impart information. The desire to start the right to know and impart information was influenced by the Natural law doctrines, the articles of French revolution, the precepts of the American declaration of independence, The United Nations Declaration of peoples' and Human Rights, African Charter on Human and Peoples Right. He also opines that there has been a democratic flowering of the independent press which has generally accompanied moves towards democracy and respect of human rights. This is against the backdrop that the media is one of the institutions that sustain democracy. One of the main constitutional roles of the media in a democracy is to monitor governance while remaining consistent, preserving, and objective stance in holding those involved in the democratic process accountable to the people. The consequence of this is that the development of the entire society is undermined concerning the right to know and impart information.

Agba (2007) opines that the press should strive to provide objective content on which the electorates can make informed decisions prior to the election and on the voting day. According to Nwaozuzu (1997), electioneering campaign reportage should seek out relevant truths for the people who cannot witness or comprehend the events that affect them. According to him, political news should be reported with further

analysis of electoral issues. This implies that the media must interpret campaigns in the light of the electoral needs of the people, that is, implications and actions to people. This argument is based on the fact that without a free press, the reporter becomes a public servant, a stooge of the powerful, and a robot who acts out the scripts of politicians. Under this scenario, the media fails to become worthy representatives of the people (Agba, 2007).

Political Priming as a technique of news reportage

Priming is a cognitive psychological situation, in which a prior stimulus modifies the propriety and ease of recognition or processing of a later stimulus (Nowak, 2012). Priming is the communication criteria and standards used by recipients to evaluate political reality (Nowak, 2012). Priming, or, the Priming Effect, occurs when an individual's exposure to a certain stimulus influences his or her response to a subsequent stimulus, without any awareness of the connection. These stimuli are often related to words or images that people see during their day-to-day lives (<https://thedeisionlab.com/biases/priming/>).

Priming, therefore, means activating information stored in long-term memory, which takes place after being exposed to such information. Iyengar and Kinder (1987) claim that while judging complicated political objects, for example, candidates for president, voters do not equally take into account everything they know about them, but use the most accessible elements (information, emotions). If the media primes news about the economy, citizens will evaluate the candidates by how well he and his government have managed to steady and grow the economy. Priming thus forms priorities, which work on the minds of voters, when they make their way to the ballots. The voters are to a very great extent, shaped by last-minute news as it is the first thing they think about when about to cast their votes (Nowak, 2012). Priming occurs when news content suggests to news audiences that they ought to use specific issues as benchmarks for evaluating the performance of leaders and governments (Scheufele and Tewksbury, 2007). The concept of priming is at the same time a research tool with possibilities of directly following how a media message influences political attitudes and actions of citizens and politicians.

Priming explains the significance of attitudes citizens use to evaluate political subjects. It defines criteria for the political judgment of leaders and events. Because priming can alter the criteria citizens use to evaluate political issues, leaders, and events, priming effects can have important consequences for the outcomes of elections, the emergence of public support for policy initiatives, and the approval ratings of political leaders (Althaus and Kim, 2006).

Two basic factors have crucial meaning for the occurrence of priming: the accessibility effect – the mentioned access to information, and the applicability affect – the adherence of information and needs accessible in memory to evaluate a given political issue or candidate (Nowak 2012). Also, Joanne and Krosnick (2000) note that priming occurs when media attention to an issue causes people to place special weight on it when constructing evaluations of political leaders, e.g. presidential job performance. Lenz (2004) cited in Nowak (2012) claims that priming is based on voters overweighting some issues while underweighting others. In the context of politics, priming is based on the accessibility of information to evaluate objects appearing in public space (political issues and candidates) taking place due to certain presentations of these objects in the media. The effect of priming may be a change of political attitude and decision making e.g. from negative to positive or vice versa.

