Newspaper Framing of the 2019 Nigerian Presidential Election

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Abstract
This study was carried out to determine how Nigerian newspapers framed the 2019 presidential campaigns, using content analysis. Data were drawn from the editorial contents of four national newspapers (*Daily Trust, The Guardian, The Nation* and *The Punch*) published between November 19, 2018 (which officially marked the beginning of the presidential election campaigns) and February 21, 2019 (when the campaigns officially ended). Data analysis was descriptive using simple percentages. Findings indicated that the newspapers gave both frequent and prominent coverage to the presidential election. Expectedly, the two leading political parties –APC and PDP –dominated the campaign stories with the APC presidential candidate, Muhammadu Buhari featuring more than the PDP's candidate, Atiku Abubakar in a reflection of the Nigerian factor syndrome. Based on the findings, it was concluded that the position of the agenda setting, gatekeeping and framing theories which affirm the media's power in setting public agenda as well as shaping the tone and influencing the direction of public discourse and ultimately public opinion and action is validated. Among others, it was recommended that newspapers should improve on their performance in reporting elections, especially in the areas of issue-based report and according visibility to so-called smaller political parties and candidates. This way democracy is better enhanced through a more balanced public discourse.

Keywords: Nigerian Factor/Media Capture, News Framing, Media Capture, Election Coverage, Political Communication.

Introduction
Periodic elections constitute one of the cornerstones of a democracy. In Nigeria, just like in other climes, elections are part of the democratisation process. As a periodic

endeavour, elections constitute a critical segment of the institutional framework for actualising the essence of democracy (Klaus, 2020). The activities allow the people's input into choices about leaders, policies, and programmes. Although, elections alone do not make a democracy, they provide an avenue for orderly leadership succession, and a guarantee for legitimisation and political authority.

Politics in Nigeria is deeply rooted in ethnic, religious and regional allegiance owing to the intricate nature of the entire political structure which has over time resulted in weak political institutions with no clear-cut philosophies and ideologies. As an important part of the electioneering process, newspapers and other media genres play crucial role in shaping the chances of political candidates and the choices voters make. As such, there is no successful election campaign without the media. To that extent, media-politician's nexus has been described as "mutual dependence" (Hangali & Kriesi, 2008). In that sense, politicians' heavy reliance on the mass media and journalists to communicate with voters has become the staple method all over the world, including developing countries such as Nigeria. Political rallies, press conferences, and embedded journalism in respective political campaign structures are ways of ensuring a steady flow of strategic campaign messages, all designed to present arranged information into structured stories and frames. Jamieson & Waldman (2003) branded the press (comprising the journalistic and advertising operations) as storytellers, amateur psychologists, soothsayers, shapers of events, patriots, and custodians of facts. These characterisations project the press as a powerful instrument for influencing the public mind through the stories they choose to present and their strategies for delivering the messages.

The 2019 Nigerian presidential election campaign presents an opportunity to examine how the Nigerian press reported the election campaigns using the analytical tool of framing in news journalism. The goal is to examine the uses and abuses of communication media during the campaigns with the sole aim of contributing to a better understanding of political communication and democracy in Nigeria. Newspapers are considered important to this study because they offer more detailed analysis of election campaigns unlike the radio and television news written without depth. In many of the newspapers studied, more than five pages of newspaper reports were dedicated to the coverage of the presidential candidates of APC and PDP. The in-depth coverage of political events allows readers/electorate to internalise news content and guides them in making or reinforcing their voting decision.

Statement of the Problem

Although, media coverage of Nigerian election campaigns have been studied by various scholars, the existing studies have focused merely on intra-party strife and political conflicts (Amenaghawon & Salawu, 2020); voter turnouts in election (Adigun, 2020); foreign actors' involvement in national elections (Ekdale & Tully, 2019); public perception of the extent of free and fair access of candidates to the media (Esuh, 2008); professionalism and ethical issues around media conduct in elections (Oyesomi,

Salawu & Onyenankeya, 2019). However, there has not been any of the studies that employed mixed methods and with an emphasis on media framing and media capture, hence the need for this study. As stated earlier, the few studies that exist on media and election coverage in Nigeria are deficient in methodological grounding. Most of the aforementioned studies have either approached data collection quantitatively or qualitatively but rarely a combination of the two. The use of a mixed methods approach is therefore very rare, yet it provides more robust findings when rigorously applied in a research. Therefore, this particular study becomes significant in filling the existing gaps in approach to studying media framing of Nigerian election campaigns. This will add to the growing body of research on media and democracy in Nigeria/Africa and lay the necessary foundation in establishing authentic communication theories or paradigms that are founded on African communication practices, in this case, the concept of Nigerian factor/media capture.

