Newspaper Framing of Nigeria's Eight National Assembly

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Abstract

The manner of newspaper framing of the   National Assembly is essential in shaping public discourse and opinion. This study, thus, examined this issue with an emphasis on sources of stories cited, framing and frames used. A total of four newspapers namely the punch, Daily Sun, Nation and Leadership newspapers were used for this study. A self-developed code sheet was used to collect data for the study. The inter-coder reliability was determined with the use of Holstis Formula, and this yielded 092 which was considered high. The result showed the dominance of legislative sources. It was also found that the newspapers largely framed the National Assembly negatively. The result of the multiple regression analysis showed that both sources of stories and debate at the National Assembly significantly predict newspaper framing. The researcher recommends, among others, the need for newspapers to go beyond selfish frames and engage in advocacy journalism against selfish thinking among Nigerian legislatures.

Keywords: frame, National Assembly, newspaper and proceedings

Introduction

The eight National Assembly of the Federal Republic of Nigeria began on a very dramatic note when both the Senate and the House of Representatives elected their principal officers on 9th June 2015. That election produced Senator Bukola Saraki as Senate President with Ike Ekweremadu as his Deputy and Yakubu Dogara as the Speaker of the House of Representatives with Yusuf Sulaiman Lasun as his deputy. Before the election, the governing party, All Progressives Congress had endorsed Ahmed Lawal (the current Senate Leader) for Senate presidency and Femi Gbajabiamila (also the current House Leader) as the preferred candidate for the position of the Speaker. However, trouble started immediately after the election of the principal officers as factions emerged in both Chambers of the National Assembly. For example, in the Senate, there was a Senate Unit Unity Forum which was against the leadership of the Chamber and the Like Mind Senators which was in support of the leadership of the Chamber. There was a similar situation in the House of Representatives. These stormy beginning of the eight National Assembly has made it vulnerable to many crises some of which affect the well being of Nigerians. The media, as the watchdog of the society, has a critical role to play in reporting issues concerning the National Assembly.

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The news media, and more specifically print media, serve as useful sources of information and essential modes of communication. The media control much of what people understand of events that take place around the world on a daily basis. The way information is exchanged to its recipients comes through various forms of communication, all of which are framed to meet the goals of the providing source. (Cisse, 2012). In social theory, a 'frame' is made up of a schema of interpretation, a collection of anecdotes, and stereotypes that people rely on to understand and respond to events. In communication, framing defines how news media coverage can shape mass opinion by using these specific frameworks to help guide their reader in understanding the issue involved. Media framing describes the way in which information is presented to its audiences. Erving Goffman was the first to concentrate on framing as a form of communication and defined "framing" as a "schemata of interpretation" that enables individuals to "locate, perceive, identify and label" occurrences or life experiences (Goffman, 1974). Entman (1993) modernized this definition by specifying that "to frame a communicating text or message is to promote certain facets of a 'perceived reality' and make them more salient in such a way that endorses a specific problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation, and/or a treatment recommendation" (Entman, 1993, p. 51).

Framing is a tool used by media and politicians to make useful points that would direct their readers to a desired frame of mind. Frank Luntz was the first "professional pollster to systematically use the concept of framing as a campaign tool" (Scheufele & Tewksbury, 2007, p. 9) as advertised in his 222-page memo called "Language of the 21st century," which was sent to select members of the U.S. Congress with the distinct message: "It's not what you say, it´s how you say it" (Frank Luntz, in press). Luntz has researched Republican campaign messages and "distilled terms and phrases that resonated with specific interpretive schemas among audiences and therefore helped shift people's attitudes" (Scheufele & Tewksbury, 2007, p. 9). Media framing has a way of influencing the direction of public discourse. This reality makes framing of National Assembly proceedings very important. One of the essential considerations in media framing is the sources of stories. Scholars (e.g., Althaus 2003; Bennett 1990; Peer and Chestnut 1995; Zaller and Chiu 1996) say news sources provide any meaningful sort of monitoring over the actions of politicians. Fogarty (2012,p 275) sums the importance of sources in media reported thus: ''Sources matter as they are key actors in the production of the news product, and can introduce both intended and unintended bias.'' Fogarty argues that if sources "make the news" then knowledge of who they are and their motivations is critical for understanding both the content of news and how citizens come to understand political events, policy, and processes. In this study, therefore, attention was paid to how story sources predict framing. A study of media framing of the eight National Assembly is essential because it provides empirical evidence that could be used for studies regarding political communication as well as understanding the relationship between the media and the parliament. Such a study provides useful data for examining the role of the media in the promotion of good governance. Ashraf (2014) avers that the active and vigilant participation of mass media is critical in a democratic society. According to the scholar, it is an important assumption that the media speaks for the people, represents the interests of the society, and serves as a check on the government. Dunu (2013) argues that media's potential to contribute to good governance depends on the extent the media reflect and enforce the principles of good governance as an institution. The argument of Dunu is essential to the current study because the media have the potentials to promote good governance through its framing of the National Assembly. This is more so that the

