

Innovations

Newspaper Representation of RUGA Programme of Buhari Administration

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Abstract: *This research examined newspaper representation of the RUGA programme of the Federal Government of Nigeria, under the leadership of President Muhammadu Buhari. The work analyzed the contents of four selected newspapers in Nigeria along the two regional divides (North and South). The newspapers examined are Daily Trust, Leadership, The Guardian and Punch. The work was anchored on the Framing theory. The study adopted mixed research method with the aid of quantitative content analysis to carry out a census of the selected newspapers within the period the programme was introduced and suspended while additional data were sourced through an in-depth interview. The findings are presented in tables and text format. The analysis was done using simple percentage and textual analysis. The major findings of this work include, among others, low representation of the RUGA programme especially by the northern newspapers. The result shows a predominantly negative representation of the RUGA programme. The work therefore recommended, among others, that the newspapers should eschew regional sentiment in presenting government programmes, no matter the region it seeks to benefit and to endeavor to emphasize the benefits of government programmes and policies to encourage mass mobilization towards public acceptance. This study has thus provided additional literature and empirical basis to the media*

representation research, especially as it concerns the short-lived Federal Government's RUGA programme in Nigeria.

Keywords: *Representation, RUGA, Media, Programme, Newspapers*

Introduction

The media in Nigeria have, no doubt, carved a significant niche for themselves over a long period of time since pre-independence all through to post independence. They have gone through transformations over this period, both positively and negatively. On the balance, they have been able to remain active. The media remain the link between the government and the people not just in reporting government activities to the people but also in helping to monitor government in trust for the people (Adeyanju, 2017). Moreover, the media, according to Isola (2008), also have the duty of promoting and nourishing the ideals of democratic ethos and to constantly assure and guarantee the protection of freedom of individuals and that of the media themselves, which is the heart of popular participation in liberal democracies.

As a result, the media are believed to always exercise very strong influence on the evolution of social realities by framing images of realities which can come in predictable and patterned manner. The mass media provide the reports a spin by considering the organizational and modality constraints, professional judgments and some perceived judgments by audience. In addition, the audience perception of the media content is usually influenced by pre-existing meanings, structures or schemes (Umueri, 2008).

Consequently, information especially from the mass media, remains the strategic resource in a world built on contestation of ideas and world views. The control of access to this crucial social resource is very important and germane to the exercise of power and hegemony by the social and political classes. There is therefore no doubt that denying the popular masses access to information and knowledge will always amount to a major part of the process of disempowerment. Access to information therefore is in this respect an enabler of all other rights. This statement is thus very important as captured by the popular cliché, "knowledge is power" (Oso, 2019).

The RUGA programme is one of the Buhariled Federal government's agricultural initiatives aimed at boosting agricultural transformation and remedy to the lingering farmers-herders' clashes that have resulted in colossal loss of many lives and properties across the country. The programme was launched on the 10th of May 2019 but as a result of condemnation and rejection, it was suspended by the federal government on the 4th of July 2019.

The media reports which uses different journalistic frames to represent the RUGA programme may have provoked the public condemnation and rejection of the RUGA programme and forced the Nigeria government into the action of suspension after a few months of its launch. This research therefore, examined how the selected newspaper reports in Nigerian represented the RUGA programme within the period under study.

Statement of Problem

The Buhari administration is reported to have introduced the RUGA programme as a means to boost food security, increase employment of youth, combat farmer-herder crisis as well as to promote his administration's economic diversification agenda. There is need to examine how the Nigerian media in their characteristic roles have represented the RUGA activities to the Nigerian audience. Media representations, according to Abubakar and Abubakar (2021) can take different forms such as images, cartoons, styles, directions, words and phrases that are employed in certain media narratives. Therefore, the rejection of the RUGA programme by Nigerians especially in some parts of the country despite the publicity provoked a need for a study of the Nigerian newspaper reports on the RUGA programme.

To this end, some researches have been carried out on RUGA programme by Ekpo and Tobi (2019), Seyedi and Ndagi (2019), Ogunlade, Olabanji, Adebisi, Omotosho and Olabode (2020), Galadima and Abana (2024) etc on the frequency of the reports, perception and analysis of the RUGA programme in some communities and newspapers. This research therefore, examined four selected newspapers and their representation of RUGA programme across the two major regional divides of Nigeria (North and South) within the period of this study. The aim was to ascertain how the newspapers represented the RUGA programme with focus on frequency of reports, category of report, direction and prominence given to the reports in line with its publicity. The research also examined the type of framing by the newspapers reports on the RUGA programme as well as the influence of editors and challenges of reporting the RUGA programme.