Objectives of the Study
The research objectives were to:
1.   Examine the nature of media content for the 2019 presidential campaign coverage, especially the framing approaches adopted by journalists.
2.   Investigate if the nature of media content during the presidential campaign coverage reflects the Nigerian factor/media capture.
3.   Determine the possible relationship between media capture and nature of election coverage in the context of the 2019 presidential campaign in Nigeria.

The 2019 Nigerian Presidential Election in Perspective
Nigeria is the largest democracy in Africa and runs a presidential system of government. General elections are conducted every four years to elect the executive president, members of the bi-cameral National Assembly comprising of 109 senators and 360 representatives, state governors in 36 states and 991 State Houses of Assembly members. Nigeria is made up of 36 states, six geo-political zones, 8,809 political wards and 119,973 polling units (with additional 57,000 voting points created for the purpose of conducting the 2019 elections due to the increase in number of registered voters) (INEC, 2019).

The 2019 presidential election in Nigeria was the country's sixth since the military handed over power in 1999. With 75 political parties canvassing for the votes in the 2019 election–but the two main parties: All Progressives Congress (APC) and the Peoples' Democratic Party (PDP). The election was, therefore, historic and unique coming after the 2015 elections that was widely adjudged as the most credible and peaceful transition of government from a ruling party–PDP to the opposition party–APC without rancour and legal battles which have always been the case in previous elections. PDP has been in power since the beginning of the 4th republic and losing to APC without the anticipated violent conflict was unprecedented. Hence, the global community watched with keen interest and Nigerian citizens approached 2019 with

great expectations toward the consolidation of the country's fledgling democracy especially with the landmark success recorded in 2015. LeVan (2019) noted that evidence from 2015 presidential election is a pointer that the cynical disposition that characterised citizens' political participation in previous elections was changing. There was a great improvement in public participation in the electoral processes including increased participation in political discourses and turnout on the election date compared to what obtained in the 2011 elections.

Captured Media and Election News Framing
Although, the media play a crucial role in sustaining democracies, the economic literature has only lately started examining the news market. Fortunately, a body of research has discussed the role and the impacts of the media on political cum public outcomes (Prat & Strömberg, 2013; Sobbrio, 2013) in addition to "inquiring the existence of distortions in the market for news" (Drufuca, 2014, p. 2). As media organisations jostle to win more audiences by framing a news story in ways that could show obvious bias (media bias and slanting) others are prevented from independently carrying out their major task of information dissemination (that is, media capture). A combination of these factors can prevent the optimal functioning of the media market and news-making process and instead engender skewed political reportage and subsequent negative political consequence (Alesina, 1988).

Media capture suggests a situation where the media due to some vested interests are unable for function independently and optimally. Media capture leads to media bias. As a news slanting technique, scholarship on media bias has identified two major factors responsible for a bias in media reportage. They include supply and demand-motivated bias. The former emerges as a result of idiosyncratic inclinations of the actors involved in the news-making process or what Baron (2006) described as ideological bias. On the other hand, demand-driven bias occurs in equipoise because of the existing cognitive bias of the news audiences (Mullainathan & Shleifer, 2005; Chan & Suen, 2008) or simply as a result of reputational concerns orchestrated by mixed beliefs (Gentzkow & Shapiro, 2006).

