Media Reportage of Financial Crimes and Public Opinion on President Buhari's Change Mantra Politics

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Abstract

Nigeria's mass media have consistently reported looting of the treasury by the political elites. Therefore, anti-corruption war has overshadowed other salient issues in the media since Buhari's ascendancy in 2015, leading to divergent opinions in the public sphere. Coming from the Spiral of Silence theoretical background and relying on quantitative and qualitative data from cross sectional survey, this study investigates public opinions on the anti-graft war with emphasis on the dominant themes in the news and related genres, namely arms deal, funds misappropriation and diversification, embezzlement, bribery, money laundering and budget padding. With a sample size of 326 respondents derived through non-probability sampling technique, the deliberative public opinion poll and survey reveal that reading Nigerian newspapers on anti-corruption war correlates significantly with audiences' opinion on President Buhari's Change Mantra; viewing Nigerian TV channels' reports on anti-corruption war relate significantly with the dependent variable; immediate social circles of audiences correlate significantly with the dependent variable; and audiences' level of income moderates the predictor and the dependent variable's relationship. Qualitative results reflect quantitative findings.

Key words: Mass media, Corruption, Anti-graft war, Public opinion, Change mantra

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Introduction

Graft is a serious and endemic problem that has affected almost every stratum of the Nigerian social, political and economic sectors. Public office appointment is conceived by most Nigerian politicians as a means of self-enrichment. Every now and again, billions of dollars derived from oil revenues are pilfered and siphoned from public coffers for personal use. High level corrupt practices in both public and private sectors have been identified as the major cause of other major vices in the Nigerian societies. To be specific, corruption is reported by news media and discussed in social circles as the major instigator of terrorism in the north eastern Nigeria and kidnapping in the Niger Delta and some parts of the eastern Nigeria. It cannot be gainsaying that the Goodluck Jonathan's regime could not succeed in combating Boko Haram's because of financial crimes that were grossly involved. Money meant for arms procurement was shared by private individuals. The arms deal case involving Sambo Dasuki, the former President Jonathan's National Security Adviser, and some prominent officials of the regime has placed Nigeria on the top of list of the most corrupt countries in the contemporary world (Gollom, 2014).

High level corrupt practices and financial crimes gained more strength as an issue of salience in the news media and in the public sphere since the emergence of President Muhammadu Buhari's anti-graft war in the scene of governance in May 2015. At the time when this empirical study was being conducted, pending in the courts of law were charges of false asset declaration, forgery, budget padding, bribes, money laundering, and similar economic crimes against the Senate President and his deputy, the Speaker of the House of Representatives, top government officials and some judges of the High Court, the Courts of Appeal and the Supreme Court. In similar vein, the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC), Nigeria's leading anti-

corruption agency, has vigorously investigated some senior election officials who were alleged to have collected millions of dollars from political office seekers. Therefore the fate of democracy and good governance is somewhat threatened by the systemic state of corrupt practices in all strata of government in Nigeria. So far the anti-graft efforts have been indicated by arrest of few top officials of the immediate past regimes, seizure and confiscation of the perceived ill-gotten assets, and freezing of bank accounts of the suspects including that of a sitting governor.

Coming from the background of the relatively controversial Buhari's change mantra and his aggressive anti-corruption crusade both of which have generated different shades of opinions in the media and social circles, the Nigerian mass communication research community could not hesitate to investigate this issue of national concern. Basically, it is assumed that such empirical inquiry could contribute to our depth of knowledge about the extent to which public debates in the immediate social circles and in the news media, as competing sources of public opinion formation, could influence different shapes of public opinion on the Buhari's anti-graft war against corrupt practices and financial crimes in the highly referred public places. The investigative competency of survey research design to measure informed public opinion is well-entrenched in communication scholarship (Neijens, 2008). The empirical report indicated in this paper is anchored on the social psychological tradition which defined public opinion as "the distribution of opinion on controversial issues that is, rightly or wrongly, part of what is perceived as the dominant position in society and such affects the individual readiness to talk about his or her own opinion in public situation" (Donsbach & Traugett, 2008).

Statement of Research Problem
There is no doubt that several investigations, conceptual and empirical, were likely to have been made into the roles played by

the Nigerian news media in generating conflicting opinions about the performance of President Muhammadu Buhari since his assumption of political leadership in May 2015. Yet, there was the need to examine public opinions on the Buhari's Change Mantra politics from the lens of how such opinions might have been instigated by the news media's messages on financial crimes and discussion about the subject-matter in immediate social circles.

Put differently, this study investigates the comparative extents to which exposure to news media messages on financial crimes (independent variable) and immediate social circles of the audiences (another independent variable) can predict peoples' divergent opinions on President Buhari's Change Mantra Politics. At the research design stage of this study, income level of audiences was factored in as a third variable. The rationale of inclusion of the third variable lies in the assumption that news media messages and audience' immediate social circles was not likely to shape public opinions, independent of other social factors. In other words, it was assumed that if there could be any correlation between the predictors and the outcome variable, such correlation was not likely to be perfect. That is, the probability of the audiences' income level, as a third variable moderating such correlation should be factored in. Elaboration of relationship between predictors and criterion variables is a common norm in opinion research. Noelle-Neumann posited that people's willingness to voice out an opinion on divisive issues depends on demographic factors (Noelle-Neumann cited in Hopkins, 2015). The stated research problem is distinctively re-articulated in the following research objectives and questions:

Research Objectives
1.   To know if reading Nigerian Newspapers' messages on anti-corruption war can significantly predict audiences'

opinion on President Buhari's Change Mantra.
2. To ascertain if there is significant relationship between viewing Nigerian TV channels' messages on anti-corruption war and audiences' opinion on President Buhari's Change Mantra.
3. To determine if the extent to which immediate social circles of audiences can significantly influence audiences' opinion on President Buhari's' Change Mantra.
4. To detect if income level of audiences can moderate the significant association between reading Nigerian Newspapers' messages on anti-corruption war and audiences' opinion on President Buhari's Change Mantra.
5. To also detect if income level of audiences can moderate the significant relationship between Viewing Nigerian TV channels' messages on anti-corruption war and audiences' opinion on President Buhari's Change Mantra.

