

An Examination of News Placement (Prominence) of President Muhammadu Buhari Administration's War against Corruption by Nigerian Newspapers

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ABSTRACT

The paper examined newspaper placement of news on the war against corruption embarked upon by the President Muhammadu Buhari's administration which was declared as soon as it was inaugurated May 29, 2015. The major objective was to determine the prominence newspapers in the country accorded the anti graft crusade. Adopting the quantitative content analysis, a combination of both the probability and non probability methods were used to choose four (4) newspapers: Daily-Trust, The-Nation, This-Day and Leadership from the total population of national dailies in the country. The study was based on a sample size of forty eight (48) editions from the selected newspapers (Three {3} editions per month from each of the newspapers across four {4} months i.e. December 2015-March 2016). The agenda setting theory which posits that mass media may not tell people what to think but it presents to them what to think about, served as the sub structure upon which the entire supper-structure of the study rests. From the data gathered and analyzed, the study found that an insignificant 10.1% of the corruption related news, reported by the studied newspapers during the period under review was placed on the front page, while 88.2% of the news was found on the inside pages, with 6.1% devoted to the back page. The paper concluded that Nigerian newspapers paid lip service to the war against corruption crusade embarked upon by the President Buhari's administration, by burying a larger chunk of their news on corruption on the inside pages of their newspapers, where little or no attention is paid by readers.

INTRODUCTION

In 1787, when Edmund Burke looked at the reporters' gallery and alluded to the press as the fourth estate of the realm, he did not just mean they were serving as the fourth arm of government but he conceived them as providing a strong checks and balances on the first three organs. Interestingly, section 22 of the constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria (1999, p. 35), empowers the press - radio, television,

and other agencies of the mass media to, at all times be free to uphold the fundamental objective of holding government accountable to the people. Therefore, communication experts have the sacrosanct duty of watching events (watchdog function), selecting the significant events from a multitude of events, ordering the experiences of the events, clarifying the experiences, intensifying the experiences and finally interpreting the experiences (Akpan, 2002, p.68). The press has earned the recognition of 'fourth estate'. Journalism is the voice of the voiceless and it plays the role of watchdog in our society. It is a strong bridge between and concerning authorities and the people...press makes such an environment where people get information and be prepared to take part in democracy. This implies that the central purpose of journalism is to provide citizens with accurate and reliable information they need to function in a free society (Asemah, 2013, p.4)

Mencher (1994) in Rabiu (2013, p. 4) opines that Journalism is the mirror held to life. It monitors the universe on our behalf. It captures the triumphs and tragedies of daily life, locally, nationally and internationally. The body of journalism is fact but people are its very heart. Akinfeleye (2011, p.12) explains that, the basic functions of the mass media in any society is to inform, and in recent times, set agenda for the people, monitor governance and make government accountable to the people. The press serves as an agent of change, and as the watchdog of the society is expected to play a part, in ensuring transparency and accountability in government, as well as contribute to the efforts of crime fighting institutions to curb corruption in the country.(Nwuneli,1990; Nwosu,1990).

Blummer (1998)in Umechukwu (2001, p.104) states that the mass media, while watching the environment, functions essentially as agencies of social engineering – as forces, which reaffirm those ultimate value standards and beliefs, which in turn, upholds the social and political status quo. Since the media are the eyes and ears of the citizens, their means of surveillance which tell them about political conditions, economic and social conditions, journalists need to be more objective in news reporting and imbibe a crusading posture in order to influence public opinion... This is very vital if the people must have peace of mind.

Dash (2007, p.109) avers:

There is no doubt, however, that newspapers have, in the modern world, played an important role in the exercise of freedom of expression. Whistle blowers and those who 'leak' stories of corruption in political circles often choose to inform newspapers before other media of communication, relying on the perceived willingness of newspaper editors to expose the secrets and lies of those who would rather cover them.

