

Selected Nigerian Newspapers' Coverage of President Buhari's Health Saga

AGUDOSY, Fabian I.

Department of Mass Communication
Chukwuemeka Odumegwu Ojukwu University, Anambra State
&

IKEGBUNAM, Peter C.

Department of Mass Communication
Chukwuemeka Odumegwu Ojukwu University, Anambra State
&

OBIAKOR, Casmir U.

Department of Mass Communication
Chukwuemeka Odumegwu Ojukwu University, Anambra State

Abstract

This paper examines Nigeria newspapers coverage of President Buhari's ill-health and the political saga that followed his medical trip abroad. The measurable objectives of the study are to ascertain whether the selected newspapers gave prominence to their coverage, the direction of coverage, the dominant media frame used in the coverage and the dominant media theme used in the coverage. The study adopted the content analysis method to analyse the manifest contents of the selected newspapers coverage of the President's ill-health saga. The study was based on the social responsibility and framing theories of mass communication. Findings show that the Newspapers gave relative prominence to the President's ill-health saga. The findings also revealed that rather than probe the government on the bad condition of the health institutions in Nigeria, the media were busy wiping up political and ethnic sentiments in their coverage. Based on the findings of the study, it is recommended that the media should strive to focus its attention on primary concerns of the society and downplay playing politics with critical institutions of the State like the health sector.

Keywords: Health, Framing, Coverage, Social responsibility, Newspapers, Buhari.

Introduction

In the annals of Nigeria's political history, the presidential seat had for the second time made vacant for different health reasons of the principal occupants. The ill-health of Late President Umaru Musa Yar' Adua in 2009 set the history in motion where the presidency was forced to battle with rhetoric on how to convince the federation on believing that all is well with the president. Once again, the current health status of President Muhammadu Buhari generated much rumbles in the press and political circles in Nigeria to the extent that it became quite clear that the unity of the country was being threatened following the height of political and religious crisis that characterise the country's political history. The hospitalisation of a sitting president should, no doubt, be headline news material anywhere in the world, but it became worrisome and strange with the level of undue sensational exaggeration, politicisation and controversy making round over Buhari's 9th February, 2017 journey to London (Alabi, 2010, p.19).

President Buhari left Nigeria on February 9 and was later reported to be receiving treatment for pericarditis at a hospital in London. The absence of the president of any nation in the words of McConnell (2010, p.14) is capable of creating a dangerous power vacuum in the nation. General Muhammadu Buhari was the military head of state in 1983-85 and currently the 15th head of state sworn in on May 29th 2015 as President and Commander in Chief of the Nigerian Armed Forces. He emerged the president under the platform of All Progressive Congress (APC). At the time of his nomination, he was an obscure figure on the national stage. He was described as a 'Messiah' that can save the country from the shackles of corruption which has eaten deep into the fabrics of the citizens of the state.

On assumption of office as the president, the lingering health challenges started cropping up one after another. This health issues and subsequent economic recession in the land paved way for some level of hatred resulting from the feeling of disappointment among the people who may have felt that the president had failed to address the problem facing the country.

Following what happened in the Yar'Adua health saga in 2009, Nigerians and the world at large were eager to know the health status of the president. The mainstream media cannot afford to be silent on this issue of the president's health given their role as the fourth estate of the realm. In his study, titled "A Cabalised Regime: Neo-patrimonialism, President Yar'adua's Health crisis and Nigeria's Democracy" Omotola (2011), concentrated on much on the constitutional crisis occasioned by the president's absence in the country. The study analysed President Yar'Adua's health crisis, defined not only in medical terms, but also the "cabalic" politicisation of his unconstitutional absence from duty, and the attendant unconstitutional efforts to sustain an absentee presidency (Omotola, 2011).

The author states that these efforts were sustained through lies, propaganda, threats and constant violations of the constitution, which refreshed the centrifugal

tendencies of the country to a dizzying height. The study also evaluates the role of various actors in the management and mismanagement of the crisis. The findings illuminate the complexity of democratic transitions, showing simultaneously the reality and limits of neo-patrimonialism under a hybrid regime. The author submits that the important lesson is that in the face of regime threatening development as the case illustrated here, a vibrant and united civil society can make a significant difference. This cannot be without a vibrant media. This assertion subjects the media to responsibility question and justifies the assertion in Ndolo (2006) when he argues that any country that fails to meet its population's demand should blame the media for such failure.

In another study, Olorede, Oyewole and Azeez (2013) used the content analysis research method and social responsibility theory of the press to examine the Press Reportage of President Yar'Adua's Ill-health. The major concern of the study was to find out whether there was any relationship between the newspaper coverage of this issue and public perception of it. It was found that the Nigerian press demanded a handing over of government from President Yar'Adua to his vice president and that view as held in the media reflected among the people's perception of Yar'Adua's health and leadership of the country (Olorede, Oyewole and Azeez, 2013). It was also inferred that the newspapers coverage of the issue with their use of banner headlines and image frame through the use of pale-looking photographs, was proportional to the perception held by the public about it.