Research Questions
1. Does reading Nigerian Newspapers' messages on anti-corruption war significantly correlate with audiences' opinion on President Buhari's Change Mantra?
2. Is there significant relationship between viewing Nigerian TV channels' messages on anti-corruption war and audiences' opinion on President Buhari's Change Mantra?
3. To what extent can immediate social circles of the audiences significantly influence audiences' opinion on President Buhari's Change Mantra?
4. Does income level of audiences moderate the significant relationship between reading Nigerian newspapers' messages on anti-corruption war and audiences' opinion on President Buhari's Change Mantra?
5. Does income level of audiences moderate the significant

relationship between viewing Nigerian TV channels' messages on anti-corruption war and audiences' opinion on President Buhari's Change Mantra to the extent that the effect will be higher among the low income groups?

Theoretical Framework: Spiral of Silence Theory

The discussion in this paper is situated within the *Spiral of Silence* theoretical explanation of how predominant opinions are formed in public debates. Formulated by Elizabeth Noelle-Neumann, the *Spiral of Silence theory* is premised on two assumptions. The first assumption is that people have the quasi-statistical sense of gauging opinion climate by identifying the distribution of percentage across those who favour a given issue and those who oppose it. Therefore people tend to adjust their opinion on an issue to other people's opinions on same issue, having aware that the latter opinions form the majority. The second assumption is fear of isolation that is triggered by the treat that social collectives pose to those who deviate from majority views and social norms in a society. That is, out of fear of being ostracized, individuals belonging to a minority view on an issue are always unwilling to express such view in public debates. It logically follows that opinions expressed by the majority consequentially becomes the predominant opinion in the public sphere as the minority become weaker and silent (Noelle- Neumann, 1993).

One common feature of the spiral of silence is its dynamism that allows for shift of opinion climates overtime: once a perspective to an issue for public debate is perceived to be that of minority, individuals that hold it becomes silent and thus the viewpoint that gains majority support is established as the predominant and social norm. That is to say a popular perspective can always become unpopular once the other perspective wins majority to its side. It is a game of number (Scheufele, 2008).

Factors of Spiral of Silence

The spiralling process is instigated by three factors: nature of the issue for debates, reactions from the immediate social environment to the issue, and the news media's portrayal of the issue (Scheufele, 2008).

The first factor, nature of the issue for debates, significantly determines the position people take when expressing their opinions in public debate. To a larger extent, spiral of silence works most of the time for value-laden and moral-burden issues regardless of the subject matter within which the issues surface. In the modern society, critical issues that gain public attention for debate cut across social, cultural, economic, political and technological strata. The weight of such issues is significant to how the public will react to the debates about them. Less worthy issues are not likely to gain power for public discussion. On the contrary, issues that border on social, cultural, economic and political aspects of people's life are taken more seriously and are significantly discussed in the public spheres (Habermas, 2006).

The second factor, reactions from the immediate social environment, influences how individuals assess what others think about issues. Thus, people watch out for the opinions that win the majority. Kepplinger (2008) refers to conversation among a community of people in their immediate social environment as direct observation. The direct observation is contingent on three factors: first, a considerable majority of people must have carefully attended to the events which revolve around the issue; second, the people must have constantly taken note of political information given out by advocacy groups, key stakeholders and, of course, news media within the immediate social environment; and third, the people must have retained the worthwhile information in their memory for future utilization (Visser,

Holbrook & Krosnick, 2008).

The third factor, the news media's portrayal of the issue, has to do with three major elements mostly involved in media coverage of issues: first, media coverage of the issue for public debates; second, how the media represent each opinion to the issue; third, amount of coverage allotted to the each opinion represented. For sure, different opinions on an issue get diverse amount of media coverage. Media's portrayal of issue is a residual component within the scope of media agenda setting theoretical discourse. The term "agenda" is all about ranked-ordered set of issues conceived as the most important in a specific period of time (Roessler, 2008).

It is common knowledge that news media influence people's interpretation of issues. Such influence can be attributed to the portrayal of the issues by the media using the framing and priming techniques. Technically, the news media do choose an angle or perspective from which an issue could be reported for specific reasons. News media role in the process of spiralling can be somewhat dramatic so much so that people who tune in to news and related genres in specific media may perceive the opinion on a given issues, which has the extensive coverage and given prominence therein, at the expense of other opinions, as the far and wide in the society. Therefore, audiences who hold divergent views are likely not to voice such view out of fear of being isolated or ostracized (Sparks, 2006, p.178).

The difference between reactions from immediate social environment and news media in terms of impact they exert on people's assessment of different shades of opinion to an issues lies in the fact that: while the immediate social environment is concerned with issues that people have experienced firsthand; the news media are for issues with which people have had little or no direct experience (Scheufele, 2008).

News media use both quantitative and qualitative

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information to frame and prime. The quantitative representation of an opinion in the news media emphasizes percentage (most often the higher percentage) of people that share the opinion (Kepplinger, 2008). For instance, in the Nigeria's case, news media may report that over 60% of the population disagrees with the way the judiciary is handling the asset declaration charges against the Nigeria's Senate president.

Qualitative representation of opinions in news media is considered to be stronger than the quantitative in the business of framing and priming. That is why news media use qualitative messages such as personality and expert interviews to strengthen and popularize specific opinion to an issue of national concern such as that of the ***financial crimes anti-graft war in the contemporary Nigeria.***

Personality and expert interviews cannot be confined to big personalities and professional experts in society alone, the interviews cut across social strata. As experts could be the professionally trained in specialised areas, they could also be found among men and women on the streets who have adequate knowledge and firsthand information on specific events and issues for public debates. Those men and women might not have acquired formal education and expertise on the issues; they have nevertheless witnessed and felt the consequence of similar events and issues in the past. Therefore, they are not only interviewed by news media for qualitative information, but also to purposefully give legitimacy to specific perspectives on the issue to be reported (Kepplinger, 2008).