National Assembly is one of the three arms of government that could deliver good governance to the masses. Therefore, this study examined media framing of the eight National Assembly of the Federal Republic of Nigeria.

Statement of the Problem

Since the inauguration of Nigeria's eight National Assembly on 9th June 2015, there have been different cases of internal wrangling that have resulted to the suspension of some parliamentarians. Some disgruntled members have also taken the Assembly to court. There have also been cases of budget padding in the eight Assembly. There are also cases of executive-legislative face-off as exemplified in the Election Reordering Bill as well as the confirmation of the acting Chairman of the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC) Mr Ibrahim Magu. These issues are fundamental and the way the newspapers frame them is capable of contributing to public understanding and eventually their opinions about same. Therefore, media sources of source such stories, the frames used a well as presenting of squabbles in the eight National Assembly is essential and worthy of scholarly inquiry.

Objectives of the Study

The general objective of this study is to examine newspaper framing of the Eight National Assembly . Specifically, the study seeks to achieve the following

- To determine newspapers' story sources on Nigeria's eight National Assembly.
- To examine the dominant frames in newspapers reportage of   Nigeria's eight National Assembly.
- To find out the frames, newspapers use in reporting debates in Nigeria's eight National Assembly.
  Research   Questions
  This study seeks answers to the following questions
- What is newspapers' story sources on Nigeria's eight National Assembly?
- What are the dominant frames in newspapers' reportage of   Nigeria's eight National Assembly?
- What frames do newspapers use in reporting debates in Nigeria's eight   National Assembly?

Literature Review

The legislature is the engine of democratic governance. This is partly because   laws made by the legislature set the agenda for the government and regulate the conducts of the people. The legislature in Nigeria, being it the National Assembly or State Houses of Assembly, has a very significant role to play in creating the legal and institutional frameworks for ensuring the existence and sustainability of transparency and accountability in the public service. Abayomi (2003,p.12) observed that Assemblies have increasingly become scrutinising bodies, the principal role of which is to deliver responsible or accountable government. Most Assemblies have developed institutional mechanisms designed to facilitate this role. Abayomi (2003,p.13) also noted that the legislature emerged from the need to make government accountable to the people. This need for accountability has ensured that all activities of parliament are open to public scrutiny, hence the need for the media to report legislative proceedings. Baldwin (2006, p.5) describes the legislature as "the

representative body that provides for legitimacy, enacts legislation and oversees and scrutinises the actions and activities of the executive in a State". The legislature is an assemblage of the representatives of the people elected under a legal framework to make laws for the good health of the society. It is also defined as "the institutional body responsible for making laws for a nation and one through which the collective will of the people or part of it is articulated, expressed and implemented" (Okoosi, 2010,p.1).

The legislature controls through legislation all economic, social and political activities of the nation. It also scrutinizes the policies of the Executive and provides the framework for the judiciary to operate. In the light of the preceding, we cannot talk about democracy in any meaningful form or manner without the legislature. Indeed, the legislature is at the very heart of any democratic arrangement or what scholars often refer to as "representative governance". The significance of the legislature as one of the strong pillars of democratic governance (the others being the Executive and Judiciary), can, therefore, be discerned from Abraham Lincoln's classical definition of democracy during the Gettysburg Address of 1863, as "government of the people, by the people and for the people" (Remy, 1994,p.31-34). Central to this definition is the existence of the representatives of the people due to the technical impossibility of all the people ruling and carrying on the business of government, at the same time, as was the original thinking in the famous Greek City States of old. (Lowi, Ginsberg & Shepsle, 2008,p.117- 128). Baldwin (2006) categorized legislatures according to their capacity to influence policy. Consequently, the four types of legislatures can be identified: - policy-making legislatures (active legislatures) - policy – influencing legislatures (reactive legislatures) - legislatures with minimal or marginal policy effect - legislatures with no real policy effect or "rubber stamp" legislatures. Of these categorisation, the Nigerian legislatures are the at the National, State or Local Government Council levels are supposedly that of policy-making legislatures which enjoy a significant level of autonomy and cannot only amend or reject measures brought forward by the executive but can substitute for its policy of its own. But whether this is the situation on ground is subject to arguments. The relationship between the legislatures and the media have often been subjected to empirical examination.