Objectives of the Study

The general aim of this research work was to examine and analyze media representation of the RUGA Programme in the selected newspapers. The specific objectives were to:

- 1) Determine the prominence given to the RUGA Programme by the selected newspapers;
- 2) Identify the volume of coverage given to RUGA Programme by the selected newspapers;

- 3) To ascertain whether editors influenced the report of RUGA Programme in the selected newspapers.
- 4) Investigate the challenges encountered by the newspapers in reporting the RUGA programme

Research Questions

The study was guided by the following research questions:

- 1) What is the level of prominence given to the RUGA Programme by the selected newspapers?
- 2) What is the volume of coverage given to RUGA Programme by the selected newspapers?
- 3) Did editors influence the report of RUGA Programme in the selected newspapers?
- 4) What are the challenges encountered by the selected newspapers in reporting the RUGA programme?

Literature Review

Media Representation of Issues

The mass media have, no doubt, become central to how citizens comprehend issues and events that happen around them. This is because we live in a highly mediatized society. In this process, journalism is seen to occupy a prime place as the main popular convener and conveyor of ideas, messages, information and images that nurture the “picture in our heads”, Bello and Oso (2018).

According to Akpor and Clever (2016) the mass media, in the form of the radio, television and newspapers are influential vehicles for persuading target audiences to imbibe new behaviours, or to remind them of critical information. In addition to informing the public about new issues and where to seek help, the media also keep the public updated about campaigns or programmes. They strive to empower rural dwellers to fight major causes of diseases which can be prevented through vaccination, inform large numbers of people of seasonal or daily variations for such activities as an immunization campaign or availability of a new product or service, teach new skills or organize listening groups, and increase community acceptance of programmes or policies.

The media are not only capable of affecting us through the information they disseminate, they sometimes determine our world view in general. Therefore, in every society today, the media are central to our existence and they have over the years saturated our lives with barrage of messages. No doubt, the media have a significant impact in the everyday lives of citizens which determines and overshadows the broader cultural relations, experiences, values and understanding of the world. This is being achieved by the media through frequent reportage of

issues. As a result, the media have also been identified as a major conveyor through which people understand public issues such as conflict, famines and politics etc. therefore, the media have the capacity to mitigate wars and conflicts and at the same time, can instigate conflicts among parties, Bello and Oso (2018).

According to Kamoru and Sirajudeen (2016), the mass media continuously serve as a very important channels of transmitting messages to a large heterogeneous and diversified audience through the use of newspaper, magazine, radio, television, books and lately the internet. They remain the veritable tools for mass mobilization in view of their coverage and impact on the society at large. This is because they carry out the primary responsibility of gathering news about events within the society with the special aim of disseminating the information to the masses that depend on the media outlets for information, news, enlightenments and entertainment.

It is therefore obvious that traditional mass media have played and are still playing essential roles in our contemporary society, serving as the “conduit” through which societal members learn of issues away from the horizon of their personal lives (Mohammed, Dalib & Adisa, 2018).

Furthermore, Ojete (2008) observed that experts in media studies are unanimous that the effect of media mobilization efforts would be seen from a triple stance. First they have the capability to create attitudes towards certain public or national affairs where none existed. Second, they could cause a shift of public attitudes or opinions that have not been deeply rooted. And third, they could only be able to simply reinforce already existing public or individual opinions on given issues or government activities.

The media, according to Asemah (2011), tend to promote the dominant ideology in every society. This is mainly because they serve as agents of information dissemination who exist to serve certain ruling class by giving more voices and amplification to the rich at the detriment of the poor. For example, news or events about the poor masses are rarely reported except from negative perspectives. The media reports are presented against the background of certain ruling class or elites, which ultimately represents a fixed alterable truth. The media therefore promote dominant ideology through agenda setting, status conferral, news analysis, broadcast commentary, editorials, features etc. These are reflected in the ways media frame and represent reports on issues, ideas or events of interest.

To this end, media representation according to the British Broadcasting Cooperation (ND), is how media texts deal with and present gender, age, ethnicity, national and regional identities, social issues and events to an audience. It also views representation as how societal aspects such as race, gender, age, ethnicity, nationality, and social issues are presented. Media texts have the power to shape an audience’s knowledge and understanding about these important topics or issues

under review. In media studies, representation is the manner certain aspects of the society, such as gender, age or ethnicity, are presented to audiences. This makes the media messages very powerful in terms of influencing ideas and attitudes of such target audiences.