Newspapers have professional communicators who handle social communication. They are better enabled to analyze, define explain and project a cause in social interest. As social crusaders, newspapers speak for the down trodden and play the part of spokesmen and advocates in social processes (Ukonu, 2005, p. 4). One of the several issues that fall within the purview of newspaper reporting in the country is corruption, a duty they owe the society in the form of public service journalism, and too, to maintain government of the people, by the people and for the people.

The word "corrupt" when used as an adjective simply means "completely shattered". It was first used by Aristotle and later Cicero who added the terms bribe and abandonment of good habit. In the words of Amartya (1999, p.125) corruption is "a pervasion or change from good to bad, involving the violation of established rules for personal gain or profit." Otite (2000, p.69) conceives corruption as pervasion of integrity or state of affairs through bribery, favour or depravity. For Agboyega (1999) in Ayua (2001), "corruption is the giving or taking of bribe or illegal acquisition of wealth, using resources of public offices including the exercise of discretion."

This paper therefore aims at examining how newspapers in the country have fared in covering the war against corruption crusade by the President Muhammadu Buhari's administration, with particular emphasis on the prominence paid to such corruption news each time the papers carried same.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Corruption: A Cog in the Wheel of National Progress

Africa and the World Group (AFRICAW, 2012) observes that, corruption is perhaps the most important factor that is impeding the accelerated socio-economic transformation of developing or less developed countries (LDCs) of the world, and that it is in fact, recognized by development scholars that, the level of reduction in corruption has a very direct link to the level of economic development of nations in the world. To curb the negative effects of corruption on economic and sustainable development requires conscious efforts and attention. Abagen and Anger (2013, p. 222) posit:

Corruption is indeed the reason why Nigeria, after 50 years of political independence, is still pervaded by extreme poverty, rigged elections, economic sabotage, poor and decaying infrastructure, industrial unrest and plain public looting of the common wealth. Successive government had tried to tackle the problem of corruption, but none has made the desired impact yet.

Expressing his disdain on this anathema called corruption, Olagunju (2012) writes that, corruption is indeed the bane of any nation; its malady cut across every religious denomination and political system, and it affects young and old, men and women alike. Olagunju (2012) likens corruption to cancer that contaminates all strata of the socio-political and economic structure of any society and its malignant nature is difficult to treat. Corruption indeed impedes economic growth, generates in-equity and erodes government credibility and the efficient functioning of state institutions (Floristeanu, 2010).

Oluyitan (2015) explains that, the war against corruption was one of the reasons for the emergence of military coups in Nigeria. The State Security (Detention of Persons) Decree of 1984 and the Recovery of Public Property Special Military Tribunals Decree were promulgated to prohibit fraudulent enrichment by public servants (Kofele-Kale, 2006). At the return to elected government, President Olusegun Obasanjo established two commissions to wage war against corruption. The resolve to fight and win the war against corruption led to the promulgation of the Corrupt Practices and Other Related Offences Act (2000), which established the Independent Corrupt Practices and Other Related Offences Commission (ICPC). The commission was mandated to prohibit and prescribe punishments for corrupt practices and other related offences. As the preponderance of economic and financial crimes like advance fee fraud and money laundering showed severe negative consequences on Nigeria, including decreased foreign direct investment, a second anti-corruption commission was established (Oluyitan, 2015). The Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC) was established in 2004. The act mandated the EFCC to combat financial and economic crimes. The commission is empowered to prevent, investigate, prosecute, and penalize economic and financial crimes and is charged with the responsibility of enforcing the provisions of other laws and regulations relating to economic and financial crimes.

TYPES OF CORRUPTION

The cankerworm called corruption occurs in different ways and at different levels. Bureaucratic corruption occurs 'in the public administration' or 'the implementation end of policies.' This kind of corruption is known as 'low level' and 'street level' corruption. This is the type of corruption that citizens encounter in their daily lives, they are confronted by it in places like the hospitals, schools, local licensing offices, police stations, tax offices and various other public agencies" (Dike 2002, p.2). Bureaucrats have rules and regulations that they are supposed to follow which promotes uniformity and equity. Street-level bureaucrats perform their duties by making decisions based on individual cases brought before them. They are given

bureaucratic discretion which is the ability to decide how policies should be implemented, but if this power is abused, it can lead to corruption (Lipsky, 2010). From Ksenia (2008), we cite two other types of corruption: Political corruption when elected politicians use their position of power to influence decisions after taking bribes; Grand corruption where head of states, ministers and top officials take bribes and misuse their power for a gain.