To find out the influence of framing, Verbrugge (2014) conducted a study on "An analysis of marijuana legalisation opinion coverage in newspapers" The researcher studied the influence of mass media on public opinion of marijuana legalisation. Using a measure of media framing in the most widely circulated newspapers in 11 states in the United States of America over the period from 2010 to 2014, the researcher sought to explain the changes in public opinion on the issue of marijuana legalisation and to identify the position of the print media. Verbrugge relied on editorials and op-ed columns, which he then used to evaluate the changes in newspaper support over time. Controlling for social demographic factors of each state, Verbrugge found that there is an 8.24 percent—statistically significant and positive— the relationship between media framing and public opinion over time. The researcher also found insignificant relationships between changes in media support and changes in public support over the period of interest. Analysis of public opinion trends on framing shifts over time also suggests that direction of causality is such that the media influences public opinion. Another important study is that of Schaffner (2006) who examined the value of local news coverage for legislators seeking to publicize their legislative work on behalf of constituents in the United States of America and found that incumbents who win more newspaper coverage are viewed as being more in touch with the district and are more likely to win support from constituents during bids for re-election. The implication of this result is that newspaper framing of legislative activities is also likely to influence voting. Fogarty (2012) examined

local newspapers, house members, and source usage and reported that local news stories on members typically include multiple, official, and nonlocal sources.

Theoretical   Framework

This study was anchored on the framing theory. The framing theory states that the volume of coverage devoted to a particular issue is not as important as the frame the media adopt (Druckman 2001). According to the theory, people make sense of their experiences using interpretational packages called frames. To frame means to slant a story towards a particular direction. Entman (1993, p. 52) observes that to frame is to "Promote a particular problem definition and treatment recommendation." Based on this theory, it can be argued that the manner of newspaper framing of the eight National Assembly has a way of shaping the public knowledge and opinion. Chong and Druckman, (2007,p.104) summarise framing theory thus:

> The major premise of framing theory is that an issue can be viewed from a variety of perspectives and be construed as having implications for multiple values or considerations. Framing refers to the process by which people develop a particular conceptualisation of an issue or reorient their thinking about an issue.

Therefore, this study used the framing theory to examine the critical areas which newspaper highlight in their reportage of the eight National Assembly.   This is more so that the framing theory does not pay attention to the number of stories concerning an issue, but the angle highlighted. There may be few stories on the eight National Assembly but the angles highlighted in such stories could shape public understanding and attitudes.

Methodology

This study adopted content analysis. This design was considered appropriate because it enabled the researcher to examine newspaper framing of the National Assembly issues. The population of this study consisted of all the national daily newspapers published in Nigeria The International Media Newspapers (2016) says there are a total of 28 national dailies in Nigeria. A simple random sampling technique was adopted in the sampling newspapers for the study. The newspapers are *The Daily Sun,* the *Nation,* the *punch and the Leadership* newspapers. Twelve editions of each of the newspapers were selected for a period of June 2015- March 2017. This time marked the inauguration of the eight National Assembly to date. The selection of twelve editions of each of the newspapers was based on the result of Stempel (1952) who first reported that twelve issues from two constructed weeks could effectively predict a year.   Therefore, the study used three years (2015-2017)and studied of four newspapers a total of 12 editions of each of the newspapers were selected for the three years, thus leading to 336 issues for the four newspapers per year and 144 issues for the three years for all the newspapers.

The table below shows the implementation of the constructed week:

Table I: Constructed week for the selected newspaper editions

	2015	2016	2017
February		11th 17th	13th 20th
June	2nd 17th 29th	14th 19th 28th	4th 17th
August	13th 19th 27th	19th 23rd	7th 16th 24th
September	13th 18th 27th	1st 7th 22nd	10th 19th

| December | 14th 22nd 30st | 12th 20th | 1st 10th 28th |

For this study, the unit of analysis was the article. The articles were about events at the National Assembly. Only stories about events at the National Assembly which were discussed at the flow of either of the chambers were selected.