Media Portrayal and Public Opinion Formation
Even though their effects on audiences are conceived as moderate, the news media's ability to distort information about reality through portrayal techniques cannot be denied. News media deliberately apply such techniques to coverage of issues

purposefully to shape opinion climates. The mostly used portrayal technique by the media is consonance. Consonance is a major portrayal method that the media use to shape and focus opinion favourably in direction of a side to an issue for public debate. Consonance is defined by Scheufele (2008) as "the tendency of different media outlets to portray controversial issues in a homogenous fashion" Consonance as a concept is synonymous with inter-media agenda setting and news media waves both of which suggest the ability of journalists to decide media contents and direction of news flows. Therefore consonant and cumulative coverage of an issue by news media reinforces their effects on audience, more so as audiences are denied the opportunity to selectively expose themselves to media messages that are consistent with their opinions and interests (Scheufele, 2008).

Strategic as the idea of consonance can be in reinforcing specific side of opinion to an issue, the media's tendency to instigate a dual climate of opinion is very high. A dual climate of opinion holds whenever there are two established opinions over an issue: one is that of the majority of the population; the other opinion is that which is strengthened by the prevalent perception created by news media so it can be accepted as that of the majority in the society. This situation brings about deviation of collective perceptions from collective preferences, which leads to spiral of silence among the individuals belonging to the collective preferences.

Within the framework of ideological interconnectivity, the media framing, priming and consonance conspiracy can be said to have shared some meanings with the basic assumption of the propaganda model that media owners, editors and reporters connive with the elitist conglomerates to manipulate reports about events and issues (Chomsky & Harman, 2002, p.5). The fact that news media so often report events and issues from the viewpoint of political elites, including the politically powerful and big business firms, can make people think that they belong to the

minority and therefore keep quiet (Sparks, 2006, p. 178).

Even though media coverage mechanisms have been suggested as having power to make people concede specific opinion on a given issue, it cannot be ruled out that the majority in some settings and under some circumstances can reject an opinion popularized by news media. A typical example of research findings in support of this observation can be seen in the one reported by Eveland, McLeod and Signorelli that very few people expressed strong support for the Gulf War in 1991 in contrast to the strong consensus that media reported in supporting and justifying the war. A greater percentage of the respondents held divergent opinion to that which was widely circulated by the media (Eveland, McLeod & Signorelli, 2001).

Situating the *Nigerian Mass Media's coverage of financial crimes and public opinion on President Buhari's change mantra politics within the purview of the existing body of knowledge reviewed, it is hypothesised that :*

H_1: *Reading Nigerian Newspaper messages on anti-corruption war* will explain significant amount of variance in *audiences' opinion on President Buhari's Change Mantra* over and above the one explained by *immediate social circles of audiences*.

H_2 *Viewing Nigerian TV channels' messages on anti-corruption war* will explain significant amount of variance in *audiences' opinion on President Buhari's Change Mantra* over and above the one explained by *immediate social circles of audiences*.

H_3: *Income level of audiences* will moderate relationship between *reading Nigerian Newspaper messages on anti-corruption war* and *audiences' opinion on President Buhari's Change Mantra* such that the effect will be higher among the low income groups. That is, Beta from the interaction terms will be negative.

H_4: *Income level of audiences* will moderate relationship

between *Viewing Nigerian TV channels messages on anti-corruption* and *audiences' opinion on President Buhari's Change Mantra* such that the effect will be higher among the low income groups. That is, Beta from the interaction terms will be negative.

Research Methods

Data for this study were gathered with the use of mixed methods: cross sectional survey and Focus Group Discussion. The rationale is not only to compensate weakness in a method with the strength of the other but also to substantiate statistical findings with pure statement of respondents (Frey, Botan and Kreps, 2000, p. 222). Therefore, quantitative data for the survey were collected with a self-administered questionnaire and qualitative data were assembled through the focus group discussion.

Quantitative Data

The research population was made up of students of Yaba College of Technology located in Lagos State. At the time of data gathering, the population of Yaba College of Technology was approximately twenty-two thousand (22000) students (as given by the Office of the Registrar). Probability sampling technique was used to do a multi-stage sample selection. This necessitated creation of a sampling frame from the eight major schools (faculties) in the institution. Therefore, simple random technique was used to select only two departments from each school of the seven (7) schools, leading to the selection of fourteen (14) departments from the entire institution.

Moreover, in each of the fourteen selected departments, a list of students in the Higher National Diploma classes was obtained. There and then, systematic random was used to select every third student on the list. Specifically, 28 students selected from the Printing Department and 32 students were selected from Fine Arts Department, resulting in 60 students from the School of Arts, Design and Printing. From the Management Estate

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Department, 22 students were selected while 26 students were selected from Quantity Surveying Department, making a total of 48 students from the School of Environmental Studies. Thirty-nine (39) students were selected from the Accounting Department and 41 students from the Marketing Department, thus a total of 80 students were selected from the School of Management and Business Studies. Thirty-six (36) students were selected from the Department of Mathematics and 43 students were selected from Biological Science Department, hence a total of 79 students were selected from School of Sciences. Thirty-two (32) students were selected from the Civil Engineering Department and 39 students from Mechanical Department making a total of 71 students selected from the School of Engineering. From the Food Technology Department, twenty-nine (29) students were selected from Textile and Polymer Technology Department, and 5 students from Food Technology, making a total of 34 students selected from Textile and Polymer Technology Department. From the School of Liberal Studies, 36 students were selected from the Mass Communication Department only because other departments in the School are for general studies. Therefore, a total of 408 students were obtained from the sample frame.

Sample Size
Four-hundred and eight copies of the self-administered questionnaire were distributed, by five trained delivery persons, to the 408 students who were selected through systematic random sampling for the purpose of data gathering. Of the whole 408 copies of the questionnaire only 372 were returned. Forty-six copies were poorly and partially filled, hence they were all discarded. That is to say that the remaining **326** formed the **sample size** for the quantitative survey. The sample size of 326 translated into a response rate of 80 percent.

Instrument Formation and Pre-testing

To solve plausible problems in the questionnaire, such as unclear wording and related errors, a pilot study was conducted with 30 respondents from among National Diploma students of Yaba College of Technology. The questionnaire reliability was tested through the frequency distributions of the responses. Thus, the items that did not have enough heterogeneity of responses were dropped or appropriately reworded at the pre-test stage. Reliability was moreover guaranteed through internal consistency analysis in the case of composite measures and indices.