Representation is an important concept within the cultural-critical paradigm of media studies that scholars have created and studied over time. The concept helped scholars to move beyond understanding media messages as simply a portrayal or reflection of reality. This is because representation is embedded in the 24-hour saturated media stream and established norms and common sense about people, groups and institutions in contemporary society. The media have created representation as a central concept, signifying practices for producing shared meaning, Fürsich (2010).

Fürsich (2010) asserted that representations are constitutive of culture, meaning and knowledge about ourselves and the world around us. This goes beyond just mirroring reality, representations in the media such as in film, television, photography and print journalism create reality and normalize specific world-views or ideologies. This view seeks to understand the concept of ideology as a hegemonic or normalizing force in contemporary societies, as developed by cultural theorists. Cultural media scholars are especially interested in representations as constructed images that carry ideological connotations. Since representations can produce shared cultural meaning, problematic (that is, limited), representations can have negative consequences for political and social decision-making and can be implicated in sustaining social and political inequalities.

When it comes to media, especially film and television, this audience is vast. Mass media broadens our scope of perception when it comes to society, multiculturalism, and the world. It holds, for many, an educational impact as it showcases unique experiences otherwise beyond reach. This is why representation is crucial. In a multicultural, diverse, multifaceted society, it is vital to amplify the voices and share the stories of all. In order to explain the media texts or contents to determine how they have represented ideas and issues, BBC (ND) identified some key concepts that are very important in representation. They include, construction, mediation, selection, anchorage, stereotype and ideology. **Construction** is the way the media text is put together, such as editing and choice of camera angles. **Mediation** is the process everything goes through before it reaches an audience such as written and re-written before it makes it to production, how newspaper or magazine photographs are cropped and captioned. **Selection** refers to what has been selected to be included in a media text. While **Anchorage** are the words that go along with images to give those pictures a certain meaning in a specific context such as captions and headlines in newspapers. **Stereotypes** are simplified representation of a person, groups of people or places, through basic or obvious

characteristics, which are often exaggerated. **Ideology** are ideas and beliefs, held by media producers which are often represented in their media texts.

Media representations predominate in determining how we see issues, individuals or events in the media. While there is a marked tendency to categorize issues, individuals or events in the media as types, the selective nature of the visual image frequently objectifies them, dismissing their historical, cultural and political circumstances, Wright (2002).

In addition, media representations are often entrenched and predefined ways of portraying others. At times, representations may leave out whole populations simply by ignoring them or their viewpoints. In a media-saturated culture, this lack of attention means silencing – a dilemma that cultural scholars call symbolic annihilation. Annihilation can also be a result of very limited or stereo-typical portrayal of a group. At other times, representations essentialize others as “exotic”, or even worse, as abnormal and even deviant, Fürsich (2010).

An interesting dimension of media representation is that of ethnic diversity where conflict between ethnic groups is presented. It is common for the media to present simplistic unidimensional analysis of conflict, where ethnic difference is in itself given as a cause of conflict. More even-handed analysis that consider underlying issues such as the fears and concerns of both sides, and explore a range of possible solutions, are rare (Sanson, Duck, Cupid, Ungerer, Scuderi & Sutton, 2000).

To this end, this research is anchored on media representation as the pivot for assessing the newspaper reports on RUGA programme of the Federal Government of Nigerian in 2019. The aim is to enable the researcher assess the consequences of the representation of RUGA programme which may have formed the basis for political and social decision-making by the citizens.

Empirical Review

Adeyanju (2017) examined the information media preference among the elite on government policies and their believability of the policy. The study was situated within the democratic media theory. The work adopted survey as its methodology with questionnaire as the instrument for data collection. Census was conducted among the elite on the senior executive course 38 at NIPSS Kuru. The work concluded among others that the elites pay adequate attention to the credibility of the messages and the depth of analysis involved. It therefore recommended among others the need to intensify in-depth analysis on government policies to help the people in taking informed decisions

Gever (2019) also examined the frames and tone of media reportson the anti-open grazing law of Benue State, Nigeria into two print media (the *Punch* and

Leadership newspapers – as well as two broadcasting channels – *Channels TV* and the *Nigeria Television Authority (NTA)* from June 2016 to November 2017. The work was located within the theory of media framing propounded in 1974 by Goffman. A total of 10 journalists who reported stories on the anti-open grazing law were interviewed for the study. The result revealed that most of the stories cited Benue indigenes as sources. The result also showed the dominance of horror and hope frames while the tone of framing was largely positive in support of the law. The work therefore concluded, among others, that the media have succeeded in projecting certain aspects of the conflicts. Therefore, the results can serve as a guide for journalists covering conflict in Nigeria and other parts of the world.