CAUSES OF CORRUPTION

The persistence of the cankerworm known as corruption in Nigeria has been due to factors such as: obsession with materialism, compulsion for a shortcut to affluence, glorification and approbation of ill-gotten wealth by the general public (Ndiulor, 1999 in Dike, 2008). Dike (2008) asserts that, absence of ethical standards throughout the agencies of government and business organizations in Nigeria is a serious impediment. The issue of ethics in public sector and in private life encompasses a broad range, including stress on obedience to authority, on the necessity of logic in moral reasoning, and on the necessity of putting moral judgment into practice (Bowman 1991 in Dike, 2008). Dike (2008) adds that, many office holders in Nigeria whether appointed or elected do not have clear conceptions of the ethical requirements of their office; even as corrupt acts are being perpetuated, little attention, if any, is being paid to this ideal. Olusheye (2013) states that, the widespread corruption in Nigeria is traceable to the increasing wave of covetousness, greed, inordinate ambition, materialism, the get-rich-quick-syndrome of the post-independence era, nationwide poverty, inadequate social security, corrupt/extravagant political system being operated and the inefficient socio-economic structures and systems put in place by our governments to alleviate the rampant abject poverty and combat the increasing wave of corrupt practices.

The Role of Newspaper in the War against Corruption

Transparency International (TI) had noted that by investigating and reporting corruption, the media provides an important counterpoint to the abuse of entrusted power for private gain, shedding light on the wrongdoings of public office holders and corporate executives alike. The media can channel its whistle-blowing function and ability to influence policies and government action to in turn bring about the much-needed development and good governance (WSCII, 2013). It is important to note that in contemporary times, the attention to corruption has shifted from the pulpits' and philosophers' arenas to that of the media's. Anderson (2002) reports that media coverage of corruption in sectors of a nation's economy is indicative of the pervasiveness of the cancer in such sectors and can go a long way in curbing the spread.

Given that corruption is anti-development, newspapers as a medium of mass communication have an enormous responsibility of carrying out surveillance, monitoring, reporting and exposing all known corrupt tendencies for a better and healthier society. This is what Nwosu (1993, p.124) calls "agitation or crusading function of the press". According to Nwosu (1993), agitation involves a representation of an issue or stand. It is vocal or non vocal action designed to call attention, condemn and change a status quo, policy or direction. Thus agitation has political, social or sectarian stance, cultural, peer-groups or status attributes (p.124). The media and civil society groups have been identified as the two very important weapons to fight the scourge of corruption worldwide and the media itself is considered the strongest force in shaping public opinion on issues (AFRICAW, 2012; WSCI), 2013).

The main function of newspaper is to tell its readers what is happening in the world, including the country, the state, the town or city and the locality (Okunna, 1999, p. 52). Newspaper is an information carrier. People believe strongly in what they read because newspapers give the truthful comprehensive and intelligent account of the daily event in a context- which gives them meaning.(Nwabueze; Ugochukwu and Egbra, 2014, p.5) Olawode (2005, p.5) cited Transparency International (TI) which espoused thus:

A free and independent media is one of the principal vehicles for informing the public about corrupt activities. By investigating and reporting on corruption, the media provides an important counterpoint to the abuse of entrusted power for private gain, shedding light on the wrongdoings of public office holders and corporate executives alike. As such, it significantly contributes to the basis of knowledge with which citizens can hold both public and private institutions to account. However, for the media to effectively discharge these important duties as indicated above and wage a successful war against corruption, it must necessarily be armed with the tools and ingredients of the profession. Independence of the media is not only desirable but a very important factor in the fight against corruption. The Political leadership of a nation desirous of fighting corruption must ensure that legislations.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Agenda-Setting Theory

McComb and Shaw (1974), opine that the media repeated report of an issue influences the audience to also view the issue as important. The media attach certain importance to news stories through placement, size and frequency of appearance of such stories. Agenda setting posits that audiences learn these important issues from the news media, thus incorporating a similar set of weights and importance into their own personal agenda.

