

Framing the National Question: The Role of Nigeria's Media and Political Elites

Yomi LAYINKA, Ph.D.

c/o Department of Politics and International Relations,
Lead City University, Ibadan
+234 803 321 7355; yourme5@yahoo.co.uk

Jide OWOEYE, Ph.D.

Department of Politics and International Relations,
Lead City University, Ibadan
+234 803 725 0417; babsowoeye@gmail.com

Abstract

The study focused on the role of the media and political elites in framing the National Question in Nigeria. The research adopted the survey design format predicated on the use of primary sources of data. The population of this study comprised of politicians, their media advisers and government press officers; media gatekeepers, (e.g. political news editors and the columnists); political/media scholars and informed members of the public. The first stage of the sampling technique involved the use of a structured questionnaire to elicit information on the attitude of Nigeria's media and political elite to the National Question. The second stage included selected interviews while the final stage focussed on triangulation and analysis. The findings revealed that Nigerian politics has become increasingly reliant on the media in recent years, thereby making the media an essential and unavoidable tool for communicating and promoting political messages and activities. It also revealed that most of the issues and arguments about the National Question are largely framed and shaped on media platforms which the political elites have found to be veritable marketplaces of ideas and contestations. Findings also demonstrated the importance of the role of media elites in defining the long-term political and democratic culture in Nigeria since they offer their political counterparts the avenue for articulating their notions and understanding of national questions. Another critical result was the nuanced yet unmistakable evidence of a significant divergence of attitudes to the national question among members of the northern elites when compared with their southern counterparts. The study, therefore, recommends that further scholarly efforts should be invested in continuously interrogating the role and impact of the media in shaping the character of politics in Nigeria, so as to monitor and mitigate the potentially deleterious effects of mediatization of politics on the democratic structure and health of the Nigerian society.

Keywords: Nigeria, Politics, Political Communication, Framing, National Question

Introduction

The National Question

The National Question in Nigeria arose from the diverse character of the country as a plural society. The challenge of managing diversity was complicated by the imbalance created by the selfish and duplicitous 1914 amalgamation of the Northern and Southern Protectorates of Nigeria by the British Colonial administration simply to assuage its expansionist and economic greed (Kolawole, 2021). The inability of the successor elites and political leaders to meet the needs of the citizens, made manifest in the exclusion, domination, marginalization, inequality, injustice, insecurity and the manifest lack of the material development and welfare of the various ethnic groups in the country have since exacerbated and deepened the national question in the country.

This has consequently resulted in the spectre of ethnic and religious intolerance, insecurity and strife, class division, lack of trust and other forms of political crisis have now risen to a combustible level across the nation. These have in turn led to the deepening of ethnic cleavages and formations led by members of the various elite groups across the nation including Afenifere, Ohanaeze Ndigbo, Arewa Consultative Forum (ACF) and more youthful and militant fronts like the Oodua People's Congress (OPC) of the Yoruba, MASSOB/IPOB of the Igbos, MOSSOP of the Ogoni, MEND of the Niger Deltas, Miyetti Allah of the Fulani, etcetera. These and similar others are all now inexorably engaged in a centrifugal battle for the nation's jugular, staking claims and daring each other to find urgent and equitable answers to the national question.

The Nigerian elites are part of that social class which make up the usually tiny groups of persons who exercise disproportionate power and influence over a community (Cook, 2005). This privileged group rules in the affairs of nations and is usually at the forefront of debates about nationality, nationalism and the national question; and like in other nations, this elite group is typically expected to midwife the resolution of Nigeria's version of the National Question. Through deliberate articulation, the astute communication and mutually beneficial resolution and agreement of the critical issues, the Nigerian elite is expected to jointly design the roadmap and then lead their people towards the attainment of the ideal nation to be created out of the many nationalities that the British Colonialists forced into a union in 1914.

It is customary to distinguish between political elites (on the one hand), whose locations in powerful institutions, organizations and movements enable them to shape or influence political outcomes, often decisively, and cultural elites (on the other), who enjoy a high status and influence in non-political spheres such as the media, arts and letters, philanthropy, professions and civic society. The political behaviour of the Nigerian elite class draws its core values from the legacies of the colonial state whose political culture was embedded in traditions of political totalitarianism.

This misapplication of democratic values has since stimulated conflict of interests and struggle for power, prestige and supremacy among Nigerian elites leading inevitably to a dysfunctional political system. Such structurally embedded conflict became the pillars on which the post independent Nigerian parliament was built creating multiplier effects of violence and stress in the political system. This consequently introduced the culture of military coup and violence as an instrument of political change. This vice of political violence and prebendalism was assimilated into the political culture of Nigeria as a rational method of regime change as were seen in the 1966, 1975, 1983, 1985 and 1993 military coups and change of governments by Major Nzeogwu, Generals Murtala Mohammed, Muhammadu Buhari, Ibrahim Babangida and Sanni Abacha respectively. Even the civilian regimes superintended by politicians since 1999 have not fared much better, owing largely to the military origins of their governance laws and codes as well as the disdain of the politicians for the subtle but distinctive nuances of democracy.