Ekpo and Tobi (2019) carried out a situational analysis of the RUGA programme to identify the various factors that culminated in its rejection by stakeholders from central and southern Nigeria. Secondary evidences in the form of media reports and primary data such as press releases by stakeholders suggested that the rejection was, among other things, instigated by the hysteria of a calculated stratagem by the federal government to, through federal-might, reallocate ancestral lands of central/southern Nigeria to the demographically pressurized herding groups from the north through the RUGA settlement. The work concluded that RUGA settlement arrangement by government created a favourable climate for the fear of the unknown, revolving around conspiracies of "Islamisation", "Fulanisation" and federal-backed land-grabbing agenda". The failure by the federal government to carry stakeholders along ensured that very little endorsement and information was available on the public to provide answers for inquisitive minds. The work therefore, recommended, among others, a need for rigorous consultations of stakeholders nationwide in drafting and implementing sensitive policies of national significance.

Similarly, Seyedi and Ndagi (2019) examined the perception of residence of selected areas in Niger state over the planned RUGA settlement in Bobi grazing reserve. The work is located within the conflict theory and adopted survey methodology. The study targeted 100 respondents of five villages in the area. The findings revealed that majority of the respondents are aware of the settlement and positively disposed to the arrangement. The work concluded that RUGA settlement in Niger state will aid the reduction of conflict among farmers and herders in the state. The study recommended, among others, the need for Niger state government to intensify additional campaign for public enlightenment.

Ogunlade, Olabanji, Adebisi, Omotosho and Olabode (2020) evaluated how the Rural Grazing Area initiative (RUGA) were reported in selected Nigerian newspapers. It assessed the frequency, report format and prominence accorded the RUGA news with reference to other subject matters in the news reports. The work adopted a systematic quantitative content analysis in data collection, analysis as well as the interpretation. A total of 276 dailies from three newspapers were analysed

using purposive sampling technique (from three months newspapers). The newspapers examined include *Punch*, *The Guardian* and *Daily Trust* newspapers respectively. The findings revealed, among others, that RUGA issues were not given adequate prominence in the selected newspapers, even though the newspapers played more of informative role in the reportage other than analysis of the programme it therefore recommended among others the need for news analysis in the style of reporting developmental initiatives to fast-track better understanding of such issues and scale up agricultural contents in the newspaper reportage.

Saka, Akinwale and Babatunde, (2019) examine the various discourse on the trajectory of the suspended RUGA programme, which views various attacks through criticism regarding the implementation of the RUGA programme. The public reactions were identified to be driven by ethnic and religious sentiments as well as lack of proper consultations prior to the implementation of the programme, the insensitivity of the government to potentials of the programme to generate ethnic and tribal issues; and lack of clarifications regarding the role of the state governments in its implementation. The study provided insights into the content of the programme and its objectives, the causes of the constant conflicts between farmers and herders and the reason for the suspension. The work posits that any policy or programme formulated without effective evaluation of its possible strengths and weaknesses, as well as its potency to produce desired outcomes may suffer setbacks at the point of implementation. The work concluded that there is urgent need for the re-visitation and refurbishing of the process of national policy formulation, implementation and evaluation to serve as means for achieving adequate and inclusive fundamental national growth. This is because the programme is perceived to lack the consent of the masses. The research therefore recommended, among others, the need to encourage only interested states to formulate public- private ranching business policy and government should adopt reliable immigration policy to manage migrants

Apikins (2020) also examined the federal government of Nigeria's Rural Grazing Area policy: demystification of the elite's theory. The work reviews how some African countries such as Burkina Faso, Central African Republic, Chad, Guinea, Mali and Nigeria herders (mostly Fulbe extraction) are embroiled in a murderous conflict with African pastoral farmers that often results into an apocalyptic power struggle by their more politically sophisticated and de-normalized kinsmen. It highlights how the solution of RUGA programme to the conflict has further incited outrage, as majority of Nigerians view it as an assault on inclusivity in a multi ethnic Nigeria, thus rejecting it. As a result of the widespread condemnation link to threat to crop farmers, secularism and national security, the government suspended its implementation. The work asserts that the paradigm shift negates the fundamental thrust of the elite's theory, which presupposes that the

elites determine “who does or gets what, when, where and how”, hence the problem antique. The adopted a qualitative research approach for data generation and analysis. The paper revealed among others that the RUGA programme saga shows how a nation can compromise her future through sheer accumulation of ethnic grievances through elite manipulations and deceits; and how the citizens can mobilize to demystify unpopular and anti-people policies of government, it therefore recommended among others, that a viable path to resolving the farmers-herders’ incessant conflicts is to modernize cattle breeding and rearing in Nigeria in tandem with global best practices.