The race for political positions does not begin and end with the open rivalry between the candidates, but extends to ''issues on information acquisition by the electorate (Drufuca, 2014, p.1). As such, the process of collecting and selecting political information by sources and when news is made available for the electorate are essential considerations that define the extent of media capturing. When faced with periods of uncertainty and indecision regarding the right candidates, the media play a significant role by making available or even withholding certain useful information that would guide the electorates in their decision-making. This is important because by learning more about the political candidates, voters would make informed decisions. The inability of most media organisations to exist without relying on the government and politicians has further added to the twist in media capturing by rent-seeking officials in Nigeria's heterogeneous and toxic political ecology. Besley & Prat's (2006)

argued that enticements to corruption reduce if there is a likelihood of being easily detected.

Framing in the context of this study is understood to mean the journalistic approach of including some aspects of an event in reporting it, while leaving out others. According to Jamieson & Waldman (2003, p. xiii), "the metaphor of a frame… describes the way information is arranged and packaged in news stories. The story's frame determines what information is included and what is ignored." Gandy (2001, p. 365) explained frames as mechanisms "used purposively to direct attention and then to guide the processing of information so that a preferred reading of the facts comes to dominate public understanding." Operationally, we determined the framing approaches by relying on the typology of news frames provided by Semetko & Valkenburg (2000) which comprised conflict, human interest, attribution of responsibility, morality, and economic consequences. Because of the peculiar nature of Nigerian political news, we shall add the "Nigerian Factor" frame to this typology to accommodate extraneous features not accounted for by the five standard categories. In Nigeria, empirical evidence establishing or refuting the existence of media capture is lacking or at best, sparse. Buoyed by the need to shrink this gap, this study beams an empirical spotlight into the 2019 presidential election in Nigeria and how media capture and 'Nigerian factor' may have shaped the media framing of the candidates and their political parties.

Empirical Literature

In their study which investigated the association between media framing of elections and electoral violence in Nigeria's fourth republic, Jinmi-Ahisu & Osah (2021) adopted a qualitative design to analyse *The Punch, This Day* and *The Guardian* newspapers. Findings showed that there was a direct link between media framing and electoral violence in Nigeria. The study by Elega, Oloyede & Özad (2021) focused on the foreign media coverage of Nigeria's 2019 general elections. A total of 135 news stories extracted from 10 international news sources were subjected to content analysis of news stories to assess the dominant frames that embodied by the coverage of the election. Findings showed that political system frame, human interest/people frame, and violence frame dominated the reports from these international news sources.

Oriola & Oluwakemi (2021) evaluated newspaper framing of the 2019 presidential election campaign in Nigeria. Straight news stories selected from 480 editions of *The Guardian, Daily Sun, The Punch, Vanguard* and *Nigerian Tribune* between November 18, 2018 and February 21, 2019 were analysed. Findings showed that the newspapers gave frequent and prominent coverage to the campaign, and that the ruling party and the major opposition party dominated the coverage. The campaign was largely presented using conflict frame especially within the context of the horserace between the APC and PDP. Adopting a narrative research design, Oluwaseun & Odebiyi (2021) studied newspaper coverage of the 2015 and 2019 presidential elections. Findings of analysis of content of *Vanguard Nigeria* and *Daily Trust* newspapers revealed that Nigerian newspapers focused on national unity, imminent

economic depression and the imperative of diversification of the economy, preparedness of INEC to conduct elections, competence of the presidential aspirants to fight corruption, pre-election violence, vote-buying, and use of divisive rhetoric by politicians. Although, it studied two election years, the study was limited by the number of newspapers it examined.

Moreover, Ntiwunka, Nwaodike & Kupoluyi (2020) studied the role of print media in the electoral process in Nigeria. The researchers adopted a mixed method which comprised content analysis, survey, observation and in-depth interview. Findings showed that print media contributed to creating better perception of the nation's electoral process by international observers. However, print media were found to have engaged in improper reportage and selective coverage wherein they failed to report actual happenings during elections as a result of undue influence by politicians and owners, hence misinforming the people. The study concluded that print media was critical to smooth electoral process during the period under study (1999 – 2019), despite challenges such as inadequate funding and non-adherence to professional ethics by some journalists. The study is robust in its findings given its rich methodological strength. Ikpegbu & Ihejirika (2020) focused on newspaper coverage of issue-based political statements and campaigns in Nigeria's electoral process from November 2018 to February 2019. The researchers carried out both quantitative and qualitative content analysis of *Vanguard* and *The Punch,* covering a total of 76 editions. Findings indicated that while the newspapers reported election stories related to national issues like restructuring, security, corruption, economy, and electricity, a greater number the stories reported involved statements that were not issue-based. In other words, the newspapers did not give adequate attention to those issues that would contribute positively to voter education.