In another study on Nigerian Newspapers Coverage of the 78 Days Presidential Power Vacuum Crisis under President Umaru Yar'adua, Ngwu and Ekwe (2015) sought to investigate the kind of coverage newspapers in Nigeria gave the power vacuum crisis during Yar'Adua's tenure in order to establish whether they (newspapers), indeed, manipulated events during those long 78 days. In carrying out this study, four national dailies (*The Guardian, Daily Sun, New Nigerian and Daily Trust Newspapers*), were used. The findings from the study revealed that Nigerian newspapers gave prominence to the coverage of the presidential power vacuum crisis. The results also showed that the issue was adequately covered using more of positive direction. However, it was also discovered that Nigerian newspapers frequently covered the power lacuna in their reports which were influenced by regional and ownership factors. Based on these, it was recommended that ownership and regional affiliations should not impact on media reports. And that the media should provide leadership in times of national conflict by setting and consolidating agenda.

The study failed to recognise the health plight of the teaming Nigerian citizens who have no access to foreign countries for medical attention when the need be. They dwell on trivialities among media propaganda and manipulation of contents to suit their various interests. In view of this fact, the current study becomes unique in the sense that it investigates how the media reported the President's action of

travelling abroad during health challenges while bearing in mind the situation of the citizens who cannot afford the same means for their health conditions in this country. Unfortunately, the previous study did not see reason for the media to probe the federal government of the federation on the position of the country's health institution. This is the gap the current study set to fill.

Our argument therefore is that, it is the responsibility of the press to inform and educate the people on the health status of the president in a situation like this. In the words of Baran (2000, p. 4), "Social Responsibility Theory" challenges media professionals' ingenuity to develop new ways of serving their communities. They argue further that "it encouraged media operators to see themselves as front-line participants in the battle to preserve democracy in a world drifting inexorably towards totalitarianism" (Nwabueze, 2012; Nwachukwu, 2010, p.94; Ekeli, 2008, p. 338). To them, by helping pluralistic groups, the media were building a wall to protect democracy from external and internal foes thereby providing the public with the right information about their government as partners in democratic progress (Adeyanju, 2013).

The press is an important institution in every human society. They perform many functions, both for individuals and for the society. Citing Okunna (1999), Ngwu and Ekwe (2015) state that the media inform, entertain, educate, promote culture, integrate people, serve as a forum for public debates and discussions, motivate and mobilise people for informed decision making on salient issues in a society.

Public perception of issues and events in any given society is largely shaped by the media. The fact that certain issues are covered by the media gives credibility and credence to such issues, and further moves such issues from media agenda to public agenda (Nwabueze and Edegoh, 2010; Owuamalam, 2016). Pietikainen (2005) cited in Nwabueze and Edegoh (2010, p. 113) buttresses the power of the media to shape public opinion and perception of events when he observes that "news is one of the most influential public spaces of contemporary society, perceived as offering trustworthy and accurate stories about the world, its events and people". The mass media do not only set the agenda for public discussion through frequent and prominent coverage of issues; they also frame the agenda through the use of language, words, captions, specific photographs, and story angles on the president's health.

According to Anaeto, Onabanjo, and Osifeso (2008, p. 89) "the agenda setting proposes that the facts which people know about public issues tend to be those which the mass media present to them." The state further that the significance which they (people) ascribe to the same issues tend to be proportionate to the amount of attention given to such issues in the media. Framing of news, according to McQuail (2010, p. 379), is "a way of giving some overall interpretation to isolated items of fact". Just as the media determine what dominates public discussion through priority

and frequency of coverage of an issue; they further determine how they set agenda or how topic should be viewed. News presentation with specific choice of words or from specific perspectives or angles plays instrumental role in agenda setting and news framing. Enough evidence exists that the health sector in Nigeria has suffered dramatically over the years and Nigerian leaders are being moved abroad from time to time for treatment of different ailments. The sudden vacation by the president on health issue is one of the cases in this respect. Against this background, the study examined how the media fared in the coverage of the health condition of the president.

Statement of the Problem

It is a common saying that health is wealth. This underscores the primacy of sound health in one's life. The ill-health of President Buhari, which took him out of the country for more than four months, gradually resulted into chaotic political crisis. The import of the frequent medical trips abroad by Nigerian leaders is a result of the fact that the country lacks standard hospitals. This situation never bothered successive governments to seek for what to do to improve the situation but adopt the culture of travelling every now and then for medical attention. The leaders did not consider the fact that many other Nigerians are equally suffering from similar health problems they have. From the look of things, the media are expected to challenge the government of the federation on improving the hospital status in the country to be able to take care of the citizens' health situations. The Buhari health saga could have been a better opportunity for the media to expose the bad condition of Nigerian hospitals and see if the government can improve on them. The presidential private jet in London had acquired a huge debt that can build standard hospitals in Nigeria. This may have informed Alecks (2005, p.15) to conclude that "Good governance flourishes when there is good journalism. It was against this background that this study is set to examine newspaper coverage of the health situation of president Buhari.

Objectives of the Study

1. To ascertain whether the selected newspapers gave prominence to the coverage of President Buhari's health issue.
2. To find out the direction of coverage given to the issue in the selected newspapers.
3. To ascertain the dominant frame used in the coverage of President Buhari's health issue by the selected newspapers.
4. To ascertain the dominant media theme used in the coverage of President Buhari's health issue among selected newspapers.

Significance of the Study

This study is most likely to add to the available pool of literature on how the press covers political crisis in Nigeria. More importantly, since press coverage of presidential vacuum controversy has not received any serious attention in academic research in Nigeria as the Buhari's case is the second ever case of presidential health crisis of this magnitude, the outcome of this study will add to the available literature.