Research on political priming has explored the impact of media coverage on the judgments of politicians and found that media can prime certain issues and thereby influence the criteria that people use to evaluate politicians (Iyengar & Kinder, 1987). The political priming effect has been found in evaluations of presidential performance (Krosnick & Kinder, 1990) and electoral voting intentions (Sheafer & Weimann, 2005). Price and Tewksbury (1997) explained that media coverage can activate certain constructs, and if the constructs are judged to apply to the current situation – applicability – they influence people's political judgments.

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework is the explanation of a particular phenomenon, using relevant theories. Such theories are applied in a study based on relevance. Research work is not complete without a theory or theories to back it up because; a research work becomes valid only when it has a backing of relevant theory or theories. Based on this, in this study, the Agenda Setting Theory, Priming Theory, and Framing Theory were found useful as they explain some of the variables in the study.

Price and Tewksbury (1997:184) summaries the distinction between the three theories as follows:

Agenda setting looks at story selection as a determinant of public perceptions of issue importance and, indirectly through priming, evaluations of political leaders. Framing focuses not on which topics or issues are selected for coverage by the news media, but instead on the particular ways those issues are presented.

The primary difference on the psychological level between agenda-setting and priming, on the one hand, and framing, on the other hand, is therefore the difference between whether we think about an issue and how we think about it.

Priming Theory

The concept of the "priming effect" was first identified in 1982, Iyengar, Peters, and Kinder and as a theory founded on the assumption that people do not have elaborate knowledge about political matters and do not take into account all of what they know when making political decisions. Krosnick and Kinder (1990) cited in Amadeo (2007), proposed the theory of priming in an attempt to provide a wide and psychologically possible explanation on how citizens formulate and review their points of view regarding an issue. They mostly take political decisions, such as voting on information that readily comes to mind. Through drawing attention to some aspects of politics at the expense of others, the media might help to set the terms by which political judgments are reached, including evaluations of political figures.

Priming is anchored on the principle of nearness, in which people such as the electorate take voting decisions based on information that is readily available to them towards the election period. In this is the realisation of this that politicians strive to control the media space through ownership or commercial news placements in order to control the content that the public is exposed to with regards to elections. The Priming theory also states that television or print media coverage of the news not only develops individuals' knowledge of on specific issues but also affects the criteria applied to assess political leaders (Willmar, 1997 cited in Amado, 2007).

Priming and the theoretically close concept of agenda-setting. Some researchers like Sheaffer and Wiemann (2005), believe that priming is part of agenda-setting (the second level of agenda-setting), others like Miller and Krosnick (2000) note that priming does not fit within this theory and is a completely distinct concept, merely explaining the consequences of agenda-setting. As defined in the political communication literature, Priming refers to "changes in the standards that people use to make political evaluations" (Iyengar & Kinder, 1987:63) cited in (Scheufele & Tewksbury, 2007) Priming occurs when news content suggests to news audiences that they ought to use specific issues as benchmarks for evaluating the performance of leaders and governments.

Research Methodology

The research design used for this study was content analysis. Content analysis seeks to examine the content of media products to detect the frequency of selected variables, the pattern of occurrence within and across the media product. Wimmer and Dominick (2003), note that content analysis method studies and analyzes communication in a systematic, objective, and quantitative manner to measure variables. Three newspapers: *The Punch*, *Vanguard*, and *The Nation* newspapers were selected out of the population of Nigerian newspapers. The choice of all three newspapers was based on sustained publication during the period of the study, circulation, sales, readership, as well as the national outlook they have.

The study frame comprising all editions of the selected published between January 1st, 2015, and February 28th, 2015. The time frame was chosen because it is the ideal period for a study on priming as it was two months left to the 2015 general elections. The sample size 177 editions, 59 each of the three selected newspapers was selected through purposive sampling.

The research instrument used for this study was a coding sheet which included content categories and unit of analysis. Data was collected through a systematic coding of the content of the selected editions of the newspapers under study. Also, Data were analyzed using simple frequency counts and percentages. The results of the data analysis were presented in tabular forms with an adequate presentation of relevant explanations of the information in the tables.