Following in the footsteps of the constitutionally enshrined but poorly implemented concept of 'Federal Character', and to mitigate the unrelieved feelings of exclusion by some segments of the nation's ethnic agglomeration, there was an attempt by the emergent People's Democratic Party (PDP) to answer the seemingly intractable national question after the party won the first national elections after the military retreated to their barracks in 1999. This informal arrangement among the party leaders agreed on the need to share and swap principal political and leadership offices of the federation on a rotational basis among the six geo-political zones in the country. Further still, and under the Presidency of Dr. Goodluck Jonathan between 2010 and 2015, he and his party (the PDP) embarked on another attempt at answering the National Question when his government set up and proceeded to organize the 2014 National Conference. Despite strong criticisms that questioned the genuine intentions of the Jonathan's government and its organizers, the conference went on with the support of many organizations, including Afenifere, Ohaneze Indigbo, the Northern Elders Forum, the Middle Belt Forum, the Niger Delta Consultative Assembly and several others

who, thereafter, actively participated in it, notwithstanding the hardnosed ethnocentric negotiations that ensued.

The fate of the provisions and recommendations of the report of that 2014 conference remains inconclusive as the succeeding APC government under the leadership of President Muhammadu Buhari has neither bothered to consider the resolutions nor initiated its own conversation on the national question. How the current APC government ultimately responds to the clamorous and persistent demand for the urgent resolution of the debilitating crisis of nationhood will largely determine how that political party and its leadership will be characterized in Nigeria's historical annals: it will either be described as a political party that helped to effectively address the National Question or one that wilfully frustrated efforts at effectually responding to and effectively answering it.

In this study, therefore, the researcher is interested in probing into whether Nigeria's ruling elite, (particularly its political and media wings) share a common understanding and definition of the National Question, and how this understanding has manifested in their political communication, particularly in the period between 2011 and 2019.

Objectives of the Study

The study seeks to examine how political communication shapes the National Question in Nigeria. Specifically, the objectives of the study are to:

- i. determine the extent of the influence of the Nigerian media and political elite in shaping perceptions of the National Question.
- ii. examine the power relations between media and political elites in Nigeria.
- iii. evaluate the influence of social media in political communication culture of Nigeria.

Literature Review

Political Communication

Political communication involves creating, shaping, disseminating, and processing information among actors from the political system, the media, and the public as well as the effects of such communication. It ultimately refers to making sense of the exercise of discursive power and its potential consequences for citizens in terms of knowledge and participation (Esser & Pfetsch, 2020). This field encompasses both the production and generation of communications by political actors as well as the transmission and reception of political messages via direct and

indirect means. Political communication entails the participation of political institutions and actors, the mass media, and most significantly, citizens (Oyedokun, 2022).

A lot of political communications research focuses on the more spectacular and observable aspects such as party, political election campaigns, the relationship between politicians and journalists, and the activities of party-political PR consultants (Garland, 2018). Political communication arrangements in various countries are exposed to simultaneous forces of stability and change. What has remained consistent is that political communication always encompasses the same factors: creating, shaping, disseminating, and processing information among actors from the political system, the media, and the public as well as the effects of such communication (Vowe & Henn, 2016).

Mediatization of Politics

Mediatization refers to a social change process in which media have become increasingly influential in and deeply integrated into different spheres of society (Hjarvard, 2013). Mediatization should thus be distinguished from the related concept of mediation, which refers to the more neutral act of transmitting messages and communicating through media (Stromback 2008). With ramifications for most parts of modern society, mediatization has also been conceptualized as operating at par with other large-scale transformative processes such as globalization, industrialization, etc. (Kriesi et al. 2013).

Mediatization scholars have argued that media and politics may “work in tandem, enabling a simultaneous mediatization of politics and a politicization of media” (Hepp et al., 2015). Mediatization interacts with politicization to become “an accelerating factor, causing political decisions to be made hastily without due consideration” (Koch-Baumgarten & Voltmer, 2010, p. 224). This mutual exchange between political and media elites results in an increase in resistance, antagonism and disbelief on the part of the public (Moss & O’Loughlin, 2008). Thus, a mediatized form of political discourse may in some way be related to a loss of public trust, a fear that has also been expressed by public servants in many European bureaucracies like in the UK. This increase in political party influence over government narratives has been consequent upon the fact that politicians in government have increasingly prioritized media management as an imperative aspect of their own political survival (Garland, 2015).

The mediatization of politics has been defined as a long-term process through which the importance of the media and their spill-over effects on political processes, institutions, organizations and actors has increased to the point of dependency (Stromback & Esser 2014).

Ultimately, the mediatization of politics is always shaped by the practices of different media and different political institutions, organizations and actors, and should therefore not be perceived as an exogenous factor influencing all institutions, organizations and actors in an equal or uniform fashion.