Theoretical Framework

Social Responsibility Theory of Mass Communication

This research is premised on social responsibility theory of the press which states that though the press should have freedom to carry out their duties, such duties should be guided by self-regulation and government regulations where necessary (Nwabueze, 2012). It is the responsibility of the press to stand for the people and ensure that the government looks after the public who they are there to serve. The health of the public and all Nigerian citizens is as important as that of the president. So, in situations like this, it would have been an opportunity for the press to expose the poor health facilities in Nigeria to the public while urging the government very seriously to effect changes.

Social responsibility, according to Ekele (2008, p. 338), originated from the moral philosophy that is directed at protecting the small, poor, the helpless and the underprivileged against the ominous power and high handedness of the big, the rich, powerful, and the very privileged. Whether the press has been able to portray their protection of public interest in the health trip of the president therefore makes this theory most appropriate for this study. Protection of the fundamental human rights to live of the citizens by exposing the governments display of irresponsibility in the health sector while quickly shuttling themselves outside to go and enjoy the medical facilities provided by another government for their own citizens is expected to be the front burner of media reportage of this issue of national concern. The media will, therefore, be failing in their responsibility if such issue of a national concern is not given adequate coverage in the media.

The Framing Theory of Mass Communication

Drawing from Scheufele & Iyengar (2010), the mass media promote a particular definition of an issue through selection, emphasis, exclusion, and elaboration. The onus here is how the selected media framed this all important trip to London in the current day recession in the country. It should be on record that travelling abroad for medical attention had been the culture in Nigeria. No press has ever taken time to analyse the reason for this. This is because, the style used in telling a given story or narrating a given episode subtly prepares the minds of its audience towards a predetermined direction personally designed or controlled by the personal desires of the story tellers who are the media. In keeping the gate, the media tell the public what

they want the public to know while those which they never wanted the public to know are buried uncovered. Could it be that the media did not remember that many other Nigerians are in need of serious medical attention abroad since we don't have any good hospital here or that the media decided to bury that angle for the sake of the government in power? Previous research has provided sufficient evidence that mass media have the power to select and “pack” the events, and thus, to influence the way audience/readers perceive the surrounding reality.

Framing is one of the media effects theories, largely used in analysing how the mass media filters information and, thus influence the public's reactions to a whole range of external stimuli (De Vreese, 2007). Through media portrayal of issues, public attitudes can be shaped towards the direction the media wanted (Azlan, 2012). At this point what the people knew and what their attitudes are play significant roles in determining the adoption of media frames about the President's health reports in a country that left greater percent of her citizens with very high mortality rate resulting from very poor health facilities.

Frames influence the perception of the news by readers, listeners and viewers (Adeniran, Hassan, Mikaila & Kayode (2015). The import of the above statement is that frames are the ways in which the media and media gatekeepers organise and present events and issues they cover, and the way the audience interprets what they are provided. In other words, since the media frame influences audience interpretation of messages, it is imperative to note that negative media framing of any issue will attract negative perception and interpretation of such issue by the audience. This is the base of our argument here. If the media should do the needful by making the general public to understand that the money the country have wasted just on the one live in London can built a better hospital in Nigeria to save thousands of other lives, the people will see beyond politics and media bias. Furthermore, Maher (2003) affirmed that framing implies relationship among elements in a message because those elements have been organised by the communicator rather than the reader.

It is very clear that the Nigerian state has very bad medical equipments and is running short of sophisticated equipment for the performance of serious medical operations. In the midst of this poor health facilities in the country, government officials have maintained regular foreign trips for themselves and their immediate family members leaving the rest of the citizens, whose taxes they are spending on the foreign trips, to die out of neglect and curable health situations. In a situation like this, the media are expected to paint a picture of gross irresponsibility on the part of the government to the people they are expected to protect. If this constant presidential travelling for medical attention and its activities receive negative media framing, the audience will perceive it from the negative sense and this will in turn make the government to try and do something for the benefit of all.

President Buhari's Health Trips to the United Kingdom

Since assumption of office as the President of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, President Buhari has taken several health trips abroad. In a statement, the presidential Senior Special Adviser on Media and Publicity, Femi Adesina, described his principal's ear infection as “persistent” (Sahara Reporters, 2016). On the 30th day of June 2016, the president left the country for London on his ear problem. This journey was reported to exceed the 10-day urgent trip to London to treat an ear infection. The reason for this, according Sahara Reporters, is because he also needs attention for “a terrible cough that has persisted longer than the ear infection” (Sahara reporters, 2016).

This reason accounted for his cancellation of his official visit to Lagos state and that of the Ogoni for the launch of a major clean-up campaign, and to Senegal for an ECOWAS engagement. It will be pertinent to recall that the president was reported earlier before his victory at the polls that his health is disrupting his campaign in south-south region of the country (Sahara Reporters, 2015). The media organisation cast the following headline as aftermath of a reported incident: “Buhari Denies Ill-health, Collapsing in Calabar”. This report was dismissed by one of his campaign aide who called it rumour propagated by the PDP-led government to malign their candidate. Health of political office holders is a matter of great interest to Nigerians after the passing away of a sitting president in 2010.

President Umaru Yaradua's death from an ill-health that was in existence before he ran for office caused a political crisis that suspended his party's rotational formula. Some analysts believe that the current crisis threatening the political fortunes of the ruling People's Democratic Party, PDP, stems from that incident. Earlier in January 2017, the president's health challenge visited again and he left for the UK again but not before his aides could not admit that he is not well. According to a report in the *Punch* (2017), the Presidency on Thursday insisted that despite the rumour doing the rounds on the President's state of health, the President is not ill. Against this information, the Nigerian Labour Congress asked Buhari to speak to Nigerians from UK, but Adesina insisted that Buhari was only in London, UK, for vacation and was not in any hospital. The Special Adviser to the President on Media and Publicity, Mr. Femi Adesina, this time said in an interview with CNBC Africa, which was monitored in Abuja, that Buhari could not be compelled to speak from the United Kingdom. This reaction made Nigerians to think that what happened in 2010 may have repeated itself again in less than 10 years.