Ele (2020) examined the clashes between the herdsmen and farmers in Nigeria as a result of the effects of climate change in northern Nigeria and exacerbated by other factors such as ethno-religious sentiments. The work posits that herdsmen are forced to migrate southwards to face competition for arable and grazing land with the farmers in the middle belt. This, invariably leads to conflicts, often resulting in gruesome murder and carnage with scores of people maimed or killed. To resolve this, the Nigerian government proposed and set up grazing reserves and rural grazing area settlements in all states of the federation. However, the major problem is how and where to obtain the land. The research reflects on the legal implication of a private freehold or leasehold tenure arrangement as against the compulsory acquisition of land as proposed by the government.

Galadima and Abana (2024) also examined newspaper framing of the rise and fall of the RUGA Initiative of the Federal Government of Nigeria. The work analyzed the contents of four selected indigenous newspapers in Nigeria: *Daily Trust*, *Leadership*, *The Guardian* and *Punch*. The work was anchored on the Agenda Setting theory and Framing theory. The study adopted quantitative content analysis to carry out a census of the selected newspapers within the period the programme was introduced and suspended. The findings are presented in tables and text format. The analysis was done using simple percentage and textual analysis. The major findings of this work include, among others, a very low presentation of the RUGA programme especially by the northern newspapers which accounted for 18.14% of the 612 editions of the newspapers examined. The result shows a predominantly negative reports of the RUGA programme. The work therefore recommended, among others, that the newspapers should step up coverage by increasing the attention given to issues of national development.

To this end, this research sought to fill a gap by examining the representation and challenges of reporting the RUGA programme of the federal government of Nigeria in four selected Nigerian newspapers within the stipulated period under study.

Theoretical Framework

Media Framing theory was adopted to locate this research enquiry. The concept of framing was made popular by Erving Goffman in 1974 when he published his work “Framing Analysis: An Essay on Organisation of Experience”. He identified primary frames as frames that allowed its users to locate, perceive, identify and label a seemingly infinite number of concrete occurrences and divided primary frames into natural and social frameworks. Natural frameworks are purely physical with no interferences while social frameworks provide ground understanding of events by incorporating an aim, a will or an effort resulting to “Guided doings”, (Goffman 1974).

Framing according to Umueri (2008) refers to a concept of media effect that is often associated with agenda setting. He adds that framing is the way the mass media paint and colour news items to an acceptable level of constructing social reality; affecting the audience, readers, with a view to adding values to information processing and use by the recipients. News framing therefore thrives on existing technology, professional competence of journalists and the pre-existing information or knowledge of the recipients in the target society.

Entman (1993) explains that the concept of framing is the process of selecting some aspects of perceived reality and making their meanings more salient in a communicating context in such a way as to promote a particular problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation and/or treatment recommendation for the item described. This means that media frames function to define an issue, discuss its causes or factors responsible, evaluate its implications; and make prescriptions on how best to handle the issue. Through these, media frames provide focus and influence how issues and events are understood and evaluated by the audience thereby giving them a particular point of view, perception or frame of interpretation.

The analysis of text in framing theory usually leads to clear and interesting results, in a transparent and communicative way, even if we are left at the end without a clear measure of strength and extent of the ‘frames’ uncovered. There are many cues to draw on, like the same ones available to the audience that give rise to supposed effects. These include visuals, language usage, labels, similes and metaphors, familiar narrative structures and so on, McQuail (2010)

Describing how framing works, McQuail, (2010) asserts that the way the news is framed by the journalists and how the audience frames news may be similar or different’ they proposed a model of framing effects, with the central idea that news frames activate certain inferences, ideas, judgments and contrasts concerning issues, policies and politicians. Their particular concern was to assess whether consistent framing of political news as either ‘strategic’ (dealing with attempt to gain campaign advantage) or ‘conflict orientated’ (as opposed to objectively reporting

substance) would contribute to greater public cynic about politics. Their evidence supports the idea of a cumulative (spiraling) process of increased cynicism as media effect.

Framing theory therefore provides an effective means for examining the media roles in developing the publics' disposition towards issues. The concept of framing is central to an understanding of the media role in shaping issue debates. With these contentions in mind, it seems evident that framing theory, despite its somewhat scattered conceptualization, has the potential to increase our nascent understanding of the interplay between media coverage of issues and the publics' knowledge of and attitude towards these same issues, Entman (1993).