Shaw (1983, p.132) reaffirms this view by positing that when the media focus repeated and major attention on an event or set of related events, it can transfer that event into an issue. Umechukwu (2001, p.148) and Folarin (2002, p.75) also agree that the mass media have an impact on agenda setting in that they have the ability to choose or emphasize certain topics thereby causing the public to perceive the issues or topics as important. This implies that the mass media pre-determine what issues are considered as important at every given time in a given society. Agenda setting theory, however, does not give to the media the ultimate power to determine what the public actually thinks; but it does give them the power to determine what the public should be thinking about. The above view is a reaffirmation of Cohen's statement (1963) that the media may not be successful in telling people what to think but they may be very successful in telling them what to think about. Ijwo and Omula (2014, p.34) corroborate this view when they wrote that, apart from her traditional functions of informing, educating, and entertaining, the media at the same time give prominence to certain issues or events, with a view to bringing such issues or events to public domain.

Sandman et al (1976, p.19) see agenda setting as the editorial decision that a particular event is not news if the news media ignores it or says so. Globally, any event given major emphasis in the mass media ultimately becomes a major event. This is referred to as agenda setting, which gave birth to the Agenda Setting Theory of the press. This theory is relevant to this study because, it spells out the fact that, newspapers have it as an enormous responsibility to determine what is important to bring to the public domain, and for public discourse. Corruption news is one that should attract media framing, so as to report its consequences both on the society and the individual members.

STUDY METHODOLOGY/DESIGN

The research method adopted for this study is content analysis. Content analysis describes research using observable evidence or experience as its material, and seeking to avoid bias as far as possible. Content or quantitative analysis is a major empirical method. It works by counting the frequency of relevant elements in a

clearly defined sample of texts, and then analyzing those frequencies. (Branston and Stafford, 2006, p.27)

In the view of Sambe (2005, p.281), content analysis is the popular use of records in the study of communication behaviour. Neuendorf (2002, p. 29) explains that content analysis "is the primary message-centered methodology of conducting research." Content analysis according to Fawole, Egbookhare, Itiola, Olajide and Olayinka (2006, p. 17) has a lot to do with analyzing, evaluating and interpreting both written and visual materials.

Quantitative research design was used for the study. Quantitative research has a lot to do with measurement of some quantity, make comparative analysis with previous results and possibly make forecasting about the future. The fundamental principle of quantitative research is to develop and apply mathematical models, theories or hypothesis pertaining to phenomena (Suberu, 2015, p.23).

A combination of methods was adopted in the sampling technique. Bryman (2004) calls this approach the "multi stage." While Brannen (1992) refers to it as "multi method" Using this approach, the researcher engaged both the probability and non probability sampling methods. Adopting the probability sampling according to Forret and Calapago (2010, p.67), "we give known chance to be selected to every unit of the population. We usually want to estimate some parameters of a population by a sample" while in the case of non probability, "every member of the population do not have equal opportunity of being selected as it does not follow the guidelines of mathematical probability" (Wimmer and Dominick, 2006, p.89). Nworgu (1991, p.78) supports this thus: In purposive sampling, specific elements, which satisfy some predetermined criteria, are selected. Although the criteria to be used are usually a matter of the researcher's judgment, he exercises this judgment in relation to what he thinks will constitute a representative sample with respect to the research purpose.

In the case of the probability sampling, the simple random and the stratified sampling were employed while for the non probability sampling method, the judgmental, otherwise known as purposive sampling was engaged. The simple random techniques of 'roll-up papers' was used to draw up the four newspapers that constituted the sample size.