In another headline titled “NLC asks Buhari to speak to Nigerians” Ozo-Eson, the Secretary General to the association said, “In the social media, stories circulate without confirmation; I think that the easiest way is to talk publicly to the nation because the citizens are concerned about their leaders' whereabouts. This report was later countered by daily trust newspaper in its front page story titled “LABOUR: We didn't demand Buhari to address the nation – NLC *Daily Trust*”

published on 30th day of January 2017. It is not by surprise that the nation's media did not look at the health issue of the president from the area that will benefit the population by encouraging the government to see the need for better healthcare facilities in Nigeria. Instead, they were busy going into politics and joining issues along the position of their various interests.

Roles of the Press in Nigerian Democratic Rule

Nigerian democracy like many other democratic systems was built on the freedom of the press. In the words of Curran (1996), cited in Olorede, Oyewole & Azeez (2013), classical liberal thought argues that the primary democratic role of the media is to act as a public watchdog overseeing the state. This watchdog role, according to him, is said to override in importance all other functions of the media, and to dictate the form in which the media should be organised. What is the stake of public health in the Nigerian media is now a million dollar question searching for an answer in the wake of the kind of coverage that was given to both the state of health of former president Late Musa Yar'Adua in 2010 and the current health challenges of President Buhari. If the president can travel abroad for health attention; can a poor man in the village do? Unfortunately, the media did not consider this case and this is a challenge to the responsibility role of the media.

The media of mass communication have, and can play great roles in the development of political and democratic ideals in developing countries including Nigeria. The media are multipliers of sources of knowledge, raise levels of resources of knowledge and levels of aspirations (Isola, 2008). As channels that disseminate contemporary ideas and refine traditional practices and values, Okoro (1995) as cited in (Isola, 2008, p. 121) affirms that the mass media assist in reshaping conflicting societal norms. He said: "The mass media are recognized as agents capable of instituting a level of enlightenment and uprightness needed to transform a society's social and political orientation". Isola (2008, p. 125) also states that: "The establishment, maintenance and fostering of an independent, pluralistic and free press is essential to the development and maintenance of democracy in a nation and for economic development." In an all round development plan, the health state of the people is expected to be of outmost priority to any sensitive government. Commenting further on Bussiek's submission, Isola (2008) states that journalists have to self – sensor themselves to ensure that democratic ideals are maintained and sustained. He says the mass media should cultivate and sustain a friendly attitude with a legitimate government and criticize when it is necessary while carrying out their watchdog functions. In Nigeria, the press seems to have forgotten their watchdog role and have all become praise singers and instrument of political survival and propaganda.

Nigerian Newspapers' Reportage of President Buhari's Health Saga vs Public Interest

The mass media, no doubt, are citizens' most important source of information during political crisis. Everyone expects the media to play key roles in resolving any political crisis that has the tendency to snowball into lawlessness or system collapse (Puglisi and Snyder, 2008, p. 1). This was the kind of role Nigerians and indeed the international community expected mass media institutions in Nigeria to play during the period of Buhari's medical exit from power. As is the practice round the world, the print media are expected to play more roles in situations like that, because of their elitist and detailed nature.

Literature shows that during the Yar'Adua's 78 days power vacuum; a lot of reports were put across to the audience by the various news organisations within and outside the country. Both broadcast and print media were awash with developments on the vacuum crisis. During this period, allegation was made by observers that the mass media, especially, the print were manipulating instead of managing the crisis (Umeh 2010, Bello, 2010 and Yakubu, 2010). The reason for this action of trying and or indulging in manipulation of truths to favour one side of the divide as earlier stated in the research problem which is the reason for which the media left what they are expected to do to serve the interest of the public but kept on publishing "paid stories". This is unprofessional, unethical and erodes the expected relationship that the media and the society shares.

To buttress this further, some of the newspapers headlines will be examined. Guardian newspaper in its front page banner headline published a story "No one can force Buhari to talk- Femi Adesina". This story contained the statements of the same person who initially denied that the president was not in London for medical purposes. In spite of the uncountable attempt by the media adviser to the president, Nigerians are still interested in his speech in the media. Unfortunately enough none of the reporters who carried this report asked him about the hospitals in Nigeria. *Daily Trust* in her own report published a story in counter to the publication already in *The Punch* Newspaper with a headline, "Buhari's health: President should address Nigerians, says NLC" in their counter media message to the Nigerian helpless and trapped citizens, *Daily Trust* newspaper through the secretary to NLC disowned the call for the president to speak to Nigerians. These and many more other trivial arguments flooded the media in a country whose 13th president died abroad as a result of poor medical facilities in the country within less than ten years and again their president is in another bad health state and was flown abroad for medical attention. Instead of addressing the state of Nigerian hospitals, our media were busy seeking favour from the people they are meant to watch as the society's eye. Unfortunately, these few media headlines have cast a view of what we are going to experience in the field. Publications of trivialities in place of probing the government for establishing better equipped hospitals in the country that can serve both the poor and rich, the privileged and the less privileged.