Constructs and Measures

Audiences' Opinion on President Buhari's Change Mantra

Audiences' Opinion on President Buhari's Change Mantra is the only dependent measure in this study and it is conceptualised as a personal view expressed by a respondent regarding the change slogan initiated and used by President Buhari and his political party to indicate their readiness to cleanse the Nigerian state of corruption. *Audiences' opinion on President Buhari's Change Mantra* was operationalised by respondents' degree of agreement or disagreement to a set of statements, tapping scope, origin/anchor point, and intensity dimensions of the variable on a five-point Likert-scale ranging from 1 for "strongly disagree" to 5 for "strongly agree". Specifically, the respondents were asked, in a self-report manner, to agree or disagree to the following 10 items/indexes:

> President Buhari is sincere in his fight against corruption// It high time to sanitize the Nigerian economy by punishing those who steal public funds // Nigerian will progress only if Nigerians conform to the new government's anti-graft policy// All former public office holders should be probed for their ill-gotten wealth// Members of the immediate former regime should be made accountable for the poor state of Nigerian

economy// Government should reduce salaries and allowances of the lawmakers// Political office holders should be made to declare their assets in the public// Number of contracts awarded and the contracting firms should be publicized for public monitoring// Amount of money retrieved from corrupt officials and the corrupt persons names should be publicized regularly// All expenditures and revenues should be announced regularly in the media// Government should create intelligent mechanism to monitor bribery in all sectors//**.**

The items consistently measure the dependent variable (*audiences' opinion on President Buhari's Change Mantra*) with a high Cronbach alpha of .82 on the SPSS reliability scale.

Reading Nigerian Newspaper Messages on Anti-Corruption War

Reading Nigerian Newspaper messages on anti-corruption war is the first independent variable in the study and is conceptualised as a respondent's active reading of news and news genres such as special reports, editorials, opinion articles, letters to the editor and advertorials published in Nigeria's newspapers about corrupt practices among political office holders and public officials as well as about arrest made in that respect by the law enforcement agents from the Economic and Financial Crime Commission and similar agencies. This conceptual designation is situated within the Noelle-Neumann's explanation of how media can shape opinion with the use of portrayal mechanisms specifically that of consonance which allows for portrayal of divisive issues in a homogenous fashion (Noelle-Neumann, 1973).

Reading Nigerian Newspaper messages on anti-corruption war was measured by respondents' degree of agreement or disagreement to a set of statements, tapping scope, origin/anchor point, and intensity dimensions of the variable on a

five-point Likert-scale ranging from 1 for "strongly disagree" to 5 for "strongly agree". Specifically, the respondents were asked, in a self-report approach, to respond to 12 items/indexes which were initially included in the questionnaire and subsequently inserted in the SPSS. However, only six indexes reliably hang together (Cronbach alpha is .76) to validly measure the predictor. The valid indexes are:

I read about corrupt practices in major national newspapers on daily basis// I read most news and opinion articles dealing with arrest of public officials in the newspapers// While straight news reveal the corrupt state of the economy, some opinion articles condemned arrest of corrupt senior public officials// Newspapers report the anti-graft activities of the government from conflicting perspectives// I have read most opinion articles on how bank accounts of suspected corrupt politicians were frozen// Most of the newspapers' messages on arrest of judges over bribery support the anti-graft war//.

Viewing Nigerian TV Channels' Messages on Anti-Corruption War

Viewing Nigerian TV channels' messages on anti-corruption war is the second independent variable in the study and is conceptually defined as a respondent's active viewing of images and footages of suspect corrupt officials, their arrest, their presence in the court of law in the company of law enforcement agents from the Economic and Financial Crime Commission and similar agencies –all in televised news and news genres such as breaking news and special reports. ***Viewing Nigerian TV channels' messages on anti-corruption war*** is further conceptually defined as respondents' viewership of television's current affairs programmes, interview programmes and public

affairs programmes on high profile corrupt practices and anti-graft initiatives by the government. This conceptual description is also placed in the Noelle-Neumann's explanation of how media can shape opinion with the use of portrayal mechanisms (Noelle-Neumann, 1973).

Operationally, viewing Nigerian TV channels' messages on anti-corruption war was indexed by respondents' degree of agreement or disagreement to a set of statements, tapping scope, origin/anchor point, and intensity dimensions of the variable on a five-point Likert-scale ranging from 1 for "strongly disagree" to 5 for "strongly agree". Specifically, the respondents were asked, in a self-report mode, to respond to 12 statements/indicators which were included in the questionnaire. Only eight statements nevertheless survived the reliability test with a Cronbach alpha of .76, suggesting the statements' consistency. The eight indexes are:

> I watch anti-graft activities of the government in television news and related programmes// I follow up the televised activities of the anti-graft agencies by watching subsequent related events as are reported on television channels// I watch political analysts as they argue their point on high profile corrupt practices in televised current affairs programmes// I pay attention to newscaster's interview with experts during news, on different angles of anti-graft initiatives// I watch televised footages and images of arrested corrupt senior public officials//television news about how bank accounts of suspected corrupt politicians are frozen is interesting to me// Television channels report the anti-graft activities of the government from conflicting perspectives// Most of the televised discussion programmes that I have watched on arrest of judges over bribery favour the anti-graft war//.

Immediate Social Circles of Audiences

Immediate social circles of audiences, the third independent variable, is conceptualised as the social environment in which a respondent belongs and interacts with others who may share or disagree with his or her view on issues. Social circles, by this conceptual delineation, include homes, religious places, offices, market places, schools and similar public arena. This conceptual definition is in tune with an observation made by Scheufele (2008) that different reactions from the immediate social environment, to some extent, determine not only the side of public opinion on an issue also, but also influence how individuals assess what others think about the issue.