Similarly, Oyesomi, Salawu & Onyenankeya (2019) evaluated newspapers' compliance with the code of conduct in their coverage of the 2015 elections as it concerned accuracy, balance and fairness. The researchers selected two national dailies – *The Punch* and *The Guardian* and employed quantitative method in analysing the content. Findings showed that there was 80 percent compliance level with the code of election coverage regarding accuracy and fairness, while the newspapers still had work to do concerning balance and citizen's participation. As the foregoing review demonstrates, researchers have focused on role of newspaper in covering elections in Nigeria, including the 2019 general elections. However, none of the reviewed studies examined this coverage from the perspective of media capture, which remains a serious variable in the press in developing countries like Nigeria where democratic institutions are still largely weak. This constituted the knowledge gap which the present study addressed.

Theoretical Framework
This paper was anchored on the assumptions of the framing and media capture theories.

Framing Theory: The idea of framing theory originated from the work of Gregory Bateson and was advanced by a sociologist-Erving Goffman in 1974 (Ardèvol-Abreu, 2015). The theory explains the mental schema through which individual's experiences are organised. In the context of journalism and communication studies, this theory refers to the approaches that journalists adopt in reporting news, including political events of elections. A large and growing body of research and knowledge on the media focuses on the concept of framing which has direct applications in many areas of practical communication, including election coverage. Journalists, advertising and public relations practitioners have much latitude in deciding how to position the subjects of their election communication from a framing perspective. Framing is one of the most relevant communication theories that can be applied in our Nigerian political context because it can explain media work by communication professionals as well as the various strategies that politicians and their handlers can use to get their messages across to their target publics.

Media Capture Theory

Media capture is an emerging theory in political communication scholarship. The theory originated from the idea of an economist, George Stigler to describe alliances that regulators form with entities they are meant to regulate (Schiffrin, 2021). This theory was popularised in the journalism and communication field through the work of a political scientist Alina Mungiu-Pippidi in 2008 "How Media and Politics Shape Each Other in the New Europe." The theory of media capture suggests that politicians or influencers use coercive (military/security clampdown, proscription) or subtle approaches through advertisement, bribery (brown envelope) to manipulate media content. In electioneering periods, politicians try to use the captured media to influence the electorate to vote in their favour. In this context, media capture comes in certain forms such as withholding of advertisement, torturing and maiming of journalists (Durante & Knight 2012, DellaVigna & Hermle 2017) and perhaps through bribery. We argue that media capture plays a huge role in how newspapers frame their stories. A captured media can only be used as an attack-dog against political opponents while suppressing negative stories about its backers.

Methodology

The researchers adopted content analysis as its method. The data for analysis came from 113 editorial contents of four national newspapers (*Daily Trust, The Guardian, The Nation and The Punch*) which are relevant to presidential election campaigns and published between November 19, 2018 (which officially marked the beginning of the presidential election campaigns) and February 21, 2019 (when the campaigns officially ended). A simple random sampling technique was adopted to generate one continuous week and one constructed week. This amounted to 14 editions for each newspaper and a total of 56 editions for the four newspapers combined and this constituted the sample size for this work. The duration of the continuous week was from December 10 to December 16, 2018, while the constructed week was as follows: December 2, 2018 (Sunday), December 3, 2018 (Monday), December 27, 2018 (Thursday), January 16,

2019 (Wednesday), February 9, 2019 (Saturday), February 12, 2019 (Tuesday), and February 22, 2019 (Friday).

Units of analysis were straight news, editorials, opinions/comments, letters-to-editor, features, and interviews. A coding sheet which captured the following content categories: story genre, nature of story, story placement, focus, direction, dominant political parties and dominant personality reported, campaign strategy, and dominant frame, was designed for data collection and was validated through inter-coder reliability tests with 87.5% level of agreement among two coders. A quantitative descriptive analysis was adopted for the data analysis using simple percentages. The data were presented in tables.