Communication, Politics and the Media

Communication is the transfer of information, feelings, beliefs, attitude's opinion, etc., from a source to a receiver with or without feedback. In the political communication process, the source is the politician, and the receiver(s) the electorates. Communication, according to Munodawafa (2008), involves the transmission of verbal and non-verbal messages consisting of a sender, a receiver, and channel of communication. In the process of transmitting messages, the clarity of the message may be interfered with or distorted by what is often referred to as barriers.

Politics, in its broadest sense, is the activity through which people make, preserve and amend the general rules under which they live. Politics is characterized as interactions between states in the international arena; the activities of politicians; and of activities such as voting (in national, regional or local elections) through which individual citizens engage with the state. Politics, however, is about much more than the activities (or careers) of politicians (Oparugo, 2021).

The mass media serve as the prime source of information on political matters to the people - about their government; about candidates vying for public offices; about political parties and their manifestoes, and about other matters in the society (Ojeka & Ajakaiye, 2015). It is worthy of note that the way the media portrays, amplifies or subsumes candidates and political parties have been proven to have significant consequences on their electoral fortunes, especially in the increasingly mediatized political environment of these contemporary times.

Little wonder that politicians now embark on massive media campaigns, exploiting a creatively deployed mix of multimedia resources including radio, television, print, outdoor, social and online media platforms to bombard potential voters with their advertising jingles and persuasive party slogans. While the targets of this media bombardment are a variegated slew across socio-cultural and economic spheres, their most dominant target is ultimately the poor and uneducated mass of voters who mostly live in rural areas. To reach this base, politicians and their media strategies deploy radio, television and other outdoor media, which possess the capacity to directly reach and impact them. For the more elitist voting population, newspapers and social media are usually the preferable means through which politicians

aspiring for elective positions can solicit and secure the services of influential opinion writers who get commissioned to write favourable articles about them in the print media (Salihu & Oparugo, 2017).

The emergence of social media has since changed the way in which political communication takes place in the contemporary world (Ahmad, Alvi & Ittefaq, 2019). Political institutions such as political parties, foundations and political think tanks now fervently deploy social media platforms (like Facebook and Twitter), to communicate with and engage voters. Regular individuals, politicians, “pundits” and thought leaders alike can voice their opinions, engage with a wide network, and connect with other likeminded individuals (Oyedokun, 2022)

Empirical Review

Udende, Akpede and Omotoso (2022) examined political communication transformation in Nigeria and the changing media environment. The quest to examine and analyse political information that can influence targeted audiences with the aim of realising the expectations of political authority on one hand, and the electorate on the other, continue to spur interest in political communication. While the Internet and news media offer an unprecedented opportunity for people to access useful information and engage in positive civic and political activities, clear evidence shows that the new media environment is paradoxically blighted by problems of information overload, and uncertainty about what to trust. The study by the scholars above noted that while political communication is an essential activity of human existence, they found that the media environment is increasingly evolving with new media technologies and systems gradually supplanting or reinforcing traditional media, consequently influencing political communication in diverse ways. The study then concludes by suggesting that politicians should eschew the use of language capable of diminishing citizens’ interest in politics even as they explore the liberal and democratic characteristics embedded in the new media. Politicians can achieve this by resisting the temptation of using abusive language that unfortunately characterise their campaign messages.

Usiere (2022) studied multimedia communication approaches in political communication in select states in the Southeastern region of Nigeria with a view to determining the preferred media of communication employed by political parties in the part of the country. This study was anchored on conspiracy and media richness theories. The survey method of research was used to generate data. The population of the study was divided into two groups made up of direct party secretariat members and the media aides of the respective state governments. The study concluded that political parties are exposed to all forms of media

channels in the dissemination of political information to the citizens. In addition, they found that each of the media channels - from the traditional, mainstream to the newer, ubiquitous media - comes with their respective advantages and baggage of disadvantages. The study concludes by recommending that political parties in that region should improve their use of print media channels of communication in order to felicitate the preservation of historical moments as well as to serve as veritable reference points for future policy directions. Similarly, the political parties are enjoined to commit improved budgetary allocations to their media responsibilities rather than allowing the fear of cost to restrict their choice of media and consequent political communication activities.

Madaki and Jakonda (2022) investigated newspaper framing of presidential candidates in the 2019 general elections in Nigeria. The study aimed at determining the relative frequency of reportage of news stories given by the selected newspapers to two of the leading candidates in that election. This study adopted a content analysis research design. The population of the study consisted of the following national dailies, *Daily Trust*, *Leadership* and *These Day newspapers*. The researcher for the study purposively sampled these newspapers. The study findings showed that the Nigerian media did well in the coverage of the candidates in the 2019 presidential election, although, the reports were centered on personality strength by projecting the contenders more than their policy issues. The researchers recommended that Nigerian newspapers should do more on editorial comments to enlighten Nigerians in terms of voter education during presidential election campaigns in Nigeria. Also, Nigeria newspapers should be sensitive on issue-based campaigns rather than personality threats.