In the view of Rogala (2011), frames provide easy understanding to complex issues by tilting towards more important or weighing certain considerations and arguments over others. In the process, they assist to communicate why an issue might be a problem, who or what might be responsible, and what can be done about them. In the process of analyzing a news report, and looking closely at what is emphasized in the story, what is deliberately excluded and what is elaborated on, it becomes very clear that the way the story is presented has a big impact on the effect of the article as against the story itself.

Scheufele (1999) recommended a process model of framing effects that recognizes them as outcomes of interaction between three different kinds of actor: interested sources and media organisations, journalist (media) and audience. As he opined, we are dealing with two kinds of frame: media frames and individual (receiver) frames. Both kind of frames can be either independent (a cause) or dependent (an effect). According to the model, there are four interrelated framing processes involving these actors. First, there is the construction and use of media frames by journalists and others working in news organisations under routine pressures, constantly dealing with sources and applying 'news values' and 'news angles' to event reports. Secondly, there is the transmission of 'framed' reports (e.g. a cynical view of politicians) to the audience. Thirdly, there is an acceptance of certain frames by members of the audience, with consequences for their attitudes, outlook (e.g. cynicism) and behavior (e.g. non-participation).

Based on this theory, the media draw public's attention to certain topics or issues in the society. They decide what people think about and the journalists select these topics. This is the agenda setting" thought". When news items occur, they are always more than only bringing up certain topics. The way in which the news is brought, the frame in which the news is presented, is also a choice made by the journalists. Thus, a frame refers to the way media and media gate keepers organize and present the events and issues they cover, and the way audiences interpret what they are provided. Frames are therefore, abstract notions that serve to organize or structure social meanings. Frames influence the perception of the news on the

audiences. This form of agenda setting not only tells what to think about but also how to think about it (Kariuki, 2013).

To this end, it is note-worthy that in the framing theory, a single sentence in a news report may perform one or more of the framing functions of problem definition, causes diagnosis, moral evaluation, and treatment recommendation while many sentences may perform none of them at all (Entman, 1993). This theoretical analysis therefore justifies why this research adopted this theory to situate the study of the RUGA programme. This is because how the newspaper reports are deliberately influenced or framed can always affect the audience perception and actions on the subject matter.

Research Design

This research adopted mixed research methodologies for gathering data. The quantitative content analysis was used to assess newspaper contents in selected newspapers on RUGA to address the first two objectives of this research. Similarly, survey method was adopted with the aid of in-depth interview, to access data on the 3rd and 4th objectives of this study. The decision to combine both qualitative and quantitative approaches was to balance numerical data with texts emanating from newspaper stories on the Federal Government's RUGA programme. While quantitative content analysis enabled the researcher to assign numbers to the coded data, the qualitative in-depth interview has created an opportunity for the analysis and discourse of manifest texts from the newspapers examined.

The Population of this study comprises all the national daily newspapers published in Nigeria constituted the population of this study. According to International Media Newspapers (2016) there is a total of 28 national dailies circulated in Nigeria. The newspapers in circulation in Nigeria make up the universe for the study from where a sample four was taken. They include: *The Guardian*; *Punch*, *Daily Trust* and *Leadership* newspapers. The duration for this study was 1st of April (a month and 10 days before the RUGA programme was launched) to the 31th of August, 2019 (a month and three weeks after it was suspended on July 4). Therefore, in this study, all the editions of the four newspapers published from 1st of April to 31th August 2019 were examined for content analysis. This period is 153 days per daily, which is 5 months. Therefore, 153 days multiply by four selected dailies equals to 612 editions of the newspapers put together. Similarly, the News editors or Editors-in-chief of the four newspapers were interviewed for additional qualitative data required

Units of Analyses

Units of analyses for this study were news stories, editorials, features, photos, columns, letters to editor, adverts and cartoons that are related to the RUGA programme in the selected newspapers.