The names of all the daily publications were written on pieces of paper, rolled up and put in a plastic bucket, shaken thoroughly, while a blindfolded research assistant was asked to pick out four pieces of the rolled-up papers. Consequently, the newspapers picked were: Daily Trust, The Nation, This-Day and Leadership which made up the sample size. In using the stratified sampling method, of which Forret and Calapago (2010, p.69) state: "In some situations, the populations can be divided into sub-populations which share some characteristics internally. In this

case, it is more reasonable to take random samples from these sub-divisions." The sub-divisions here are called "strata".

From each of the newspapers, three (3) editions were selected in each of the months amounting to twelve (12) editions, multiplied by the number of the newspapers sampled (4) to arrive at the sample size of forty-eight (48) editions.

DATA PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS

Data Presentation

Table 1: Corruption News Placement by the Four Newspapers December 2015-March 2016

Newspapers	Front page	Inside Page	Back Page	Total	Percentage
Daily Trust	1(2%)	11(22.9%)	0(0%)	12	25%
The Nation	2(4.1%)	10(20.8%)	0(0%)	12	25%
This Day	1(2%)	9(18.7%)	2(4.1%)	12	25%
Leadership	1(2%)	10(20.8%)	1(2%)	12	25%
Total	10.1%	83.2%	6.1%	48	100

From the table above, it can be observed that Daily Trust recorded 1(2%) of its placement of corruption news on the front page between December 2015 and March 2016, The Nation had 2(4.1%) of its total news of corruption placed on the front page also during the period under review, likewise This Day attracted 1(2%) while Leadership placed corruption news on the front page just once 1(2%). On the inside pages, Daily Trust posted 11(22.9%) of its corruption news there, The Nation recorded 10(20.8%), with This Day having 9(18.7%) while Leadership attracted 10(20.8%) of its corruption news placed on the inside pages.

On the back page, Daily Trust did not place its corruption news there at all which gave it 0%. Equally, The Nation recorded same 0%; This Day had 2(4.1%) while Leadership attracted 1(2%)

DISCUSSION

News placement by newspapers goes a long way in portraying the importance editors attach to news items. News are either on the front page, on the inside pages or on the back page; and this placement more often than not, is usually determined by the editors based on the topicality, currency, news value, and the need to provide public service function for the readers. Alao (1992, p. 10) writes that news can simply be defined as an account of current event, idea or problem that interests the greatest number of people. Alao (1992, p.11) went further to opine that only a few readers read every story in the newspaper, while most readers read every story of personal interest in the newspaper that is published each day. Consequentially, placement is akin to agenda setting theory as the way and manner a particular news item is treated and positioned can compel attention for such a news item. The media

can ascribe importance to an issue through: (i) the quality/frequency of reporting (ii) prominence given to the report (iii) the degree of conflict generated in the report (iv) commutative media specific effects over time (Okoro and Agbo, 2003, p.31). Kunczick (1988) in Okoro and Agbo (2003, p. 32) states that "the opportunity for agenda setting by the mass media becomes enhanced when the value structure of a society is in a state of flux".

Unfortunately, Nigerian newspapers seem to be paying lip service to the effort by the present administration to combat corruption, or they can even be described as being lackadaisical in the way and manner they are reporting news of the war against corruption. This inference is reached after considering the fact that the four newspapers chosen for this study- Daily Trust, The Nation This-Day and Leadership recorded an insignificant total of 10.1% of their corruption related news placed on the front page, 6.1% on the back page while an alarming 83.2% was recorded on the inside pages of same newspapers regarding placement of their corruption news during the period under review.

CONCLUSION

Just as drivers need a road map when going on a long trip, readers need guidance in making sense of the information presented to them in a newspaper. Without any attention to the way the newspaper is visually presented to the reader, a few would be interested in reading the content of a typical edition (Rolnicki, Tate and Taylor, 2001, p.263). From the above cited assertion it can be concluded that part of the ways of helping readers make sense out of the day's edition is through prominence, determined by the pages on which each news items is placed. Stories on the front page of a newspaper are over and above more important than those on any other pages. Therefore it can be safely concluded that Nigerian newspapers by burying a large chunk of their corruption news in the inside pages have not played very significant role in the reporting of the efforts to rid our dear nation of corruption, a cancerous disease that has for long dragged the country in the mucky waters.

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