Theoretical Review

This study is situated under the ambit of the agenda-setting theory, which was formulated by McCombs and Shaw in 1968 and published in 1972. By comparing the salience of issues in news content with the public's perceptions of the most important election issue, McCombs and Shaw were able to determine the degree to which the media determine public opinion. The major assumption of the theory is that the media set the agenda for the public to follow. The theory holds that most of the pictures we store in our heads, most of the things we think or worry about, most of the issues we discuss are based on what we have read, listened to, or watched in different mass media (Asemah, Nwammuo, & Nkwam-Uwaoma, 2022).

Folarin (1998) notes that the agenda setting theory implies that the mass media pre-determine what issues are regarded as important at any given time in a given society; agenda

setting theory does not ascribe to the media the power to determine what we actually think but does ascribe to them the power to determine what we are thinking about.

The media make us to think about certain issues, they make us to think or feel that certain issues are more important than others in our society. The agenda setting theory argues that the media may not tell us what to think but may tell us what to think about. Thus, in choosing and displaying news, editors, newsroom staff and broadcasters play an important part in shaping public agenda. Thus, readers not only learn about a given issue but how much importance to attach to the issue by the amount of information in a news story and its position

In applying the agenda setting theory to this study, we seek to tease out just how much the Nigerian media determine perceptions of the National Question compared to how much the political elites shape it.

Methodology

In basic terms, research methodology involves processes that the researcher employs to gather and analyse the data. This study adopted the survey research design which is predicated on the use of primary sources of data. The population of this study comprises political office holders, their media advisers and government press officers; media gatekeepers, (political news editors and their columnists); and political/media scholars and informed members of the public. The samples for this research were respondents derived from the population of the study, with purposive sampling techniques used to identify targeted respondents for the research. The first stage of the sampling technique involved the use of a structured questionnaire to elicit information on the mediatization of politics and the national question in Nigeria. Hence, 700 copies of questionnaire were distributed.

Analysis and Data Presentation

A structured questionnaire was used to elicit information from various professional media practitioners and political office holders during former President Goodluck Jonathan administration as well as the current President Muhammed Buhari's administration. The structured questionnaire was distributed to 700 professional media practitioners, political social media influencers/bloggers and political office holders, out of which 616 copies, representing 88%, were returned and used for the analysis. The data were analysed using the Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS) and the presentation was done using simple percentage combined with numerical, frequencies. To communicate the information effectively.

Table 1: Respondents’ Demographic Data

N	Variables		Frequency	Percentage (%)
1.	Gender	Female	334	54.2
		Male	282	45.8
		Total	616	100.0
2.	Age Group	18-29	117	19.0
		30-49	288	46.8
		50-69	192	31.2
		70 & Above	19	3.2
		Total	616	100.0
3.	Highest Educational Qualification	Diploma	108	17.5
		Bachelor's Degree	339	55.0
		Postgraduate's Degree	169	27.4
		Total	616	100.0
4.	Years of Experience	1-5	83	13.5
		6-10	231	37.5
		11 & above	302	49.0
		Total	616	100.0

Source: Field Report, 2022

Table 1 contains the demographic attributes of the respondents. The information showing the gender distribution of participants across various associations and administrations revealed that 334 (54.2%) male participants and 282 (45.8%) female participants were sampled in the study. The section, which presents the participants’ age categories across various associations and administrations, shows that out of the 616 total participants, 117 (19%) were between 18-29 years, 288 (46.8%) participants were within the age group of 30-49, 192 (31.2%) were within the age group of 50-69 years, while only 19 (3.1%) participants were above 70 years old.

The data gathered on the participants’ highest educational qualification across various associations and administrations indicates that 108 (17.5%) participants have a Diplomas’ degree, 339 (55%) participants have Bachelors’ degree, while 169 (27.4%) participants have post-graduate degrees, that is, MBA, MSc., Ph.D. This implies that all the participants are educated and qualified to provide dependable answers to the issues raised in this study. Further, Table 1 revealed that 83 (13.5%) participants have between 1-5years of experience. In contrast,

231 (37.5%) participants have 6-10years of experience, and 302 (49%) participants have worked for various associations and administrations for 11years and above. This implies that the participants have the requisite experience to respond to raised issues and draw inferences for empirical generalisation.

Table 2: Relationship between Media and Politics in Nigeria

S/N	Statements	SA (%)	A (%)	D (%)	SD (%)	Total (%)
1	Contemporary politics in Nigeria has become very dependent on the mass media	155 (25.2)	308 (50)	81 (13.1)	72 (11.7)	616 (100)
2	The media is an important and unavoidable means of communicating and implementing political activities	168 (27.3)	317 (51.5)	84 (13.6)	47 (7.6)	616 (100)
3	The Nigeria media has become more influential on Nigeria politics	154 (25)	298 (48.4)	84 (13.6)	80 (13)	616 (100)
4	The medias now shape institutional practices of political parties in Nigeria by intruding the outcomes of their processes	212 (34.4)	223 (36.2)	72 (11.7)	109 (17.7)	616 (100)
5	Recent and current media practices and laws will better facilitate the practice of participatory democracy in Nigeria	170 (27.6)	314 (51)	72 (11.7)	60 (9.7)	616 (100)

Source: Field Report, 2022

The analysis presented in Table 2 establishes the role of the media in politics. From the data analysed, most participants across various associations and administrations, representing 75.2% affirmed that Nigerian politics has become very reliant on the media in recent years. Similarly, 78.8% of the participants inferred that the media is an essential and unavoidable tool for communicating and carrying out political activities. Also, 73.4% of the respondents ascertained that Nigeria's media has become increasingly influential in the country's politics. It was further revealed that 70.6%, claimed that by interfering with the outcomes of political parties' processes, the media has now shaped the institutional practices of Nigerian political parties, while 78.6% claimed that the modern and current media practises and laws will make it easier for Nigerians to practise participatory democracy.