Data Presentation and Analysis

Table 1: Newspaper ID

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	*The Guardian*	26	23.0	23.0	23.0
	Daily Trust	23	20.4	20.4	43.4
	The Punch	30	26.5	26.5	69.9
	The Nation	34	30.1	30.1	100.0
	Total	**113**	**100.0**	**100.0**	

From table 1 above, majority of the stories that are related to the 2019 presidential election campaigns were contained in the *Nation* newspaper (30.1%) followed by the *Punch* newspaper (26.5%). *Daily Trust* newspaper had the least number of stories by 23 percent. The findings indicate that the two top national dailies in South-West Nigeria reported more on the presidential election campaigns. Also, newspaper from the South-South, *The Guardian* equally had more reports than the newspaper from the Northern part of Nigeria.

Table 2: Date and Months

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	November	1	.9	.9	.9
	December	75	66.4	66.4	67.3
	January	11	9.7	9.7	77.0
	February	26	23.0	23.0	100.0
	Total	**113**	**100.0**	**100.0**	

Table 2 presents data on the months of the election campaign stories' occurrence. As shown in the table, December, 2018 recorded the highest frequency of occurrence (66.4%); followed by the month of February, 2019 (23%). The implication of this finding could be explained from the fact that all party candidates, including the gubernatorial candidates, equally flagged-off their campaigns in the month of December 2019. These candidates used their various platforms to campaign vigorously for the presidential flag-bearers of their respective political parties. Surprisingly, the month of November, which was the official flag-off of the presidential campaigns

recorded an insignificant (0.9%) occurrence of campaign related reports, perhaps, it could be partly explained from the sampling procedure which featured more December issues in the sampling frame and partly from the point that campaigns were yet to gather momentum and that the various candidates at other cadres – gubernatorial, National Assemblies (Senate and House of Representatives) played a greater role in the entire campaign processes.

Table 3: Story Genre

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Straight news	79	69.9	69.9	69.9
	Editorial	1	.9	.9	70.8
	Opinion/comment	5	4.4	4.4	75.2
	Letters-to-Editor	1	.9	.9	76.1
	Features	11	9.7	9.7	85.8
	Interviews	3	2.7	2.7	88.5
	Can't Say	13	11.5	11.5	100.0
	Total	**113**	**100.0**	**100.0**	

Table 3 showed the story genre. Data from the table indicate that majority of the campaigns related reports were presented in the form of straight news (69.9%) across the various newspapers sampled. Reports that appeared in the form of features accounted for 9.7 percent of the entire campaign-related issues, while opinions/comments and interviews accounted for 4.4 percent and 2.7 percent of the total campaign-related issues respectively. The data indicate that none of the newspapers was significantly partisan in taking positions or campaigning for any of the presidential candidates. This is shown by the insignificant 0.9% of the reports that featured as editorials- newspaper's stand on any issue of public interest.

Table 4: Election or Non-election Story

		Frequency	**Percent**	**Valid Percent**	**Cumulative Percent**
Valid	Yes	99	87.6	87.6	87.6
	No	14	12.4	12.4	100.0
	Total	**113**	**100.0**	**100.0**	

Table 4 compares the frequency of reporting of election and non-election stories in the newspapers. The data indicate that majority of the reports (87.6%) were election-related as against 12.4% that were not. The implication of this is that the newspapers gave much frequent coverage to the 2019 elections. In other words, they featured it more regularly than other issues within the period under study.

Table 5: Story Topic/Subject

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Economy	6	5.3	5.3	5.3
	Politics	63	55.8	55.8	61.1
	Agriculture	2	1.8	1.8	62.8

Crime/Conflict/Security	10	8.8	8.8	71.7
All of the above	1	.9	.9	72.6
Other	31	27.4	27.4	100.0
Total	**113**	**100.0**	**100.0**	

Table 5 shows data on the major subject or topic of the campaign-related reports. From the data gathered, politics dominated as a key subject in the reports; in other words, majority of the reports, 55.8 percent centred on politics. While 8.8 percent and 5.3 percent focused on crime, conflict or security and economy respectively. Other topics including education, science and technology, sports and entertainment, health, etc. accounted for 27.4 percent of the total campaign-related reports across the sampled newspapers.