Immediate social circles of audiences was operationalised by respondents' degree of agreement or disagreement to a set of statements, tapping scope, anchor point, and intensity dimensions of the variable on a five-point Likert-scale ranging from 1 for "strongly disagree" to 5 for "strongly agree". The respondents were precisely requested, in a self-report style, to indicate agreement or disagreement to 10 items/indexes originally spelled-out in the questionnaire. Only nine of the whole twelfth statements were consistent on the reliability scale with a Cronbach alpha of .74. The nine indexes are:

> My people have spoken much against looting of the treasury by political office holders// Whenever anti-graft war is discussed, majority of people want the corrupt person to be punished// Fight against corruption dominate public discussion nowadays// Even within the opposition circle, people disowned the corrupt politicians// In my work place people discussed government anti-graft initiatives from different perspectives// In most places, people want the looters of public funds to be jailed //.

Control Variables

Three demographic variables (*gender, age-group and geo-political regions*) are included in the regression as control variables. *Income level of audience* is the only moderating variable used in the equation. Gender is basically a categorical variable (male=1 and female=2). Education and income levels were separately conceptualised in the study as indicators of a respondent's social status. In this study, *a geo-political region is* conceptually defined as the geographical region to which a respondent belong. *Geo-political region, as a control variable,* is measured by respondents' ticking one out of the six geo-political regions included in the questionnaire. Geo-political regions are coded as follows: south-west is coded "1"; "south-east is coded as "2"; south-south is coded"3";   north-west is coded"4";   north-east is coded "5";   and north-central is coded"6". Income level, as an intervening or moderating variable, was conceptualised as the income category to which a respondent belonged in terms of amount of money he or she earned monthly from parents or sponsors. Respondents were asked to specify their individual levels of income within twelve intervals given in the questionnaire. The twelve categories ranged from the lowest N10, 000.00 - 30,000.00 and N171, 000 and above.

Qualitative Data

Data for the qualitative angle of this research were generated through Focus Group Discussions (FGD). In line with the research objectives, the researcher anchored discussions on the topic of this research with two separate groups on different locations at different points in time. The participants in the two groups did not participate in the quantitative survey or participate in the pilot survey whatsoever. Thus, the groups were researcher-constituted groups.

The first focus group (Group A) was made up of some lecturers and students in the Mass Communication Department at

the Kwara State University located in Malete, KwaraState. The first group included 9 males and 6 females. The second group (Group B) was made up of traders operating in Owode Onirin in Lagos State. The second group included 8 males and 2 females. The sample size was in order because the participants in each of the two focus groups were not less than 5 nor exceed fifteen(See Babbie, 2001, p. 75; Deacon, Pickering, Golding & Murdock, 1999, p. 57). The age of the participants in the two groups ranges between19 and 60. The two focus groups were characterized by participants of divergent views on the main theme of this research with the three independent variables and the dependent measures in focus. The entire discussions were tape-recorded for subsequent analysis.

The participants were majorly asked to discuss President Buhari's change mantra slogan within the framework of anti-graft activities initiated by the federal government and functionally carried out by the EFCC and similar agencies. They were specifically asked to express their individual opinions on the new democratic regime's fight against financial crimes and related atrocities that have pervaded the three arms of government in Nigeria. Isolated themes for discussion were: arms deals championed by the former National Security Adviser to the former President Jonathan, the clamp-down on two Supreme Court's judges and five others from the Court of Appeal and High Courts for alleged bribery and similar corrupt practices, budget padding in the House of Representative and money laundering that have been outrageously committed by senior public officials of the immediate former regime. Most importantly discussed was the extent to which the three major independent variables had influenced the diverged opinions expressed on the subject matters.

Data Analysis, Findings and Interpretations

Prior to the use of hierarchical multiple regressions for the analysis of the data on IBM SPSS (version 23) for examining the patterns of correlation between the predictors and the dependent variable, preliminary analysis was conducted in other to establish that there was no violation of the normality, linearity, multicollinearity and homoscedasticity's assumptions.

Table 1 displays the pattern of correlation between each independent variable and the dependent measure (i.e. ***Audiences' opinion on President Buhari's Change Mantra***). Table 1 indicates that all the predictors (***Reading Nigerian newspapers' messages on anti-corruption war***; ***Viewing Nigerian TV channels' messages on anti-corruption war***; ***Immediate social circles of audiences***; ***Reading Nigerian Newspaper messages on anti-corruption war× Income level of audiences; Viewing Nigerian TV channels' messages on anti-corruption war× Income level of audiences***) correlate with ***audiences' opinion on President Buhari's Change Mantra***. The effects of the demographic variables (*gender*, *age-group*, and *geo-political regions)*, were removed because the variables were inserted in the first block as control variables. The controlled variables explain 32% of the variance in the dependent variable (Incremental $R^2 =$ 32.4, F $(3, 326) = 19.171$, P<.005).

In Table 1, Reading *Nigerian newspapers' messages on anti-corruption war* is indicated as a significant predictor of *audiences' opinion on President Buhari's Change Mantra. Reading Nigerian newspapers' messages on anti-corruption war* was placed in the second block of the equation, thereby explaining 3% of the variance in the dependent variable (Incremental $R^2 = 2.2$, F $(5, 326) = 16.549$, P<.05) with the effects of the control variables removed. Also glaring in Table 1, is the significant correlation of *viewing Nigerian TV channels' messages on anti-corruption war* with *audiences' opinion on President Buhari's Change Mantra*. As a predictor, *reading the*

Nation's news stories on corruption occupied the third block of the regression, making 3.1% explanation in the total variance of the outcome variable (Incremental R^2=3.1, F(5, 326) = 23.065, P<.02) after the effects of the demographic variables had been taken care of.

Table 1 also shows that *immediate social circles of audiences,* as an independent variable*,* significantly correlates with the *audiences' opinion on President Buhari's Change Mantra.* Specifically the predictor was inserted in the fourth block of the regression, contributing additional 2.2% of the variance in the dependent variable *(*Incremental R^2=2.6, F(4, 326) = 16.549, P<.03),with the effects of the control variables removed.