Table 3: Mediatization of Politics in Nigeria

S/N	Statements	SA (%)	A (%)	D (%)	SD (%)	Total (%)
1.	The media has facilitated the unhindered dissemination of political information at reduced cost and without needless censorship	180 (29.3)	216 (35)	111 (18)	109 (17.7)	616 (100)
2	The increasing level of hate speech, political tension and violence in Nigeria is traceable to the influence of the media in politics	194 (31.5)	250 (40.6)	103 (16.7)	69 (11.2)	616 (100)
3.	The media has provided citizens the opportunity to get feedback from political leaders as well as to hold them accountable	177 (28.7)	264 (42.9)	99 (16)	76 (12.4)	616 (100)
4.	The impact of media on politics is stronger than it was during Obasanjo years (1999-2007)	185 (30)	275 (44.6)	76 (12.4)	80 (13)	616 (100)
5.	Increase mediatisation strengthens the democratic rights of the citizen and on the democratic culture of an emerging democracy like Nigeria.	170 (27.6)	314 (51)	72 (11.7)	60 (9.7)	616 (100)

Source: Field Report, 2022

Table 3 indicates how mediatisation impacts politics in Nigeria. The analysis revealed that 63.5% of the participants across various associations and administrations affirmed that the media had facilitated the unrestricted dissemination of political information at a lower cost and without the need for unnecessary censorship. Similarly, 72.1% of the respondents blamed the media’s influence in politics for the rise in hate speech, political tensions, and violence in Nigeria. Also, most of the participants representing 71.6% ascertained that the citizens have been able to get feedback from political leaders and hold them accountable thanks to the media. It was further revealed that 74.6% of the respondents agreed that the impact of media on politics is more potent than it was during Obasanjo’s years (1999-2007).

Also, 78.6% of the respondents alluded that increased mediatisation strengthens citizens' democratic rights and the democratic culture of a developing democracy like Nigeria.

Table 4. Responses on the Power Relations between the Political and Media Elites

S	Items	SA	A	D	SD	Tot
N						al
1	Politicians are more consequential than media elites in contemporary democratic Nigeria	196	244	90	86	616
		31.8	39.6	14.6	14	100
		%	6%	%	%	%
2	The role of media elites is important in promoting sustainable political and democratic culture in Nigeria.	204	342	75	12	616
		32.1	54.9	12	1.7	100
		%	2	%	%	%
3	Both political and media elites share equal power and influence in shaping and determining political outcomes	204	311	45	56	616
		33.1	50.3	7.4	9.0	100
		%	5%	%	%	%
4	Nigeria's media political elite share an adversarial relationship	193	254	80	89	616
		31.3	41.2	13	14.4	100
		%	2%	%	5%	%
5	There was a more cordial relationship between the media and the political elite during Jonathan's years compared Buhari's years	141	242	104	129	616
		22.9	39.3	16.9	20.9	100
		%	%	%	%	%

Source: Fieldwork, 2022

Table 4 assesses the power relations between the political and media elites. From the table above, it was revealed that 196 (31.8%) and 244 (39.6%) of the participants strongly agreed and agreed that politicians are more consequential than media elites in contemporary democratic Nigeria; 90 (14.6%) disagreed, while 86 (14%) of the participants strongly disagree with the statement. This implies that most of the participants representing 71.4%, affirmed that in today's democratic Nigeria, politicians are more influential than media elites.

It was also revealed that 204 (32.1%) and 342 (54.2%) of the participants strongly agreed and agreed that the role of media elites is vital in promoting sustainable political and democratic culture in Nigeria; 75 (12%) disagreed, while 12 (1.7%) of the participants strongly disagree with the statement. This inferred that most of the participants representing 86.3%, asserted that in Nigeria, the role of media elites is critical in promoting a long-term political and democratic culture.

However, 204 (32.1%) and 311 (50.5%) of the participants strongly agree and agree with the statement that both political and media elites share equal power and influence in shaping and determining political outcomes; 45 (7.4%) disagreed, while 56 (9%) strongly disagreed with the statement. This indicated that most of the participants representing 83.6%, recognised that political and media elites have equal power and influence in shaping and determining political outcomes.

It was also revealed that 193 (31.3%) and 254 (41.2%) of the participants strongly agreed and agreed that Nigeria's media-political elite share an adversarial relationship; 80 (13%) disagreed, while 89(14.5%) of the participants strongly disagree with the statement. This inferred that only 72.5% of the participants from various associations and administrations affirmed that Nigeria's media and political elites have a symbiotic relationship.