Data Presentation and Analysis

A total of 612 editions of the four selected newspapers were examined for this research. The sum total of 113 reports were discovered as related to the RUGA programme. However, two of the reports were discovered to be invalid for reason of contamination and discarded. Therefore, a total of 111 reports are being analyzed for this research, in the tables below:

Table 1: Prominence of Reports

Prominence	Daily Trust	Leadership	Punch	Guardian	Total
Front page	0	0	1 (14.29%)	6 (85.71%)	7(6.31%)
Back page	4 (80%)	0	1 (20%)	0	5 (4.50%)
Inside page	15 (15.30%)	22 (22.45%)	22 (22.45%)	39 (39.80%)	98 (88.29%)
Centre spread	0	0	0	1 (100%)	1 (0.90%)
Total	19 (17.12%)	22 (19.82%)	24 (21.62%)	46 (41.44%)	111 (100%)

Source: Field Research, 2021

This table above contains data on the location of the reports on RUGA programme by the selected newspapers. It reveals total of 7 reports on the front pages of the newspapers while 5 reports are recorded for the back page, 98 reports for the inside pages and 1 for the centre page. Specifically, the *Daily Trust* newspaper has no report on the front page, 4 reports on the back page, 15 inside page and zero centre spread. The *Leadership* newspaper also has no report on front and back pages, except on the inside pages and no story on the centre spread. The *Punch* newspaper has only 1 report each on both the front and back pages. Finally, the *Guardian* newspaper has 6 reports on the front page, with none on the back page. The table therefore reveals that all the northern newspapers (*Daily Trust* and *Leadership*) did not give prominence to the RUGA programme as they all focused mostly on reporting in the inside pages while the southern newspapers gave minimal prominence to the report. This goes to show that the location of the newspapers has no link with the prominence given to the reports on RUGA programme.

Table 2: Volume of Coverage

Volume of	Daily Trust	Leadership	Punch	Guardian	Total
Story					
Full page	0	1 (8.33%)	5 (41.67%)	6 (50%)	12 (10.81%)
Half	8 (22.22%)	4 (11.11%)	7 (19.44%)	17 (47.22%)	36 (32.43)
Quarter	11 (17.46%)	17 (26.98%)	12 (19.05%)	23 (36.51%)	63 (56.76%)
Total	19 (17.12%)	22 (19.82%)	24 (21.62%)	46 (41.44%)	111 (100%)

Source: Field Research, 2021

The table above show the volume of coverage given to the RUGA programme by the four selected newspapers. The data shows that *Daily Trust* newspaper has no full-page report on RUGA programme while The *Leadership* newspaper has only 1 full page report on the programme. On the other hand, The *Punch* newspaper has 5 full page reports, while The *Guardian* newspaper has 6 full page reports. Over all, there are 12 full page reports on the RUGA programme, most of which are credited to the southern newspapers.

Interview Results

In addition, an indepth interview was conducted with the Editors of *Daily Trust, Leadership, Guardian* and the *Punch* newspapers. The extract is captured in the Research Questions and discussion of findings bellow.

Answering the Research Questions

This section is concerned with the provision of answers to the research questions earlier stated above. The answers have provided below:

Research Question 1: What is the prominence given to the RUGA Programme by the selected newspapers? Table 1 above provides answers to this research question. It reveals a total of 7 reports on the front pages of the newspapers, out of the 111 reports while 5 reports are recorded for the back page, 98 (88.29%) reports for the inside pages and 1 for the centre page. This report shows that the inside page got the highest frequency in reporting the RUGA Programme by the selected newspapers. It therefore indicates that adequate prominence was not given to the RUGA programme by the newspapers. This answers the research question 1 adequately.

Research Question 2: What is the highest volume of coverage given to RUGA Programme by the selected newspapers? Table 2 above provides answers to this research question. It reveals a total of 12 full page reports, 36 half page reports and

63 quarter page reports on the RUGA programme by the selected newspapers. This presentation reveals that the quarter page reports got the highest frequency. Therefore, the volume of coverage given to the RUGA programme by the selected newspapers is very low. This has thus, answered the research question 2.

Research Question 3: What is the dominant theme in reporting the RUGA Programme by the selected newspapers? Table 3 above provides answers to this research question. It indicates that a total of 53 reports on political theme which is equivalent to 47.75%. The table indicates that the northern newspapers (*Daily Trust* and *The Leadership* newspapers) focused more on political theme much the same way the southern newspapers (*The Punch* and *The Guardian* newspapers) which also tilted more on the political theme in the reports. This information has thus answered the research question 3.