Data analysis and discussion of findings

Research question 1: What were the issues the selected Nigerian newspapers primed in the 2015 Nigerian Presidential Elections?

Table 1: Issues primed by the selected Nigerian newspapers in the 2015 Nigerian Presidential Elections.

S/N	Issues primed	Vanguard	Nation	Punch
1	Politics	96 32.3%	109 36.7%	92 31.0%
2	Security/terrorism	6 17.1%	12 34.3%	17 48.6%
3	Corruption/anti-corruption	5 31.3%	3 18.8%	8 50.0%
4	Religion	4 26.7%	4 26.7%	7 46.7%
5	Economics	6 33.3%	6 33.3%	6 33.3%
6	Infrastructure/development	11 28.2%	13 33.3%	15 38.5%
7	Others	8 32.0%	5 20.0%	12 48.0%

Table 1, shows that most of the stories reported by the selected newspapers were on politics. However, The Nation newspaper reported more stories on politics with 109 stories (36.7%), followed by Vanguard with 96 stories (32.3%) and lastly by the Punch with 92 stories (31.0%).

Findings show that *The Nation* newspaper covered more political issues than *The Punch* and *Vanguard* newspapers. The findings imply that the selected newspapers focused mainly on political issues with a lesser focus on issues such as insecurity, restructuring, economy, agriculture, infrastructural development should have however received adequate coverage.

Table 2: Placement of Stories in the three Newspapers

S/N	Position in Newspaper	Vanguard	Nation	Punch
1	Front page	20 39.2%	16 31.4%	15 29.6%
2	Back page	— %	2 40.0%	3 60.0%
3	Inside page	330 38.1%	273 31.5%	264 30.4%
4	Editorial page	1 4.5%	21 95.5%	—
5	Opinion page	20 48.8%	11 26.8%	10 24.4%
6	Center page	10 35.7%	14 50.0%	4 14.3%

7	Others	10 66.7%	5 33.3%	– %
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Table.2 showed that the Vanguard newspaper gave more prominence to the coverage of the election as it had more stories on the front page than The Punch and The Nation. Also, most of the stories were tucked into the inside pages with Vanguard rating highest with 330(38.1%) stories, followed by Nation with 273(31.5%) stories, and lastly by Punch with 264(30.4%) stories. Therefore, these researchers conclude that the newspapers preferred to place most the content on the 2015 polls in the inside pages

Research question 2: What were the sources of the primed issues in the selected newspapers?

Table 3 Sources of the Primed Issues on the 2015 Presidential election in the selected newspapers.

S/N	Content Sources	Vanguard	Nation	Punch
1	Reporters /correspondent	183 34.3%	174 32.6%	176 33.0%
2	Political party's /party loyalty	5 26.3%	10 52.6%	4 21.1%
3	Foreign news agencies	– %	4 80.0%	1 20.0%
4	Local news agencies	– %	2 40.0%	3 60.0%
5	Political analyst	25 31.6%	36 45.6%	18 22.8%
6	Others/unidentified	19 43.2%	19 43.2%	6 13.6%

Findings in Table 3 show that the dominant content source used in the priming of the 2015 Presidential election was the reporters/correspondents of the media outfits. The next dominant content source used by the newspapers was Political Analysts' source in which case. Consequently, the issues on the polls that the public was exposed to were mainly the choice of the editors and some public commentators.

Table 4: Headline Types used in the priming of the 2015 Presidential election.