It was also revealed that 141 (22.9%) and 242 (39.3%) of the participants strongly agreed and agreed that there was a more cordial relationship between the media and the political elite; 104 (16.9%) disagreed, while 129 (20.9%) of the participants strongly disagree with the statement. This inferred that only 62.2% of the participants affirmed that the media and the political elites had a more cordial relationship.

The findings suggest that elite perceptions of the news media have been largely ignored by scholars, despite their importance in shaping the political world. When politicians perceive the media to be powerful, they respond by initiating coverage and granting journalistic requests. When a topic is expected to receive much media attention, politicians respond by introducing legislation or discussing it. As a result, politicians' perceptions of the media may be at the heart of a decades-long process of political mediatisation. This empirical evidence suggests that the public's and elite's perceptions of the news media are related.

Table 5: Social Media and Public Opinion Formation in Nigeria

S/N	Statements	SA (%)	A (%)	D (%)	SD (%)	Total (%)
1	Social media content on politics have stirred up political interest in activities of political parties, groups and candidates	190 (30.8)	215 (34.9)	133 (21.6)	78 (12.7)	616 (100)
2	The social media do not have positive impact on the political processes because they are not taken seriously	90 (14.6)	78 (12.7)	138 (22.4)	310 (50.3)	616 (100)
3	Social media stories are mostly negative and full of fury than sound and practical idea, especially since they are usually old and unreliable	78 (12.7)	92 (15)	199 (32.3)	247 (40)	616 (100)
4	Political conversation on media is often mundane, trivial and rarely highlight important issues on society	130 (21)	77 (12.5)	181 (29.3)	228 (37)	616 (100)
5	Social media has become the popular space for enhanced citizen participating in politics	187 (31.4)	253 (41)	89 (14.9)	87 (12.7)	616 (100)

Source: Field Report, 2022

Table 5 presented the analysis on the relationship between social media and Public Opinion Formation in Nigeria. From the data presented, it was revealed that most of the participants representing 65.7%, affirmed that political content on social media had sparked interest in the activities of political parties, groups, and candidates. However, 72% of the participants across various associations and administrations disagreed with the assertion that social media has no positive impact on political processes because it is not taken seriously. Similarly, most of the participants representing 82.3% disagreed with the assertion that social media story is mostly negative and full of fury than sound and practical ideas, especially since they are usually old and unreliable. Also, Table 4 revealed that 66.3% of the respondents disagreed with the statement that political conversation on media is often mundane, trivial and rarely highlight important issues in society. Finally, 75.4% of the respondents agreed that social media had become the popular space for enhanced citizen participating in politics.

Discussion of Findings

This study sought to examine the roles of the media in political communication and opinion formation in Nigeria. Specifically, opinions of media and political elites as well as communication and political science scholars were gathered to provide needed answers to the research questions. From the demographic attributes of the respondents, 54.2% male participants and 45.8% female participants were sampled in the study. The participants' age categories across various associations and administrations shows that 46.8% were within the age group of 30-49 while on the participants' highest educational qualification, 55% participants have Bachelors' degree, 27.4% participants have post-graduate degrees, that is, MBA, MSc., PhD. This implies that all the participants are educated and qualified to provide dependable answers to the issues raised in this study. Further, 49% participants have worked for various associations and administrations for 11years and above. This implies that the participants have the requisite experience to respond to raised issues and draw inferences for empirical generalisation.

Research Objective One investigates the role and impact of the media on Nigerian politics. The results show that politics in Nigerian has become even more reliant on the media in recent years. This makes the media an essential and unavoidable tool for communicating and carrying out political activities. Also, the results reveal that Nigeria's media has become increasingly influential in determining the course of politics and policies in the country. It was further found that by interfering with the processes and impacting the outcomes of political party activities, the media can be said to have become a critical shaper of the institutional practices of Nigerian political parties. In similarity with previous studies like Oparugo (2021), the modern media play a central role not only within the political processes of every type, ranging from coverage of major political events and institutions to effects on campaigns and elections but also in the lives of individuals, providing unlimited access to important information services as well as offering possibilities for self-enlightenment and entertainment. On how much mediatisation impacts politics in Nigeria, findings show that the media had facilitated the unrestricted dissemination of political information at a lower cost and without the need for unnecessary censorship. However, a large percentage of the respondents affirmed that the media's influence in politics is to blame for the rise in hate speech, political tensions, and violence in Nigeria. Also, the results ascertained that the citizens have been able to get feedback from political leaders and hold them accountable through the media. It was further revealed that the impact of the media on politics is more

become more potent after the years of the former president, Olusegun Obasanjo (1999-2007). The results further show that increased mediatisation strengthens citizens' democratic rights and the democratic culture of a developing democracy like Nigeria. The findings are like that of Madaki and Jakonda (2022) which reported that the Nigerian media did well in the coverage of the candidates in the 2019 presidential election although the reports were centred on personality strength by projecting the contenders more than their policy issues