The first interaction variable, *reading Nigerian newspapers' message on anti-corruption war × income level of audiences*, is displayed in Table 1 as a stronger predictor of the dependent measure. Located in the fifth block, the interaction variable explains 4% (the highest percentage so far) of the variance in the audience opinion measure, meaning that ***income level of audiences*** moderate the relationship between *reading Nigerian newspapers' messages on anti-corruption war* and *audiences' opinion on President Buhari's Change Mantra* (Incremental R^2=3.5, F(6, 326) = 25.021, P<.005), while the demographics are controlled for.

Like its counterpart*,* the interaction variable, ***viewing Nigerian TV channels' messages on anti-corruption war ×*** *immediate social circles of audiences,* is shown in Table 1 as significantly correlating with the dependent variable. The predictor explains 4% (the highest percentage so far) of the variance in the audience opinion measure, indicating ***income level of audiences*** as a moderator in the relationship between *reading Nigerian newspapers' messages on anti-corruption war* and *audiences' opinion on President Buhari's Change Mantra* (Incremental R^2=3.8, F(6, 326) = 25.021, P<.005), while the demographics are controlled for.

The finalized Beta in Table 1 reveals that all the independent variables, except *education level* of respondents and *age-group* of respondents, are indicated as predicting the dependent variable: *gender* (β=-.14, p<005); *age-group* (β=-.05, p>05); *geo-political regions* (β=.26, p<.005); **reading Nigerian newspapers' message on anti-corruption war**(β=-.17, p<05); **viewing Nigerian TV channels' messages on anti-corruption war** (β=.19, p<02); **immediate social circles of audiences**. (β=.14, p<.03); **reading Nigerian newspapers' message on anti-corruption war × Income level of audiences**. (β=-32, p<.005); **viewing Nigerian TV channels' messages on anti-corruption war × income level of audiences** (β=.36, p<.005);

The statistical outputs of the hierarchical multiple regressions displayed in Table 1 supported the first three hypotheses tested for the study; the fourth hypothesis is not supported.

Testing the First Hypothesis

H_1: **Reading Nigerian Newspaper messages on anti-corruption war** will explain significant amount of variance in **audiences' opinion on President Buhari's' Change Mantra** over and above the one explained by **immediate social circles of audiences**.

The first hypothesis is not supported because relationship between **immediate social circles of audiences** and **audiences' opinion on President Buhari's Change Mantra** is greater than the correlation between **reading Nigerian Newspaper messages on anti-corruption war** and the dependent variable. This is glaring in the incremental R^2 of the immediate social circle variable as a predictor of the audiences' opinion (Incremental R^2=2.6, F(4, 326) = 16.549, P<.03), whereas the incremental R^2 of the newspaper reading variable and the dependent variable is lesser (Incremental R^2=2.2, F(5, 393) = 16.549, P<.05).

The non-supportive state of the first hypothesis is also indicated in the opinion expressed by overwhelming majority of

discussants in the two focus discussion groups that the punitive response of the government to the corrupt officials gained much support in the immediate social circles to which they belong and wherein the change agenda of the Buhari's regime were much discussed. On the contrary, fewer discussants in the two groups mentioned that their opinions were influenced by newspaper's messages on the issue. For instance, the fifth discussant in the first focus group said:

> This issue of fight against financial crime is more articulated in real life setting than in the newspapers. As a student, I get more information about corrupt practices from my peers with whom I discussed issue of national concern. Though I also read about it in the newspapers, what people say about the need to change catch more of my attention (5th Discussant in the first focus group).

That is not to say that all opinions were expressed on the change mantra and the anti-graft war flowed in the positive direction. While some discussants, most especially some in the first group, expressed their support for the way the anti-graft was being fought, some discussants were critical about sincerity of the change agenda and the anti-graft war. A discussant in the first group vehemently said in support of the anti-graft war:

> The enlightenment about fight against corruption goes beyond the newspaper pages…we talk more about it in different settings. The anti-graft crusade has come in the right time…if President Buhari does not succeed in his fight against corruption this time around, Nigeria will never get it right again. The judiciary should be cleansed of corrupt judges who have millions of dollars at home…they wouldn't take it to banks because banks are also afraid that the EFCC are watching them ….the DSS were correct to clamp down on them at home…otherwise they would have escaped with the billions…the judges are the last hope of the

common man. If the judiciary does not change for good, the situation could be worsening as the corrupt officials charged to courts would always be discharged and acquitted…" (2nd discussant in the first focus group).

A divergent opinion from third discussant in the first group observed that:

The President should also investigate the corrupt politicians in his cabinet. We know them. Change should begin with members of his political party, the APC. If the president could do that, he would be the most celebrated president in Nigeria. A lot of petitions came in when the president nominated to the national assembly some former governors for ministerial positions…" (3rd discussant in the first focus group).

About the arrested judges, the discussant went on to say that:

"…even though I support any crusade against financial crimes, yet the way the judges were camped down upon by the DSS in the wee hours of the night shouldn't have been. The government should have taken the proper channels of the law to get them arrested and confiscate the stolen wealth…the clamping down on them was not proper (3rd discussant in the first focus group).

Another participant who shared the divergent opinion from the second group lamented that:

See…. we are suffering because some politicians are siphoning billions of dollars from the treasury. I have read the newspapers most of the time and I have read a lot articles on the anti-graft war. I believe the newspapers. There are too many corrupt people in the President's party and in his cabinet. He should replace them so we can get the whole things right for change (1st discussant in the second focus group).

With the available quantitative results in Table 1, the answer to the first research question, in the initial section of this paper, is given in the affirmative. The first research question

reads: Does *reading Nigerian Newspapers' messages on anti-corruption war* significantly correlates with *audiences' opinion on President Buhari's Change Mantra*? Table 1 reveals **0.05** statistically significant level of correlation between *reading Nigerian newspapers' messages* and *audiences' opinion on President Buhari's Change Mantra.* This means that audiences' opinion about the Change slogan propagated by the Buhari's democratic administration has some connection with what they read in the Nigerian newspapers about the anti-corruption war. The submission made by some of the participants in the two focus groups sound conflicting, it corroborate the quantitative findings to an extent as the participants confirmed that they read about the anti-graft war in the newspaper even though they said they are more affected by what they obtained from the immediate social circle about the anti-graft crusade.