S/N	Headline type	Vanguard	Nation	Punch
1	Sensational	24 22.6%	44 41.5%	38 35.8%
2	Labeling	4 33.3%	6 50.0%	2 16.7%
3	Coherence	146 32.2%	165 36.3%	143 31.5%
4	Disparity	– %	22 75.9%	7 24.1%
5	Others	1 50.0%	– %	1 50.0%

Table 4 shows that a substantial number of stories used Coherence as the headline type. The Nation was rated highest with 165(36.3%), followed by Vanguard with 146(32.2%) and lastly by Punch with 143(31.5%). Up next was Sensational where the Nation was rated highest with 44(41.5%), followed by Punch 38(35.8%) and lastly by Vanguard with 24(22.6%). In Labeling, it is shown that the Nation was rated highest with 6(50.0%), followed by Vanguard with 4(33.3%) and lastly by Punch with 2(16.7%). In Disparity, it is shown that the Nation was rated highest with 22(75.9%), followed by Punch with 7(24.1%) and lastly by Vanguard with (0%).The data shows that the Coherence Headline type was used more by the selected newspapers, with minimal usage of sensationalism, disparity, and labeling.

The implication of the finding of preference for Coherence headlines is that the selected newspapers primed the 2015 presidential election as hard news that should be devoid of sensationalism or entertainment.

Research question Three

How were the two dominant Political Parties primed in the 2015 Nigerian Presidential Election?

Table 5 Priming of the Political Parties in the selected newspapers.

S/N	Direction/slant of the story	Vanguard	Nation	Punch
1	Pro-Bihari (APC)	64 20.6%	166 53.4%	81 26.0%
2	Pro-Jonathan (PDP)	227 57.5%	44 11.1%	124 31.4%
3	Anti-Buhari	71 53.0%	2 1.5%	61 45.5%
4	Anti-Jonathan	65 22.3%	132 45.4%	94 32.3%
5	Neutral	15 21.7%	14 20.3%	40 58.0%

Table 5 shows that The Nation published 166 positive articles (53.4%) on APC, followed by The Punch with 81 articles (26.0%), and lastly by Vanguard with 64(20.6%) articles. In favour of PDP, Vanguard was rated highest with 227articles (57.5%), followed by Punch with 124 articles (31.4%) and the Nation with 44 articles (11.1%). Against APC, Vanguard was highest with 71 negative articles (53.0%), followed by Punch with 61 negative articles (45.5%) and lastly by Nation with 2 negative articles (1.5%). In publishing against PDP, it is shown that the Nation was rated highest with 132 negative articles (45.4%), followed by Punch with 94 negative articles (32.3%) and lastly by Vanguard with 65 negative articles (22.3%). In publishing neutral articles, The Punch had 40 articles (58.0%), followed by Vanguard with 15 articles (21.7%) and lastly by the Nation with 14 articles (20.3%).

Having analyzed the data collected through the three selected newspapers, findings show that The Nation newspaper published more positive stories about Buhari than it did about Jonathan; Vanguard published more positive stories about Jonathan than it did about Buhari while The Punch had an almost neutral reportage of the two candidates. This backs up the reason for the researcher's choice of newspapers from the South, North, and South-West as the media outlets based in these regions favoured their candidates.

Table 6: Story size/length of the articles in the selected newspapers

S/N	Story size/length	Vanguard	Nation	Punch
1	Full page	175 40.7%	106 24.7%	149 34.7%
2	Half page	26 28.0%	27 29.0%	40 43.0%
3	Quarter page	101 31.5%	104 32.4%	116 36.1%
4	A tiny mention	81 35.5%	101 44.7%	44 19.5%
5	Others	— %	— %	2 100.0%

Based on the statistical analysis of data gathered from the three newspapers, findings reveal that news and other formats of reporting on the election was given some appreciable amount of space in the selected newspapers. It shows also that the Vanguard gave more prominence to the coverage of the election as it had more of its news stories and articles on the full page.

Research Question 4: What editorial formats were used in the priming of the 2015 Nigerian Presidential election?

This research question aimed to enquire into the editorial formats that were mostly used to disseminate information before the 2015 Presidential election.

Table 7: Formats of Reporting used in the priming of the 2015 Presidential election.