Research Objective Two evaluates the power relations and the stronger influencer of democratic culture and processes between politics and media in Nigeria. Findings revealed that politicians are more consequential than media elites in contemporary democratic Nigeria; This implies that most of the participants representing 71.4%, affirmed that in today's democratic Nigeria, politicians are more influential than media elites. Yet, the findings suggest that elite perceptions of the news media have been largely ignored and underestimated by scholars, despite their importance in shaping the political world. While the public (and even the media) thinks that politicians are more influential on the National Question, politicians themselves generally perceive the media as being quite powerful. The former therefore responds to this power equation by initiating coverage and granting journalistic requests. such that when a policy issue or topic is required to generate significant media attention and consequent publicity that can influence and determine public opinion, politicians respond by initiating friendly relations with the media executives who then required to respond in kind. . In effect, this politicians' perceptions of the media may be at the heart of a decades-long process of political mediatisation. Our findings confirm widespread beliefs among politicians of the impact of the news media on politics and the effects of these beliefs on media motivation and efforts.

These findings also support prior studies which posit that politicians' perceptions of the media's power are not only significant, but they also shape their interactions with the news media. This may invariably explain research findings demonstrating that much of political actors' behaviour is motivated by the desire to get journalists' attention and coverage, a desire that scholars refer to as mediation.

Research Objective Three assesses the power of social media in political communication in Nigeria. The result gathered on the relationship between social media and public opinion formation in Nigeria revealed that political content on social media had sparked interest in the activities of political parties, groups, and candidates. The results ascertain that social media has positive impact on political processes and has indeed become the popular space for enhanced citizen participating in politics. On the growing concerns about of *fake news*

and its deleterious effects on news credibility and social security in the country, Akoje (2022) had found that the media disseminate a tremendous amount of political content much of whose material is trivial, unreliable and polarising. “Fake news” is a fairly recent term that speaks to this phenomenon. Similarly, the findings in a recent study by Msughter and Kurfi (2022) showed that the manifestation of hate speech by the select newspapers in the 2015 and 2019 general elections was significantly high in the inside pages than front and back pages. However, in contradistinction to the general belief that social media stories are mostly negative and full of fury than sound and practical ideas (especially since they are usually old and unreliable), our findings disagreed with the notion that political conversations here are often mundane, trivial and rarely highlight important issues in society. This implies that social media political contents can be trusted. Oyedokun, Amedu and Azizi (2022) similarly concluded that social media has reshaped the terrain of political communication in Nigeria and that it should be consistently explored in coming elections to capture citizens’ interests, especially the youth.

Conclusion and Recommendations

According to most of the participants in this study, the media is a very critical force for the framing, formation and projection of perspectives on the National Question in Nigeria. Like in most parts of the modern world, the press has always been involved in politics, especially in the formation of public opinion, in the perception of images of candidates for political offices, as well as in the definition of social reality and social norms. Similarly, the information, education, enlightenment and entertainment of the public, as well as the presentation and clarification of issues, values, goals and changes in culture and society, have long been established attributes of the media. The fact that some kind of communication on some kind of issues, brought to the attention of some kinds of people under some kinds of conditions always has some kind of effects make the media a very intriguing and impactful phenomenon.

While most of the respondents agreed that there is hardly any major political movement or effort in Nigeria that is not invariably implicated by the critical involvement of the media in politics, some feel that the relative influence on the media on the character of contemporary Nigerian politics may have been exaggerated, if not completely mischaracterized. For example, some forcefully argued that the assertion that politics is losing its autonomy is a very subjective one; that that thinking not only comes from an ideological standpoint but traces its academic origins to media studies. This perspective argued that there has always been some incipient

rivalry between media constructions and politics; that the media has indeed tended to be more about an instrument of politics rather than its shaper.

The study recommends that sustained efforts should be made to continuously interrogate the role and impact of the media in politics in Nigeria, especially to monitor and mitigate the potentially deleterious effects of mediatization of politics on the democratic structure and health of the Nigerian society. The growing influence of the social media is particularly worthy of the focus of scholars and practitioners so that both their positive and negative implications can be teased out with a view to determining what intermediations may be required. The study also recommends that to ensure a more robust and democracy-supporting mass media, all significant interest groups ought to be consciously represented by, and in, the media - thereby facilitating the equitable negotiation or arbitration of competing interests through democratic processes.

References

- Ahmad, T., Alvi, A. & Ittefaq, M. (2019). The use of social media on political participation among university students: An analysis of survey results from rural Pakistan. *SAGE Open*, 1-9.
- Akoje, T. P. (2022). *Social Media as Joint Arena of Voters and Politicians*. In E. S. Asemah, D. O. Ekhareafo, T. Santas (Ed.), *Thoughts on Political Communication in Nigeria*. Enugu: GO University Press, 138-145.
- Asemah, E. S., Nwammuo, A. N. & Nkwam-Uwaoma, A. O. (2022). *Theories and Models of Communication (2nd Ed)*. University of Jos Press, Jos, Plateau State
- Cook, T. (2005). *Governing with the News: The News Media as a Political Institution*. 2nd Edition. Chicago: University of Chicago Press; Dahlgren.
- Esser, F. & Pfetsch, B. (2020). *Political Communication*. In D. Caramani (Ed.), *Comparative Politics*. Fifth edition. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 336-358.
- Folarin, B. (1998). *Theories of Mass Communication: An Introductory Text*. Ibadan: Stirling-Horden Publishers.
- Garland, R. (2018). Between media and politics: Can government press officers hold the line in the age of 'political spin'? The case of the UK after 1997. A PhD Thesis submitted to Department of Media and Communications, London School of Economics and Political Science.