Table 6: Story Placement

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Front	30	26.5	26.5	26.5
	Editorial	3	2.7	2.7	29.2
	Other	80	70.8	70.8	100.0
	Total	113	100.0	100.0	

The data in table 6 above showed the level of prominence the newspapers attached to the presidential elections campaign reports. Findings indicated that majority (70.8%) of the campaign-related reports were buried on the inside pages of the newspapers. However, slightly more than one-quarter (26.5%) of the reports appeared on the front page. The editorial page accounted for 2.7 percent while there was no campaign-related report on the back page. However, the fact that there is one front page in every edition as against tens of inside pages means that only a very small proportion of a newspaper's daily reports can appear on front page. Hence, by placing more than one-quarter of the campaign-related stories on the front page whereas there are many other issues competing for the single front page on daily basis, the newspapers can be said to have accorded prominence to these reports.
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Table 7: Story Focus

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Issue based	28	24.8	24.8	24.8
	Non-issue based (horse-race)	60	53.1	53.1	77.9
	Other	25	22.1	22.1	100.0
	Total	**113**	**100.0**	**100.0**	

The data presented in table 7 sought to determine the nature of the campaign-related stories reported, if they were issue-based or mere horse-race. The findings revealed that majority of the reported campaign stories (53.1%) were non-issue-based or mere horse-race. While less than one quarter of the reports (24.8%) were issue-based. The data corroborates the findings in table 5 which showed that politics and politicking dominated in the campaign issues and were reported as such by the sampled

newspapers. Again, the findings corroborate O'Malley *et al*'s (2014) study which sees scenario as observed to be a common practice within the media-politician nexus. In this sense, campaigns are largely framed and covered as a game (horse-race) rather than a policy debate (issue-based).

Table 8: Story Direction

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Positive	41	36.3	36.3	36.3
	Negative	58	51.3	51.3	87.6
	Neutral/Balanced	12	10.6	10.6	98.2
	Can't say	2	1.8	1.8	100.0
	Total	113	100.0	100.0	

Table 8 presented data that also sought further details on the nature of the campaign-related stories reported in the newspapers. Similar to the findings in table 7, majority (51.3%) of the news reports were negative while 36.3 percent were positive. Only about 10.6 percent of the reports were presented in neutral/balanced format.

Table 9: Campaign Strategy

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Attacking mostly	43	38.1	38.1	38.1
	Defending mostly	26	23.0	23.0	61.1
	Neither attacking nor defending/balanced	44	38.9	38.9	100.0
	Total	113	100.0	100.0	

Table shows data on the dominant campaign strategy adopted by the two major political parties in focus– the APC and the PDP. The findings show that the reported strategy was mostly neutral/balanced (neither attacking nor defending) (38.9%) and mostly attacking (38.1%). While 23 percent on the other hand, was mostly defending either a particular candidate, party, or position.

Table 10: Dominant Political Party

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	APC	40	35.4	35.4	35.4
	PDP	32	28.3	28.3	63.7
	PDP & APC Equally	15	13.3	13.3	77.0
	No Party	21	18.6	18.6	95.6
	Other	5	4.4	4.4	100.0
	Total	113	100.0	100.0	

The data show that the dominant political party in the entire campaign reports was the All Progressives Congress (APC) (35.4%). The People's Democratic Party (PDP) accounted for about 28.3 percent of the total report, while 13.3 percent reported both

parties equally. However, a significant percentage (18.6%) centred on neither of the two dominant political parties.

Table 11: Dominant Personality

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Muhammadu Buhari	36	31.9	31.9	31.9
	Atiku Abubakar	27	23.9	23.9	55.8
	INEC Chairman/Officers	8	7.1	7.1	62.8
	Other People	24	21.2	21.2	84.1
	None (No Person).	18	15.9	15.9	100.0
	Total	113	100.0	100.0	

Data in table 11 above show that the dominant personality in the reported campaign stories was the APC's presidential candidate, Muhammadu Buhari which accounted for 31.9 percent of the total report. While the presidential candidate of the PDP, Atiku Abubakar, accounted for 23.9 percent of the reports. However, almost one-quarter of the reports (21.2%) focused on other personalities, other than the APC and PDP presidential candidates.