Method of Study

Content Analysis was adopted as a research method in this study. The study comprises of all editions of *Daily Sun, Daily Trust, the Punch, and Guardian* published from January to March, 2017 when the issue was hot in both mainstream and social media. The four newspapers were selected based on accessibility, wide circulation and geographical inclinations in the country. This makes a total of 90 editions each of the four selected newspapers. This means that the total number of newspapers issues under study were 360 editions published within the period of study. A total of 47 editions per newspaper were selected using Taro Yameni's sample size determination formulae.

Content analysis, according to Riffe, Lacy and Fico (2005, p.3) is “the systematic assignment of communication content to categories according to rules, and the analysis of relationships involving those categories using statistical methods. Under the consideration of framing theory, researchers are able to conduct content analysis by measuring clusters of manifest media contents to see how these are slanted in the newspapers by the reporters.

Considering the units of analysis, the researchers examined the placement of the stories; the direction of coverage; the frames of coverage and the themes dominant in the coverage of the issue under investigation. The researchers designed media frames based on the views expressed in the content under analysis. Using the same strategy, the researchers established the media themes from the structure and texture of the media content as observed in the sampled copies under study. Based on this very platform, the researchers considered the front, inside and back page stories, while the media frames used in the coverage are the blame, religious, responsibility and political frames. The reason for this is that the contents found in the sampled newspapers reflect the above frames as adopted in the study.

The direction of coverage of the activities in the media was examined using the slant of the contents as reported by the select newspapers concerning the health situation of the president. Finally, the researchers established ethnic theme, accountability theme, good governance and health themes. It is pertinent to state that the choice and or establishment of the frames and the themes used in this study were based on the heterogeneous nature of the country which had grossly infiltrated the media, hence, directing their means of framing issues of public concern. The coding sheet, however, was used as instrument to content analyse reports on the health trip of the president to London.

The sampling period for this study covers all the editions of the select newspapers published within the months of January, February and March, 2017. These months were also purposively selected given that this was the period the president left the country and the time he returned first before leaving for the second one. This study employed the purposive sampling technique which allows the researcher to purposively select the sample of the study based on an expected quality,

character or to select those which meet certain criteria in the phenomenon under study (Nwodu, 2017). The coding sheet however was used as instrument to content analyse reports on the health trip of the President to London. The measuring instrument meets a correlation coefficient of 0.75 to be accepted as valid and reliable for the study.

Method and Instrument of Data Collection

With respect to the research design adopted in this study, the most appropriate instrument for the collection of data is the coding system. Therefore, the manifest content of the selected newspapers were coded using coding sheet carefully constructed for this research. One major advantage of coding over all other means of data collection is its ability to translate field data into an easily understandable value or symbols representing specific attributes or given variables and indication (Uwakwe, 2005). The above instrument was used in the cause of generating data for this research.

Data Presentation and Analysis

Table 1 Prominence Attached to the Coverage of President Buhari's ill-health

Variables	<i>Daily Sun</i>	<i>Daily Trust</i>	<i>Punch</i>	<i>Guardian</i>	Freq	%
Front page	21	18	23	25	87	36%
Inside page	31	37	28	31	127	52%
Back page	15	10	3	0	28	12%
Total	67 (28%)	65 (27%)	54 (22%)	56 (23%)	242	100%

Source: Researcher's Content Analysis, 2018.

From the table above, it could be observed that a total of 242 items were published by the four selected national dailies. The implication of the above table is that the *Sun* newspaper controlled the greater percent of the total items published in the issue under study. The table equally revealed that the inside page stories are on the lead in the publication as observed in the study.

Table 2: Direction of Coverage of Buhari's ill health in the Newspapers

Variables	<i>Daily Sun</i>	<i>Daily Trust</i>	<i>Punch</i>	<i>Guardian</i>	Freq	%
Positive	21	18	23	25	87	36%
Neutral	31	37	28	31	127	52%
Negative	15	10	3	0	28	12%
Total	67 (28%)	65 (27%)	54 (22%)	56 (23%)	242	100%

Source: Researcher's Content Analysis, 2018.

Table 2 above revealed that of the 242 items published, 127 items accounting for 52 percent were neutral, 87 accounting for 36 percent are positive while the remaining 28 items accounting for only 12 percent. The fear of being arrested by the police or DSS forced the media to serve as praise singers to the government while neglecting the public interest.

Table 3: The media frames used in the coverage of Buhari's ill health in the Newspapers

Variable	<i>Daily Sun</i>	<i>Daily Trust</i>	<i>Punch</i>	<i>Guardian</i>	Freq	%
Blame frame	2	3	3	4	12	4.9
Responsibility frame	1	0	1	4	6	2.4
Political frame	54	48	23	34	159	65.7
Religious frame	10	14	27	14	65	26.8
Total	67 (28%)	65 (27%)	54 (22%)	56 (23%)	242	100

Source: Researcher's Content Analysis, 2018

Contents that challenge the government with their inability to establish sound health institutions in the country to take care of the poor and the rich, the citizens and those in controls of public offices are classified as Blame frame. Contents that view the provision of health institutions as a serious responsibility of the government and questions why the president should be flown abroad for medical treatment are classified as responsibility frames. In the same manner, media contents found to be a reaction or reflection of the political divides in the country are seen as political frame while the contents which exposes the religious divides of the country are classified as religious frame.