Testing the Second Hypothesis

H_2 *Viewing Nigerian TV channels' messages on anti-corruption war* will explain significant amount of variance in *audiences' opinion on President Buhari's Change Mantra* over and above the one explained by *immediate social circles of audiences*.

Contrary to the situation of the first hypothesis, the second hypothesis is supported by the high level of the significant correlation displayed for *viewing Nigerian TV channels' messages on anti-corruption war* and *audiences' opinion on President Buhari's Change Mantra* (Incremental R^2=3.1, $F(5, 326)$ = 23.065, P<.02) compared to the significant relationship between ***immediate social circles of audiences*** and the dependent variable (Incremental R^2=2.6, $F(4, 326)$ = 16.549, P<.03). The second hypothesis also finds support in the findings from the qualitative data, specifically the data from the second focus discussion group. Most of the discussants in the second group suggested that their opinions were derived from both television news and discussion in their immediate social circles. A female discussant said:

"Most often I have watched NTA reports on how the government recovers our stolen money from looters who call themselves public servants…let the EFCC go after them to jail them…" (4rd discussant in the second focus group).

Another discussant said:

"…Based on what we watch on TV and our real life an experience, the country is in problem. The government needs our support. But the government should solve the problem of hunger first. To fight corruption is not enough. That is what people are saying everywhere." (7th discussant in the second focus group

The second research question secured an answer from the quantitative research outcome. The second research question reads: Is there significant relationship between *viewing Nigerian TV channels' messages on anti-corruption war* and audiences' *opinion on President Buhari's Change Mantra*? In Table 1 and in the data interpretation, it is glaring that there is a relationship between **viewing Nigerian TV channels' messages on anti-corruption war** and the dependent variable because the level of the statistical significance is 0.02. Corroborating the stronger relationship between the two variables indicated is the fact that most of participants in the two focus groups agreed that the fight against financial crimes should continue.

Furthermore, answer to the third research question is also located in Table 1. The third research question is: To what extent can immediate social circles of the audiences significantly influence audiences' opinion on President Buhari's Change Mantra? Table 1 reveals the relationship between *immediate social circles of the audiences* and the outcome variable at the statistically significant level of 0.03, indicating a positive and strong correlation between the two variables. This is supported by the qualitative results from the two focus groups wherein majority of the participants affirmed that they were more influenced by the information they sourced from their immediate social circled than

what they read from newspapers.

Testing the Third Hypothesis

H_3: ***Income level of audiences*** will moderate relationship between ***reading Nigerian Newspaper messages on anti-corruption war*** and ***audiences' opinion on President Buhari's Change Mantra*** such that the effect will be higher among the low income groups. That is, Beta from the interaction terms will be negative.

In similar vein, the statistical outputs in the fifth block of Table 1 support the third hypothesis because the incremental R^2 for the first interaction variable *(i.e.* ***reading Nigerian newspapers' message on anti-corruption war × Income level of audiences)*** was very significant (Incremental R^2=3.5, F(6,326) = 25.021, P<.005) notwithstanding the insertion of three independent variables (i.e. ***reading Nigerian newspapers' message on anti-corruption war****, viewing Nigerian TV channels' messages on anti-corruption war* and *immediate social circles of audiences*) in the earlier three blocks of the regression. Besides, the Beta coefficient for the interaction *variable* (β=-32, p<.005) supports the hypothesis that "***income level of audiences*** will moderate relationship between ***reading Nigerian Newspaper messages on anti-corruption war*** such that the effect will be higher among the low income groups. That is, Beta coefficient for the interaction terms will be negative". That is, one standard deviation increase in the level of the moderator variable reduces the effect of ***reading Nigerian Newspaper messages on anti-corruption war*** on the ***audiences' opinion on President Buhari's Change Mantra*** by 32 Standard Deviation, indicating higher effects of the newspaper reading variable on the audiences' opinion among the low income groups of the sample size. The fact that the Beta coefficient moves in the negative direction indicates that the effect of *reading **Nigerian Newspaper messages on anti-corruption war*** on ***audiences' opinion on***

President Buhari's Change Mantra is higher among the low income earners.

The third hypothesis is also supported by the findings derived from the qualitative data of the two focus discussion groups. The few discussants who attributed their opinions to what they read in the newspapers were low income earners.

The answer to the fourth research question is glaring in Table 1 as well as in this section of the data analysis. The fourth research question runs thus: Does *income level of audiences* moderate the significant relationship between *reading Nigerian Newspapers' messages on anti-corruption war* and *audiences' opinion on President Buhari's Change Mantra*? The statistically significant level of the interaction variable relationship with the dependent variable is .005, indicating that the income level of audiences is a moderating factor in the relationship between *reading Nigerian Newspapers' messages on anti-corruption war* and *audiences' opinion on President Buhari's Change Mantra*. That is to say that the initially significant relationship between *reading Nigerian Newspapers' messages on anti-corruption,* as an independent variable*,* and *audiences' opinion on President Buhari's Change Mantra*, as the outcome variable has some connection with the audiences' level of income.

Testing the Fourth Hypothesis

H_4: ***Income level of audiences*** will moderate relationship between ***Viewing Nigerian TV channels messages on anti-corruption*** and ***audiences' opinion on President Buhari's Change Mantra*** such that the effect will be higher among the low income groups. That is, Beta from the interaction terms will be negative.

The fourth hypothesis is not supported despite the correlation of the second interaction variable (i.e. ***viewing Nigerian TV channels' messages on anti-corruption war*** × ***Income level of audiences***) with the dependent measure (i.e.

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audiences' opinion on President Buhari's Change Mantra) because the Beta coefficient for the interaction variable tilts towards the positive direction (β=.36, p<.005). The Beta coefficient moving in the positive direction suggests that effect of ***viewing Nigerian TV channels' messages on anti-corruption war*** is higher among high income earners; not on ***the*** low income earners.

The fourth hypothesis is not also supported by the findings derived from the qualitative data of the two focus discussion groups because most of the discussants that attributed their opinions to what they watch on television were high income earners.