- Hepp, A., Hjarvard, S. & Lundby, K. (2015). Mediatization: Theorizing the interplay between media, culture and society. *Media, Culture and Society*, 37(2), 314-324.
- Hjarvard, S. (2013). *The Mediatization of Culture and Society*. London: Routledge.
- Koch-Baumgarten, S. & Voltmer, K. (2010). *The Interplay of Mass Communication and Political Decision-Making - Policy Matters!* Oxford: Routledge.
- Kolawole, S. (2021). Nigeria and the hegemony of ideology. <https://www.thecable.ng/nigeria-and-the-hegemony-of-ideology>, 2021.
- Kriesi, H., Lavenex, S., Esser, F., Matthes, J., Bühlmann, M., & Bochsler, D. (2013). *Democracy in the Age of Globalization and Mediatization*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Madaki, W. M. & Jakonda, L. M. (2022). *Newspaper Framing of Presidential Candidates in the 2019 General Elections in Nigeria*. In E. S. Asemah, D. O. Ekhareifo, T. Santas (Ed.), *Thoughts on Political Communication in Nigeria*. Enugu: GO University Press, 368-379.
- Madaki, W. M. & Jakonda, L. M. (2022). Newspaper framing of presidential candidates in the 2019 general elections in Nigeria. In E. S. Asemah, D. O. Ekhareifo, T. Santas (Ed.), *Thoughts on Political Communication in Nigeria* (368-379). Enugu: GO University Press.
- Moss, G. & O'Loughlin, B. (2008). Convincing claims? Democracy and representation in Post-9/11 [2001] Britain. *Political Studies*, 56(3), 75-725.
- Msughter, A. E. & Kurfi, M. Y. (2022). *Comparative Study of Hate Speech in the 2015 and 2019 General Elections in Select Newspapers in Nigeria*. In E. S. Asemah, D. O. Ekhareifo, T. Santas (Ed.), *Thoughts on Political Communication in Nigeria*. Enugu: GO University Press, 146-158.
- Ojeka, J. D. & Ajakaiye, O. P. (2015). Political advertising and elections: An overview of 2011 presidential election in Nigeria. *The Postgraduate Journal of Multidisciplinary Studies, University of Ilorin, Ilorin, Kwara State*, 13(1).
- Oyedokun, D. M. (2022). *Nexus between Citizen Journalism and Political Communication in Nigeria*. In E. S. Asemah, D. O. Ekhareifo, T. Santas (Ed.), *Thoughts on Political Communication in Nigeria* (259-270). Enugu: GO University Press.
- Oyedokun, D. M., Amedu. A. A. & Azizi, A. S. (2022). *Social Media, Political Communication and Youth's Political Participation in Nigeria*. In E. S. Asemah, D. O. Ekhareifo, T. Santas (Ed.), *Thoughts on Political Communication in Nigeria* (237-348). Enugu: GO University Press.

- Pfetsch, B. & Esser, F. *Comparing Political Communication*. In F. Esser & T. Hanitzsch (Eds.), *The Handbook of Comparative Communication Research*, New York, NY: Routledge, 2012, 25-47.
- Salihu, N. A. & Oparaugo, B. (2017). Cartoon as a device for political critique in Nigerian newspapers. *The Beam: Journal of Arts and Science*, 11(2), 149-155.
- Strömbäck, J. & Esser, F. (2014). *Mediatization of Communication: Transforming Democracies and Reshaping Politics*. In K. Lundby (Ed.), *Mediatization of Communication*. Berlin: DE Gruyter Mouton, 375403.
- Strömbäck, J. (2008). Four phases of mediatization: An analysis of the mediatization of politics. *International Journal of Press/Politics*, 13(3), 228-246.
- Udende, P. Akpede, K. S. & Omoloso, A. I. (2022). *Political Communication Transformation in Nigeria and Changing Media Environment*. In E. S. Asemah, D. O. Ekharefo, T. Santas (Ed.), *Thoughts on Political Communication in Nigeria*. Enugu: GO University Press, 118-127.
- Usiere, A. U. (2022). Multimedia communication approaches in political communication in select states in Southeast Nigeria. In E. S. Asemah, D. O. Ekharefo, T. Santas (Ed.), *Thoughts on Political Communication in Nigeria* (310-319). Enugu: GO University Press.
- Vowe, G. & Henn, P.(eds.) (2016). *Political Communication in the Online World*. London: Routledge.