Table 3 above, demonstrated that of the 242 items observed as published in the selected newspapers, a whole of 159 items accounting for 65.7 are on political frame with Responsibility frame came last in the table with a total of 6 items accounting for only 2.4 percent of the items published. This demonstrated that the media did not pay attention to responsibility frame in their coverage of the ill health of the President; rather, they are busy joining political arguments and supporting their political divides with little attention to humanitarian role.

Table 4: The media frames used in the coverage of Buhari's ill health in the Newspapers

Variable	Daily Sun	Daily Trust	Punch	Guardian	Freq	%
Health theme	11	10	12	14	47	19.4
Good governance	0	4	1	1	6	2.4
Ethnic theme	39	27	23	20	109	45.0
Accountability	17	24	18	21	80	33.0
Total	67 (28%)	65 (27%)	54 (22%)	56 (23%)	242	100

Source: Researcher's Content Analysis, 2018

On the above table, the contents that are expressing the need for sound good health of not only the president but of all Nigerians are classified as health theme while those that expresses ethnic inclination of the persona in the news is seen as ethnic theme. Meanwhile the manifest contents of the newspapers that points at the need for effective good governance and sustenance of democracy are seen as good governance theme with those looking at the government as lacking in caring for themselves rather the people are seen as accountability theme.

The information in table 3 above demonstrated that of the 242 items observed as published in the selected newspapers, a whole of 109 items accounting for 45.0 percent are on ethnic theme followed by 80 other items accounting for 33.0 percent which were based on accountability theme. While 47 items accounting for 19.4 percent are based on health theme. The remaining 6 items accounting for 2.4 percent of the items were based on good governance. This demonstrated that the dominant media theme used in the coverage is the ethnic theme. The import of this research outcome is that the media in Nigeria pay higher attention to ethnic divides than good governance and accountability of public office holders.

Discussion of Findings

Considering the first research question which sought to ascertain if the media gave prominence to their coverage of the President Bukhara's health visit to London, it was found that though greater percent of the publications were buried inside the pages, the media accorded prominence to the health condition of the president. Data from table two show that front and back page stories controlled 48 percent of the total publication. This is enough to show for the agenda setting function of the media.

This finding agrees with the position held in Nwabueze (2011, p. 113) that the media pay attention to what they wanted by publishing events in their focal points. Moreover, the findings equally lends credence to the position of the proponents of the agenda setting theory of mass communication which in the words of Miller (2002), posits that the media lead the public in assigning relative importance to various public

issues by positioning them in focal points for public to see the level of importance it commands in the media. The use of focal points in the coverage of the health issues of the President makes it a matter of public concern among Nigerians. Through this way, the issue transcends into public discuss and form public agenda.

On the direction of stories, it was observed that the dominant media direction of coverage is neutral. Equally it is pertinent to state categorically, that the media fear of being arrested by DSS and political affiliation of the media organisations influence their coverage of President's health issue. Looking at table two above, all the selected newspapers published more of neutral and favourable stories on the president's health visit to London and none of the four newspapers looked at the condition of Nigerian health institutions. This finding negates the position of the social responsibility theory of the press which in the words of Ekeli (2008, p.338) originated from the moral philosophy that is directed at protecting the small, poor, the helpless and the underprivileged against the ominous power and high handedness of the big, the rich, powerful, and the very privileged. The reason for this kind of publication cannot be divorced from fear of being punished and the media organisations need to remain in good books of the government. Designing news stories to reflect a neutral ground or worse still a positive one in a country that cannot boast of one single health institution that is up to standard is act of negligence to public health and of cowardice to the media.

As the reports have now been, media framing and agenda setting in the media on issues command public perception of an issue under study. In respect to this, Waller and Conaway (2011) have found correlations between low levels of political affiliation of media organisations, on one hand, and the predisposition frame or set agenda on issues of public concern, on the other hand. Significantly, Adair (2007) and Mac Sheoin (2013) had shown that, in general, the public is more affected by negative frames than by the positive ones. In line with the view above, it is pertinent to state that since the media coverage of the comment of the president have reflected negative slant, it will be possible that it will encourage negative perception among readers

On the third research question which sought to ascertain the dominant media frames used in the coverage of the health issue of President, it was found that media coverage of the President's health issue was dominated by political frame which acceding to the data in table 3 controlled 159 items out of the 242 items published. By this figure, political frame accounted for 65.7 percent of the total publications. Framing the health issue of the President in this direction to a large extent shapes peoples understanding of the issue. This finding is in tandem with the position of framing theory of mass communication. The bases of this theory is that the media focuses attention on certain events and then places them within a field of meaning (Okugo, Onwukwe, Ihechu and Okereke, 2015) in which light, they want the people to understand it (Emphasis is mine).

This field of meaning can have some significance effects on the audience's

beliefs, attitudes and behaviours by conferring a particular (political) meaning or interpretation to the President's health issue. Scheufele and Tewksbury (2007); Oso (2006, p. 68) citing Tankard (1991, p.5) defines a media frame as the “the central organizing idea for news content that supplies a context and suggests what the issue is through the use of selection, emphasis, exclusion, and elaboration”. In this guise, framing President Buhari's health visit to London in the media politically as found in this research shows the level of partisanship among the media practitioners.

This finding confirms the previous allegations against the media by Gastil (2008) that Nigerian media participation in politics influences their coverage of issues in the country. Media framing and agenda-setting on issues of public concern command public perception of issues under study. In respect to this, Tewksbury and Scheufele (2009) have found correlations between low levels of political affiliation of media organisations, on one hand, and the predisposition to frame or set agenda on issues of public concern, on the other. Unfortunately, this shouldn't be so, if the media are respecting their social responsibility role to the society.