Table 12: Dominant Story Frame

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Conflict Frame	10	8.8	8.8	8.8
	Human Interest Frame	40	35.4	35.4	44.2
	Economic Consequence Frame	7	6.2	6.2	50.4
	Morality Frame	15	13.3	13.3	63.7
	Responsibility Frame	20	17.7	17.7	81.4
	Others	21	18.6	18.6	100.0
	Total	113	100.0	100.0	

The data presented in table 12 aimed at ascertaining the dominant story frame adopted by the sampled newspapers in reporting the campaigns. It was found that the human-interest frame which accounted for 35.4 percent of the reports dominated in the framing approach. In other words, majority of the reports emphasised the actions or planned actions of the dominant political parties and their candidates that gear towards better living conditions for the Nigerian citizens. On the other hand, 17.7 percent harped on the action or inactions of the opposition political party or its candidate that resulted in certain adverse consequences on the Nigeria citizens; thus, highlighting the responsibility frame. The morality frame accounted for 13.3 percent of the total reports, while conflict frame which emphasised the disagreements between the opposing parties accounted for 8.8 percent of the framing approach adopted by the sampled newspapers.

The dominance of human-interest frame could be viewed against the backdrop of the fact that discourses of leadership selection in Nigeria have, to a large extent, been dominated by quest to have leaders that will lift people out of party and generally improve living conditions.

Results further showed that none of the newspapers was significantly partisan by way of taking positions or campaigning for any of the presidential candidates. However, majority of the reported campaign stories were non-issue-based or mere horse-race. Notwithstanding, the papers were mostly neutral/balanced (neither attacking nor defending) (38.9%) and mostly attacking (38.1%) in their reportorial approach.

Discussion of Findings

This study examined the nature of media content for the 2019 presidential campaign coverage, especially the framing approaches adopted by journalists. As demonstrated in table 12, the dominant framing approaches adopted by newspapers to cover the 2019 presidential election was human interest. This finding is consistent with that of Elega, Oloyede & Özad (2021) which established that political and human-interest frames dominated the coverage of the 2019 general election in Nigeria. However, the current study focused entirely on the presidential election and not the broader context of general election that Elega and co explored. Again, our finding is unique because it explored the nature of this coverage from Nigerian newspapers unlike that of Elega and co which Oriola & Oluwakemi (2021); Ntiwunka *et al* (2020) which all reported a similar tendency. The implication of this pattern is that newspapers have over the years done well to regularly report elections as well as give them prominent treatment– two crucial variables in placing any issue in the public agenda (McQuail, 2010).

Similarly, the tendency of newspapers, as found in this study, to give dominant coverage to the two major contenders, Buhari and Atiku and their respective parties, APC and PDP, also reflected in previous studies by Oriola & Oluwakemi (2021). In fact, this is a pattern that has been observed the world over and it has been suggested in line with the argument of the media capture theory, that such approach to reportage project media alliances and contribute in increasing the dominance of already prominent candidate and party; thus, potentially relegating the less prominent candidates and parties to their disadvantaged position.

Furthermore, the finding that the newspapers reported campaign stories mainly within frames that were non-issue-based appears to be a recurring pattern in literature. As shown in table 7 which sought to determine the nature of the campaign-related stories reported in the context of issue-based or mere horse-race, the findings revealed that majority of the campaign stories were non-issue-based. The finding aligns with O'Malley *et al*'s (2014) study which sees scenario as observed to be a common practice within the media-politician nexus. In this context, campaigns are largely framed and covered as a game (horse-race), rather than a policy debate (issue-based) that would engender the emergence of the best contenders.

