

Chapter 4

Narrative Analysis of the Coverage of the 2015 and 2019 Presidential Elections in Selected Nigerian Newspapers

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ABSTRACT

The media is important for the sustenance of democracy. While several studies have examined the role played by the Nigerian media during elections, none has examined issues discussed by the media during elections, in particular the 2015 and 2019 presidential elections. Therefore, the study undertook, through narrative research design, the coverage of the 2015 and 2019 presidential elections in Vanguard Nigeria and Daily Trust newspapers. Findings from the study reveal that Nigerian newspapers preached national unity, warned of economic depression and the need to diversify the economy, questioned the preparedness of the electoral commission to conduct elections, questioned the ability of the presidential aspirants to eradicate corruption, spoke out against pre-election violence and vote-buying, and spoke against the use of divisive rhetoric by politicians. The study recommends that media owners and professionals themselves should safeguard the profession from being a tool in the hands of divisive politicians.

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INTRODUCTION

The media play different roles in society, most especially in governance and nation-building. The media is the fourth estate of the realm: a prominent watchdog on the government, safeguarding the transparency and credibility of the electoral process (Buami, 2016). Electioneering activities include campaigns, rallies, gatherings, education, and sensitisation of the electorate. A large section of the voters never gets the chance to attend any of these events. Voters rely on the mass media to get adequate information on all these. It will infringe on the peoples' rights if the media are not recognized and given the freedom to educate and report campaign activities.

Kadiri, Muhammed, Raji and Sulaiman (2015) observe that the mass media are considered the brain box of democracy. They supply vital political information that some members of the electorate may base their decisions on. Furthermore, Odunlami (2013) says that an individual's capacity to have informed opinions and take decisions on political matters mirror the volume and quality of information that a person has been exposed to. Their uses of mass media may shape these. Buami (2016) notes that although there have been frequent concerns about media neutrality, mostly during election periods, yet the mass media have remained prevalent sources of information on politics in democratic societies.

Some authors have studied the Nigerian 2015 general elections. While Issa (2015) assesses the role of the media, Fasakin, Oyero, Oyesomi and Okorie (2017) examine the use of hate speech. Aleyomi, Ajakaye, Otu and Oluwasegun (2018) look at how politically affiliated newspapers reported candidates from other political divides. Aririguzoh (2019, 2019b) discovers the two major political parties - Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) and All Progressives Congress (APC) - and their presidential candidates' advertisements were not the whole truth; even though they vigorously used music to pass across their different messages aimed at catching and luring the voters to their sides.

However, none of these studies examined the issues the Nigerian media discussed in the 2015 and 2019 presidential elections. Therefore, this study will examine the problems the press discussed during the 2015 and 2019 presidential elections. Given the power of the media to influence public opinion and thoughts, it is essential to assess the issues the press in Nigeria discussed in these two elections to determine if these were under their social responsibility roles: making the coverage of events on the elections paramount in exchange for the freedom they enjoy.

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