Considering the dominant media theme used in the coverage of the health issue of the president, it was discovered that Ethnic theme dominated media theme of the president's health visit to London. The selected media portrays the health visit to London paying little attention to accountability of the government. The reason for this may not be far from fear of being subjected to government black list and arrest by DSS. This finding is in tandem with the position of Adaja and Talabi (2017) when they argue that the media sometimes ignore responsibility for fear of the would-be outcome of their reports. Unfortunately, the researcher found through headline casting, that media organisation's political and ethnic inclinations influence the editorial policies of the practitioners there in. The number ethnic theme and accountability theme when compared with each other shows the level of politicisation of the media and compromising of public interest. The kinds of themes observed as used in table four cannot be divorced away from the political and ethnic inclination of the selected newspapers. From the above table, it is clear that the geographical inclination and affiliation of the newspaper organisations influence their framing of issues. This finding equally corroborates the allegations among media scholars that media practitioners involve in partisan politics and leave their social responsibilities (Coronel, 2009) to the public (SparkNotes LLC, 2017; Haifei, 2009).

Summary

A good look at the literature on media and government relationship as found in Gastil (2008) has shown that sometimes the media shy away from responsibilities when it concerns the government in power. It was as a result of this kind of unhealthy relationship between the watchdog and the government that this study was designed to examine how the media fared in their coverage of the health condition of the president and his travelling to London for medical attention where health institutions

are here in Nigeria. The study is therefore, a probe into the media responsibility of ensuring accountability through effective reporting of what the government ought to do for the people to encourage good healthcare for all and not for the privileged.

From this study, it has been clear that the Nigerian media dwells on trivialities while the main thing is left uncovered. From the information obtained from the four selected national dailies, no news item questions the state of health institutions in the country, rather they were all joining issues of political line up and ethnic responses while paying no attention to the poor men who may have been suffering from similar health condition which Nigerian health institutions cannot handle. It was observed that the media seems to lose focus on the welfare of the people whom it ought to represent.

Conclusion

Based on the findings, the researchers conclude that the media did not live up to social responsibility to the public by failing to issue reports on the situation of Nigerian health institutions. From the research objectives that guided the study, the researchers concluded that the mass media here-in this study represented by the select newspapers did not respect the responsibility of the government in providing good governance to the citizens but dwell on ethnic, political and religious divides which had caused the country a lot of damage and set back including sectarian crisis, secession and terrorism that threatens the peaceful co-existence of the country for decades now. The researchers also concluded that the media mostly issued neutral slant reports on the health situation of the president while political frame dominated the media framing of the issue under study. Meanwhile, the research finding revealed that the story were mostly covered using inside page stories.

Recommendations

From the findings above, the researchers recommended as follows:

First, the media should wake up and strive to use their reports to attract a responsible and accountable government for the country by placing their contents on the focal points of their newspapers and be reasonable to accommodate the interest of the public.

Second, the media should do away with politics and ethnic rivalry that influence their slant of coverage as well as influence their framing of issues of public concern.

Third, singing praises to the government should not be the bases for media reporting as doing so hides the government's inefficiencies and unaccountability to the people who the government is expected to provide for.

Finally, the media should frame health as not only important to those in power but also important to the masses. Media reporting should and must take this

perspective and ask the right questions. Why are government officials travelling abroad for medical treatment? Is this not an admittance of the failure of healthcare system in the country? This, we expect should be the media role in poking the government and getting them to act.

References

- Adair, N. (2007). *Political violence as understood within historically conditioned schemata: A case study of American media discourse on Chechen-led hostage crises*. Unpublished Thesis, University of Helsinki, Department of Political Science.
- Adaja, T and Talabi, F.O (2016). Investigative journalism and Nigeria's democratic challenges. *Journal Of Media And Communication Review*, 2 (1), 28-37.
- Adeniran, R., Hasan, S., Mikaila, A. & Kayode, J. (2015). Representation of children in the Nigerian news media. *The Nigerian Journal Of Communication*, 12 (1), 160-183.
- Adeyanju, A.M. (2013). Mass media and public opinion: Formation, process and uses. In P. Umaru, C. Nwabueze & I. Nsikak's (Eds.), *Politics, culture and the media in Nigeria*. (184 – 204). Lagos: Stirling Horden Publishers Ltd.
- Alecks, P. (2005). *Free expression*. USA: Pinoy Exchange Jimoh.
- Alibi, W. (2010). They all failed the people. *The Guardian* January 24.
- Anaeto, S. Onabanjo, S. and Osifeso, B. (2008). *Models and Theories of Communication*. Maryland: African Renaissance Books Incorporated.
- Arahgba, E., Soola, O., & Oso, L. (eds.) *Media Dialogue, Peace Building And Reconciliation: Conference Proceedings*. (pp 336-344). Ibadan: ACCE and Book Wright Nigeria.
- Azlan, A. (2012). Content analysis of crisis communicative strategies: Tunisian protest vs. anti-Mubarak protest. *International Journal of Human Sciences*. (9) 2, 571 - 586. Accessed online from www.j-humansciences.com/ojs/index.php/IJHS/article/view/1962/939, 28/6/2016
- Baran, S. J. (2004). *Introduction to mass communication*. New York: Mc raw Hills
- Bello, A. (2010). Nigerian media and sick president Yar'Adua. What are the frames? In M.N Adamu (Ed.) *Political developments in Nigeria democratic Journey*. Kano: Mailafia Press
- Cacciatore, M. A., Scheufele, D. A. and Iyengar, S. (2016). *The End of Framing as we Know it ... and the Future of Media Effects*. Mass Communication & Society Division of the Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication ISSN: 1520-5436 print=1532-7825 online DOI: 10.1080/15205436.2015.1068811
- Coronel, S. (2009). *Digging deeper*. New York: Columbia University.
- De Vreese, C. H., Peter, J. & Semetko, H. (2001). Framing politics at the launch of the Euro: A cross-national comparative study of frames in the news. *Political*
-

Communication, 18, 107-122.