S/N	Editorial formats	Vanguard	Nation	Punch
1	News report	183 34.3%	176 33.0%	174 32.6%
2	Features/commentaries	1 6.3%	9 56.3%	6 37.5%
3	Editorials	– %	5 83.3%	1 16.7%
4	Interviews	11 44.0%	7 28.0%	7 28.0%
5	Letters to the editors	1 6.3%	15 93.8%	– %
6	Advertorials/adverts	159 41.5%	79 20.6%	145 37.9%
7	Opinion	28 56.0%	8 16.0%	14 28.0%
8	Cartoons	– %	7 50.0%	7 50.0%
9	Photographs	29 46.0%	25 39.7%	9 14.3%
10	Others	1 25.0%	3 75.0%	– %

Table 7 shows clearly that all the selected newspapers preferred news reports to other editorial formats in the coverage of the polls in the 2015 presidential election in Nigeria. From a media research perspective, news reports do not create ample leverage for setting agenda, education, or mobilization of electorates for the voting process.

Table 8: Media functions used in the priming of stories on the 2015 Presidential election.

S/N	Media function	Vanguard	Nation	Punch
1	Education	5 71.4%	1 14.3%	1 14.3%
2	Information	199 34.9%	190 33.3%	181 31.8%
3	Surveillance	– %	2 100.0%	– %
4	Entertainment	2 33.3%	4 66.7%	– %
5	Agenda setting	15 32.6%	13 28.3%	18 39.1%
6	Mobilization	146 42.6%	95 27.7%	102 29.7%
7	Others	– %	– %	10 100.0%

Findings in Table 8, clearly revealed that the selected newspapers used more of the information function in the priming of the 2019 presidential election. This correlates with the data presented in table 4 that showed

that news report was preferred to other editorial formats. This is so because news content is hinged on performing the information function in media reportage of issues.

Stories published in all three newspapers were made to perform the function of information, agenda-setting, and mobilization.

Discussion of findings

The data presented in Table 1 and Table 2 show that the media were greatly influential in telling the readers what to think about and also in giving readers the criteria with which to evaluate the candidates. This is evident in the issues primed and in the placement of stories on the pages of the selected newspapers (*The Punch*, *Vanguard*, and *The Nation*) on the priming of the 2015 Nigerian Presidential election. The fact that all three newspapers primed politics more than all other issues, thereby, putting politics in the limelight. And also, the fact that Vanguard newspaper carries more news stories on its front page than The Punch and The Nation newspaper suggested that, during the study period, Vanguard newspaper, set agenda for the readers, telling them to pay attention to the important stories on its front page. This finding agrees with the findings of McCombs and Shaw (1972) who found during a study conducted on the media's role in the 1968 U.S. Presidential campaign in Chapel Hill, North Carolina between Richard Nixon and Hubert Humphrey that the media were highly influential in telling readers and viewers what to think about.

The findings presented in Table 3 and Table 4 show that the most dominant content source used in the priming of the 2015 Nigerian Presidential election was the reporters/correspondents of the media outfits, with Vanguard in the lead, closely followed by The Punch and lastly The Nation. It also shows that The Nation newspaper made use of more Coherence headline type in most of its coverage and reportage of stories. It was closely followed by Vanguard and then, The Punch newspapers.

The findings in Table 5 showed that two of the newspapers, Vanguard and The Nation, were biased in their priming of the presidential candidates; while The Punch was fairly neutral in its reportage of the candidates. Table 6 showed that the Vanguard newspaper devoted more space to the coverage of the 2015 Nigerian Presidential election. This finding conforms to McCombs and Shaw (1972) study which revealed that the media agenda influences public agenda not by saying 'this issue is important' in an overt way but by giving core space and time to that issue.

The data in Table 7 showed that Vanguard newspaper tailored the coverage of its stories on the 2015 Nigerian Presidential election on news reports than The Nation and The Punch newspapers. It also had more publications on adverts/advertorials than The Nation and The Punch newspapers. This complies with the findings of Griffin (2003), which revealed that media outlets are constantly searching for materials they regard as newsworthy, when they find it, they do more than tell their audiences what to think about.