The answer to the fifth research question is also located in Table 1. The fourth research question says: Does income level of audiences moderate the significant relationship between viewing Nigerian TV channels' messages on anti-corruption war and audiences' opinion on President Buhari's Change Mantra to the extent that the effect will be higher among the low income groups?

The answer to the fifth research question is clearly provided in the fact that the regression analysis revealed higher level of statistical significance at 0.005 for association between the second interaction variable and the dependent measure. This suggests that that the original significant relationship between ***viewing Nigerian TV channels' messages on anti-corruption war*** as an independent variable, and ***audiences' opinion on President Buhari's Change Mantra***, as the outcome variable has some connection with the audiences' level of income.

With the fourth hypothesis not supported, the answer to the fifth research question includes the fact that the low income earners were not as affected by the television messages on the anti-graft efforts made by the Buhari's democratic government as the high income earners were highly influenced by TV messages.

Discussion of Findings and Conclusion

There is no doubt that the news media constitute a large proportion in the field of what influence people's opinion formation on issues of national interest. Yet the media do not go it alone in such business; other factors also play some roles. One of the major variables that predict what people say on issues is immediate social circles to which they belong. This has been confirmed in the literature of communication and public opinion research (See Noelle- Neumann, 1993).

The spiral of silence seems to take effect at the instance of controversial issues because the side of an issue that attracts the majority of people most of the time becomes the overriding opinion. This is what took shape in the case of the people's opinion on the President Buhari's change mantra agenda against the backdrop of how the news media reported the numerous financial crimes committed by top public officials in the past and present democratic regimes as well as how the criminal activities have been discussed in different settings of socialization. This observation is more revealing in the findings of this study: that reading Nigerian Newspaper messages on anti-corruption war is a predictor of audiences' opinion on President Buhari's Change Mantra; that viewing Nigerian TV channels' messages on anti-corruption war is also another predictor of audiences' opinion on President Buhari's Change Mantra; and that immediate social circles of audiences is a key determiner of audiences' opinion on President Buhari's Change Mantra. Definitely all the three variables are strong in their ability to tell us that graft is a serious and endemic problem that has to be fought to its knees.

However, the revelation that media (both TV and newspapers) reports on anti-graft war significantly predicted audiences' opinion on President Buhari's Change Mantra is in disagreement with an earlier finding submitted by Eveland, McLeod and Signorelli (2001) that very few people expressed strong support for the Gulf War in 1991 in contrast to the strong

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consensus that the media reported in support of the war. In other words, opinion of the larger percentage of the respondents on the war was totally different from that which was widely circulated by the media (Eveland, McLeod & Signorelli, 2001).

Similar, divergent finding is located in the US-based research conducted by Shoemaker, Breen and Stamp (2000) that there is no significant correlation between media exposure and audiences' willingness to express their opinion on right to abortion, a legally sensitive issue. Yet the researchers indicated media exposure as a strong antecedent variable in the path analysis findings. They reported that media exposure is a factor, along with other variables such as fear of negative evaluation, in the significant correlation that is established between the public opinion variable and the respondents' willingness to express an opinion about abortion (Shoemaker, Breen & Stamp, 2000).

Unlike media exposure's problematic situation with audiences' willingness to express opinion, immediate social circle is strongly indicated as a significant predictor of the dependent variable. The significant correlation between the predictor and the outcome variable indicated in the current study can be said to have emerged to support existing findings. Specifically the current finding validates the finding of Shoemaker, Breen and Stamp (2000) which specifies that the people's perception of the predominant opinion is positively related to their willingness to express their opinions on the right to abortion as a sensitive issue.

Notwithstanding, the hybrid method of data collection for this study, it has some limitations. The mixed methods of data collection and data analysis belong to the category of the *within method* since both the quantitative and qualitative data were collected from people. A future research can always take the *across method* approach to data gathering. For instance, cross sectional survey of a social setting could be combined with content analysis of the news media in order to compare what the people say with some exact media messages reported (See

Tashakori & Teddies, 2007). One of the limitations that have to be compensated for is the fact that students were the major respondents for the quantitative research. A future study can always go outside the academia for new data on the theme of this research.

On the whole, the theme of this study is a subject matter of national concern that has to be expanded in scope with variables of interests that can explain how the new media works with the social circles of audiences to shape public opinions on matters that affect both government and masses.

Table 1: Regression Analysis Indicating Impact of Control and Predictor Variables on Audiences' Opinion on President Buhari's Change Mantra

Independent Variables	Dependent Variable Audiences' opinion on President Buhari's Change Mantra (N=326)	
	β^a	Incremental R^2(%)
Block 1		
Gender	-.14*	
Age-Group	-.05	
Geo-political zones	-.26*	31.5**
Block 2 *Reading Nigerian newspaper messages on anti-corruption war*	.14*	2.2*
Block 3 *Viewing Nigerian TV channels' messages on anti-corruption war*	.19*	3.1**

Block 4 *Immediate social circles of the audiences*.	-.17*	2.6*
Block 5 *Reading Nigerian Newspaper messages on anti-corruption war× Income level of audiences*	-.32**	3.5**
Block 6 *ViewingNigerian TV channels' messages on anti-corruption war × Income level of audiences*	.36**	3.8**
Total Incremental R (%)		15.0***

***p ≤ . 001
**P ≤ .005
*p ≤ .05
[a]Finalized Beta Coefficients

Table 2 Frequency Distribution of Audience across News Media of Choice

Mass Media	Frequency	%	Valid %	Cumulative %
Guardian	42	12.8	13	13
The Nation	51	15.6	16	29
Punch	40	12.2	12	41
NTA	75	23.0	23	64
AIT	60	18.4	18	82
Channel TV	58	17.7	18	**100**
Total	**326**	**100**	**100**	

Table 3 Frequency Distribution of Audience across Media Messages of Choice

Media Messages	Frequency	%	Valid %	Cumulative %
News	50	15.3	15	15
Opinion articles	43	13.1	13	28
Editorials	20	6.1	6	34
Interview	20	6.1	6	40
Current Affairs	51	15.6	16	56
TV News	63	19.3	19	75
Discussion programmes	48	14.7	15	90
Public Affairs	31	9.5	10	**100**
Total	**326**	**100**	**100**	

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