- Ekeli, E. O. (2008). Mass media ethics, peace building and reconciliation. In Mojaye, E.M.E, Gastil, J. (2008). Political communication and deliberation. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, Inc.
- Griffin, E. M. (2000). *A first look at communication theory* (4th edition). Boston: McGraw-Hills.
- Mac Sheoin, T. (2013). Framing the movement, framing the protests: mass media coverage of the anti-globalisation movement a journal for and about social movements Special contribution Volume, 5 (1), 272 – 365.
- Maher, M. T. (2003). *Framing: An Emerging Paradigm of a Phase of Agenda Setting*. In S. D. Reese, Gandy, O. H. J. & Grant, A. E. (Eds.), *Framing Public Life: Perspectives on Media and Our Understanding of the Social World* (pp. 83- 95). Mahwah NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Nigeria.
- McConell, T. (2010, January 7). *Prove you are alive: Clamour for missing Nigerian leader to show his face*. The Times of London. Retrieved from www.timesonline.co.uk/tol/news/world.
- McQuail, D. (2010). *McQuails' mass communication Theory* (7th ed.). London: Sage publications.
- Ndolo, I. S. (2006). *Mass media system and society*. Rhyce Kerex publishers. Enugu.
- Ngwu, C. C. and Ekwe, O. (2015). Nigerian Newspapers Coverage of the 78 Days Presidential Power Vacuum Crisis under President Umaru Yar'adua: Managing or Manipulating the Outcome. *Global Journal of Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences* Vol.3, No.11, pp.101-127 2015 Published by European Centre for Research Training and Development UK (www.eajournals.org) DOI: 101 ISSN: 2052-6350(Print) ISSN: 2052-6369(Online)
- Nwabueze, C (2012) Evaluating the application of social responsibility theory in developing societies. In .N.T. Ekeanyanwu, S.N Ngoa & I: A Sobowale (@) critique and application of communication theories. Ota. Convent University Press.
- Nwabueze, C. & Edegoh, O. (2010). Framing the agenda: press coverage of the 2008 teachers' Strike in Nigeria. *Journal of Communication and Media Research*, 2(1), 113-120.
- Nwabueze, C. (2011). *Magazine and newspaper management and production: An introductory text*. Owerri: Top Shelve publishers.
- Nwachukwu, F. G. (2010). Corruption in the media: a focus on state owned media organizations in Nigeria. In Okon, G. B. & Udouo, A. (eds.) *political communication and Nigerian Democracy: A book of reading*. (PP 92-101). Port-Harcourt: Amethyst and Colleagues Publishers.
- Nwodu, L.C. (2017). (2nd ed.) *Research in communication and other behavioural sciences; principles, methods and issues*. Enugu: Rhyce Kerex.

- Olorede, J., Oyewole, A. & Azeez, L. (2013). Press Reportage of President Yar'Adua's Ill-health: A Study. *New Media and Mass Communication* www.iiste.org ISSN 2224-3267 (Paper) ISSN 2224-3275 (Online) Vol.9, 2013.
- Omotola, J.S. (2011). A Cabalised Regime: Neopatrimonialism, President Yar'adua's Health crisis and Nigeria's Democracy
- Oso, L. (2006). Framing of environment press coverage of an environmental problem. *The Nigerian Journal of Communication*, 4 (1), 66-77.
- Owuamalam, E.O (2016). Communication issues in public relations and advertising: *social, political and economic*. Owerri, Top Class Agency.
- Price, V. & Feldman, L. (2009). News and Politics. In R. Nabi & M.B. Oliver (Eds.), *The SAGE handbook of media processes and effects* (pp. 113-130). Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications, Inc.
- Puglisi, R. and Snyder, J. (2008). Media coverage of political scandals. *A working paper of National Bureau of Economic Research*. Retrieved 26 March 2012 from www.nber.org/papers/W14598. Renaissance Books Incorporated.
- Riffe, D., Lacy, S., Fico, F., (2005). *Analyzing Media Messages: using quantitative content analysis in research*. New Jersey: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Inc.
- Sahara Reporters (MAY 30, 2009). Umaru Yar`dua: Great Expectation, Disappointing Outcome -Nasir El-Rufai.
- Scheufele, D. A. & Iyengar, S. (2011). *The state of the framing research: A call for new directions*. Retrieved May 18, 2016 from <http://pcl.stanford.edu/.../2011/scheufele>
- Umeh, T. (2010). *Media framing of late president Yar'Adua's absence: The push for favorable public opinion*. An unpublished seminar paper presented at the Annual Conference of SIFE in Abuja.
- Waller, R. L., & Conaway, R. N. (2011). Framing and counterframing the issue of corporate social responsibility. *Journal Of Business Communication*, 48(1), 83-106.
- Yakubu, H. (2010). Media projection of sick leaders around the globe. *Journal of International Relations and Diplomacy*, 8 (2), 10-21.