Table 8 presented that stories in the newspapers performed more of information, agenda-setting, and mobilization function of media; and less of education, surveillance, and entertainment function.

CONCLUSION

The media influence public opinion by emphasizing certain issues over others. The amount of media attention or the media salience, devoted to certain issues influences the degree of public concern for these issues (McCombs & Shaw, 1972). By making some issues more salient in peoples' minds, mass media can also shape the considerations that people take into account when making judgments about political candidates or issues.

Mobilization.

From the research questions investigated for this study and answers given as a result of data collected, coded, and analyzed, the researcher concludes that:

1. Of all the issues listed, the selected newspapers (*The Punch*, *Vanguard*, and *The Nation*), primed Politics more. When compared, *The Nation* newspaper had more stories on politics than *Vanguard* and *The Punch* newspapers. They gave more salience and prominence to political issues. The implication of this is that the newspapers did not go in-depth to the other issues in the country, they

picked one and focused on it; thereby, giving the readers streamlined criteria to base their evaluations of the candidates on.

2. In terms of prominence, *Vanguard* gave more prominence to the coverage of the election as it had more stories on the front page than *The Punch* and *The Nation*. Also, most of the stories reported on the 2015 Presidential Election in the selected newspapers were tucked into the inside pages of the editions purposefully picked.
3. The most dominant content source used in the priming of the 2015 Nigerian Presidential election was the reporters/correspondents of the media outfits, with *Vanguard* in the lead, closely followed by *The Punch* and lastly *The Nation*. The next dominant prime source was political analysts. Foreign and Local news agencies were barely used as prime sources.
4. *The Nation* newspaper made use of more Coherence headline type in most of its coverage and reportage of stories. It was closely followed by *Vanguard* and then, *The Punch* newspapers.
5. *The Nation* newspaper targeted the coverage of its stories on the 2015 Nigerian Presidential election towards the positive direction (in favour of Buhari) than *Vanguard* and *The Punch* newspapers. *Vanguard* newspaper targeted the coverage of its stories on the 2015 Nigerian Presidential election towards the positive direction (in favour of Jonathan) than *The Nation* and *The Punch*. *The Punch* was mainly neutral in the portrayal of the two candidates/parties.
6. *Vanguard* newspaper devoted more space to the coverage of the 2015 Nigerian Presidential election. *The Punch* came in second and *The Nation* third.
7. *Vanguard* newspaper tailored the coverage of its stories on the 2015 Nigerian Presidential election on news reports than *The Nation* and *The Punch* newspapers. It also had more publications on adverts/advertorials than *The Nation* and *The Punch* newspapers. Suffice it to say that *The Nation* had at least a publication in all the editorial formats.
8. Stories published in the selected newspapers were made to perform the information, mobilization, and agenda-setting functions. However, when compared, *Vanguard* published more stories used for information and mobilization functions. While *The Punch* published more stories used for agenda-setting functions.
9. The findings of this study revealed that the media is very much responsible for the decisions of citizens in times of election, as citizens depend solely on the media for information about pertinent issues on the election and the candidates themselves.

Recommendations

The media, in the priming of elections, should ensure they prime all issues that are of importance to citizens and the society at large. They should not prime just one issue at the expense of other issues, making one look more important than the other. The press should make information readily accessible to citizens. This ensures that citizens make responsible, informed choices rather than acting out of ignorance or misinformation. Also, newspapers, regardless of the ownership influence or regional/zone influence, should report the news objectively and impartially. That is, they should avoid being biased in their reports on all candidates either from their zone or not. This enhances the newspapers' credibility in dealing with societal issues.

All stories on election published in newspapers should perform other media functions like education, surveillance, and entertainment. Media practitioners and editors should not focus their reports on elections solely on mobilization, agenda-setting, and information.

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