Sources of Stories

The following sources were considered:

National Assembly Members: Stories that cited either member of Senate or House of Representatives.

Legislative aid: Newspaper stories that cited legislative aid of the National Assembly.

Civil society groups: Stories that cited civil society groups.

Others: Stories that do not belong to any of the above.

Newspaper framing of National Assembly proceedings

The following frames were delineated

- **Positive Frames:** frames were considered as positive if the portrayed the good sides of National Assembly.
- **Negative Proceedings**: Frames were considered as negative if the portray sides of National Assembly
- **Neutral frames**: Frames were considered as neutral if they were either positive nor negative.
  Newspaper framing of squabbles in the National Assembly
  Here, the following frames were considered:

- Selfish fight: Frames were considered as selfish fight if they revealed that squabble was for personal gain.

- **Patriotism:** frames were considered as patriotism if the project that the squabble was in the interest of the nation.

- **Inter-party squabbles**: frames were considered as inter-party squabbles if they revealed that the squabble is for political dominance.

- **Others:** Frames that do not fall into any of the above classifications.

Two coders were used to code the frames. The coders were told to go through the newspapers and code the stories on National Assembly proceeding. The Inter-coder reliability was determined using Holsti's Inter coder reliability formula thus:

$$R = \frac{2M}{N1 + N2}$$

Where:

M = The number of coding decisions which two coders agree.

N1 & N2 – The number of coding decisions by the first and second coder respectively. The inter coder reliability was

$$\frac{2(46)}{50 + 50} = 0.92$$

Therefore, inter-coder reliability = 0.92 was considered as high. In the analysis of data for the study, both simple percentages and multiple regression were used while data were presented in tables.

Results

Out of the 144 editions that were sampled, 107 copies had stories on National Assembly while the remaining 37 had no stories on National Assembly whatsoever. The 107 editions were examined, and this yielded 367 stories. The result is here by presented in the following tables:

Table 1: Newspaper sources of stories on the National Assembly

			Sources				
			Legislative members	legislative aide	Civil society	Others	Total
Newspaper	*the Punch*	Count	22	15	44	17	98
		% of Total	6.0%	4.1%	12.0%	4.6%	26.7%
	Daily Sun	Count	39	23	32	21	115
		% of Total	10.6%	6.3%	8.7%	5.7%	31.3%
	Leadership	Count	42	27	14	7	90
		% of Total	11.4%	7.4%	3.8%	1.9%	24.5%
	Nation	Count	28	19	9	8	64
		% of Total	7.6%	5.2%	2.5%	2.2%	17.4%
Total		Count	131	84	99	53	367
		% of Total	35.7%	22.9%	27.0%	14.4%	100.0%

Table one above sought to determine the sources of newspaper stories on Nigeria's National Assembly. The result showed that most of the stories cited the legislators themselves followed by civil society groups and then legislative aide. Cumulatively, legislators and their aid made more than 50% of the stories. This suggests that more than half of the stories cited sources at the National Assembly. To examine the framing of the National Assembly, the following table was computed:

Table ii: Newspaper framing of the National Assembly

			framing			
			positive	negative	Neutral	Total
Newspaper	the Punch	Count	8	77	13	98
		% of Total	2.2%	21.0%	3.5%	26.7%
	Daily Sun	Count	7	94	14	115
		% of Total	1.9%	25.6%	3.8%	31.3%
	Leadership	Count	14	61	15	90
		% of Total	3.8%	16.6%	4.1%	24.5%
	Nation	Count	10	34	20	64
		% of Total	2.7%	9.3%	5.4%	17.4%
Total		Count	39	266	62	367
		% of Total	10.6%	72.5%	16.9%	100.0%

The result from the table above revealed that more than one and half of the stories about the National Assembly were negatively framed. This result is surprising because most of the stories cited sources related to the National Assembly. To determine the frames used in reporting National Assembly debates, table III was computed.