The data in tables 10 and 11 support the "media capture" principle and incumbency factor (Nigerian factor) as previously found by Drufuca (2014) and Besley & Prat (2006). In other words, Nigerian factor or the power of incumbency had a major influence in securing greater media attention and giving undue advantage to the ruling political party and its candidate. This demonstrates media capture as the newspapers failed to seize their social responsibility power to interrogate issues that would have given all candidates and political parties equal attention a level playing ground. This is also evident in similar findings by Ntiwunka *et al* (2020). Ikpegbu & Ihejirika (2020); Oyesomi *et al* (2019). These previous studies pointed to the fact that the newspapers showed some bias in their reportage and that their reportorial approach was significantly adverse (attacking) in nature. Media capture can be engineered by forces within and outside a political party or the media (Drufuca, 2014). For instance, ''in an electoral context where agents have common interests (media capture) may come from incumbent candidates trying to hide their true quality in order to be re-elected or it may come from the government trying to misreport the real value of public project in order to extract tangible rents'' (Drufuca, 2014, p. 2). To understand the possible relationship between media capture and nature of election coverage in the context of the 2019 presidential campaign in Nigeria, this study demonstrates that indeed, media capture largely shaped how the coverage of the election evolved. Media capture shapes political outcomes and distorts news in favour of a candidate or political party. A body of research has discussed the role and the impacts of the media on political cum public outcomes (Prat & Strömberg, 2013; Sobbrio, 2013) in addition to "inquiring the existence of distortions in the market for news" (Drufuca, 2014, p. 2).

The concern here is why the media function as both the provider of balanced and distorted news. In their quest to win more audiences by framing a news story in ways that show obvious bias (media bias and slanting), the media are sometimes coerced into servile partisanship. This is how media capture manifests, and it can engender a dangerous antecedent for skewed political news-making. A combination of these factors can prevent the optimal functioning of the media market and news-making process (Alesina, 1988). In all, findings of the present study in the main did not depart from findings of previous studies on related issue. This would suggest that newspapers in Nigeria have largely maintained similar approaches in the way they report elections in the country. This further suggests that the environmental circumstances that possibly condition how the press in Nigeria reports election have over the years remain largely the unchanging. Although, none of the newspapers declared open partisan support for a particular party or candidate, the majority of the reported campaign stories were non-issue-based or mere horse-race.

Conclusion
Findings of this study point to the fact that newspapers and media in general play an important role in setting the tone of public discourse. The frequent and prominent coverage accorded the presidential election by the newspapers under study resonates

with the fact that this election dominated public discussion during the period under reference. Furthermore, the two major political parties and candidates that dominated the newspaper pages ended up receiving the highest votes in the election. More significantly, the winning candidate got more newspaper coverage than the losing candidate. This could be linked to the incumbency advantage and other extraneous factors such as 'media capture' and 'Nigerian Factor.' In addition, the human-interest frame which emerged dominant in the reportage of the election corresponds with one of the most prominent issues of public discourse in Nigeria–ending of poverty and alleviation of human suffering in general in the country. All these tend to validate the position of the agenda setting, gatekeeping and framing theories which affirm the media's power in setting public agenda as well as shaping the tone and influencing the direction of public discourse and ultimately public opinion and action.

Recommendations
Based on the findings of the study, the following recommendations are made:

1. Newspapers should improve on their performance in reporting elections in the country, especially in the areas of issue-based report and according visibility to so-called smaller political parties and candidates. This way democracy is better enhanced through a more balanced public discourse.
2. There should be need for periodic review of newspapers' performance on election coverage. This may be done under the auspices of bodies like the Nigerian Union of Journalists (NUJ), Nigerian Guild of Editors (NGE), Nigerian Press Council (NPC), among others. The aim of such peer review will be to evaluate and improve professionalism and social responsibility in election reportage.
3. A repeat of this study using other newspapers different from those employed in this study may be necessary as a way of further validating the findings made here. Similarly, other media forms such as radio and television should also be subjected to this sort of study with a view to comparing findings.
4. A different approach in methodology may benefit further investigation of newspaper coverage 2019 presidential election. Hence, it is suggested that studies using textual analysis and/or critical discourse analysis (CDA) should be undertaken in this area with the view to investigating the language, underlying ideology and power dialectics that might have defined reportage of the election.

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