Table: Newspaper frames on National Assembly debates

	Squabbles	Total

			Selfish frame	Patriotic frame	Inter-party squabbles	Others	
Newspaper	the Punch	Count	55	15	14	14	98
		% of Total	15.0%	4.1%	3.8%	3.8%	26.7%
	Daily Sun	Count	47	34	27	7	115
		% of Total	12.8%	9.3%	7.4%	1.9%	31.3%
	Leadership	Count	34	11	38	7	90
		% of Total	9.3%	3.0%	10.4%	1.9%	24.5%
	Nation	Count	35	8	13	8	64
		% of Total	9.5%	2.2%	3.5%	2.2%	17.4%
Total		Count	171	68	92	36	367
		% of Total	46.6%	18.5%	25.1%	9.8%	100.0%

The table above sought to ascertain the frames newspapers used in reporting squabbles at the National Assembly. The result showed that the selfish frames were more than all other frames. Comparatively, *the Punch* newspaper had more of the selfish frames than all the other three newspapers. To determine the variables that predict newspaper framing of the National Assembly, a multiple regression analysis was conducted, and the result is presented below:

Table iv: A Multiple Regression analysis on   predictors of newspaper framing of the National Assembly

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients	Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.	95% Confidence Interval for B

	B	Std. Error	Beta			Lower Bound	Upper Bound
1 (Constant)	1.308	.045		29.211	.001	1.220	1.396
Sources	.154	.030	.319	5.211	.001	.096	.212
Debates	.210	.030	.424	6.919	.001	.150	.269

a. Dependent Variable: framing

A multiple regression analysis was conducted to determine predictors of newspaper framing of Nigeria's National Assembly. The result showed that both sources of stories and the debate at the National Assembly significantly predict newspaper framing (P-value < 05). The result also showed that debate at the National Assembly had a higher beta value of .424, which means it predicts newspaper framing more than the sources cited. The beta value for sources of stories was slightly lower (beta =319), an indication that it made a less unique contribution.

Discussion of Findings

This study examined newspaper framing of Nigeria's National Assembly. In doing so, attention was paid to sources of stories, debates in the National Assembly and framing. The result showed that most of the newspaper stories on National Assembly cited National Assembly members and their legislative aid. The result of this study is consistent with that of Fogarty (2012) who examined local newspapers coverage of House Members, and source usage and reported that local news stories on members typically include multiple, official, and nonlocal sources. The dominance of official sources could give little or no room for story analysis, rather, most of the events could be more descriptive, thus, providing little or no interpretations to the stories reported.

The result of this study also revealed that most of the newspaper frames were negative. What this means is that all the newspapers frame National Assembly debates negatively. The result of this study also showed that selfish frame was most used in framing debates at the National Assembly. The members were framed as mostly pursuing their benefits. The less occurrence of the patriotic frame is a testimony to the negative framing of the National Assembly. Such framing is capable of influencing public perceptions about parliamentarians and even the legislative institution. This assumption is supported by evidence in literature as Verbrugge (2014) in a study revealed that newspapers framing are capable of shaping public opinion. Also, Entman (1993, p. 52) in explaining the framing theory submits that frames influence public opinion. The result of this study also revealed that 58% of the frames promoted by the media are the selfish frame. This result has a way of affecting the individual legislatures' political carrier. Schaffner (2006) in a study revealed that media coverage of legislature as a significant correlation with the electoral fortunes of individual law makers. Nigeria's National Assembly has an image problem, the masses perceive them as those hugely paid for doing little for the nation.

Conclusion/Recommendations

This study investigated newspaper framing of Nigeria's National Assembly. Based on the result of this study, the researcher concludes that the newspapers studied cited sources mostly from the National Assembly. The researcher also concludes that the newspapers mostly frame the National Assembly in a negative light with the use of the selfish frame. This study has implications for political communication, framing theory as well as the media-legislature interface. The study has implications for political communication because it has shown the variables that predict media framing of political issues. This understanding could be useful to those in the field of political communication and journalism alike. The result has implications on the framing theory because it has shown that the newspapers studied select some aspects of the National Assembly even when there may be other issues that will likely present the Assembly in a positive light. Finally, the result of this study has implications on the relationship between the media and the legislature by providing empirical evidence regarding how the media perceive lawmakers. The basic contribution of this study is that it has provided empirical evidence for understanding media framing of Nigeria's National Assembly. Such understanding could be useful to researchers of political communication, newspaper research as well as those interested in the media-legislative nexus. The researcher makes the following recommendations:

- Nigerian newspapers should also project positive frames in their coverage of National Assembly as there may be other interesting things that the parliamentarians do.
- There is a need for the press to go beyond promoting selfish-frames but engage in advocacy reporting to promote patriotic thinking among Nigerian legislatures.
- Nigerian press should work towards sustaining, if possible, increasing the number of stories with identifiable sources.
- Subsequent studies should investigate the dominance frames of newspaper coverage of the National Assembly.

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