Research Question 4: Did editors influence the report of RUGA Programme in the selected newspapers? The transcribed interview provides answer to this research question. The interview information shows that the editors influenced the newspaper reports for and against the RUGA programme. The result shows that *Daily Trust* newspaper (which is a northern newspaper) had interest in RUGA programme and influenced the report on the 2019 RUGA programme. In the words of the *Daily Trust* editor: “Of course *Daily Trust* is a national newspaper but it has special interest on happenings in the north. So we train our reporters from time to time on how to give special attention to issues around RUGA and even in the placement in the paper... we see it as a positive endeavor, we supported it, we felt that Nigeria must move forward, we strongly felt that if it succeeds many millions of people will benefit from it. We strongly believe that if it succeeds, herder farmer crisis will go to be a thing of the past. We strongly believe that it will also address issues of poverty especially in this part of the country.” On the other hand, *The Punch* newspaper (which is a southern newspaper) had interest against the RUGA programme and made efforts to discourage it. According to the editor, “when the issue of RUGA came up some few years ago we insisted on it because we sense that we should really bring to the public domain the consequences of RUGA and this is based on the fact that it is another fix or agenda by a section of the country. So we insisted on it, to find out what and what to use in the editorial and to the glory of God the issue of RUGA nobody has heard about it. And if the government try to represent it through different ways but we knew what they were up to. So we did our best to give balance Journalism... the position (of *Punch* newspaper) is that we will try to find out what really is the agenda behind this RUGA.... RUGA is another way to bring back some of the operations and some of the policies through the back door”. However, the *Leadership* newspaper which is a northern newspaper did not show

partisan interest for or against the RUGA programme even though they believe in the it and what it stood to provide. Finally, *The Guardian* newspaper (southern newspaper) may also have interest against the RUGA programme since it's allegiance is tied to the south. According to the editor of *The Guardian*, "our position was just to be the voices of the masses and if majority of the people were saying no particularly from the south, we couldn't report otherwise".

Research Question 5: What are the challenges encountered by the selected newspapers in reporting the RUGA programme? The content of the transcribed interview provides answers to this research question. The study revealed that newspapers and reporters face challenges, for instance, *Daily Trust* experienced accusations of supporting Bandits/ banditaryand classified as bandits; faced cyber bullying and sometimes condemnation of reports while *The Punch* newspaper reporter experienced being detained, called names and avoided by news sources. The *Guardian* newspaper also experienced reactions from the presidency such as denials or refutation of reports. However, the *Leadership* newspaper did not experience any challenge, commendation or condemnation on the report of the 2019 RUGA programme in Nigeria.

Discussion of Findings

The result of this research finding reveals a total of 12 full page reports, 36 half page reports and 63 quarter page reports on the RUGA programme by the selected newspapers. This indicates that majority of the reports on the RUGA programme were hosted on the quarter pages while only 12 reports appeared on full pages. Therefore, the volume of coverage given to the RUGA programme by the selected newspapers was very low (at 10.81%). This indicates that the RUGA programme was not given the relevance it deserves by the newspapers within the period of the research.

The data from the findings also showed that all the newspapers have politics as the content category with the highest frequency with a total of 53 appearance equivalent to 47.75%, followed by Ethnicity and Solution with each having 20 (18.02%). This signifies that majority of the newspaper reports lay more emphasis on the political angle to the RUGA programme. This may account for the reason why the programme was accepted in some states and also rejected along regional and ethnic divides in Nigeria. It is on this basis that Kamoru and Sirajudeen (2016), opined that the newspapers are not necessarily interested in reporting the truth as it is, the events as they occurred, but to reconstruct and reaffirm their ethnic and cultural positions and identities.

Similarly, the data presented above also revealed that out of the 111 reports by the selected newspapers, a total of 22 reports were on thematic frame while 89

reports were on Episodic frames. As indicated above, the thematic frames are stories that provided background and context to stories on RUGA programme while the episodic do not provide background or context to the reports. Therefore, majority of the reports, as presented did not provide the necessary background information or context in the reportage of the RUGA programme. This trend may be deliberate in order to lead the audience towards rejecting the RUGA programme, which later became the reality of the day. As Stacks, Hacking & McDermott (2003) have emphasized, the goal of framing is to understand the nature of media presentations and ultimately how these presentations affect audiences (especially in their actions). In line with this argument, McComb and Ghanem (2003) opined that the media frames are important, as research has shown that differences in how media represent or frame events have consequences on the reasoning and beliefs of media consumers regarding events.

In addition, the research discovered that most of the selected newspapers had interest in or against the RUGA programme and made some efforts towards actualizing the interests. For instance, the northern newspapers especially the *Daily Trust* newspapers openly stood for and encouraged the actualization of the RUGA programme because it is perceived to be a northern agenda while the southern newspapers confessed to protecting the interest of the south which was against the RUGA programme. According to Jibo and Okoosi-Simbine (2003), the ownership pattern has influence over the nature of discourse in the newspapers, noting that the Nigerian media often take a “North- versus- South” position when matters are being discussed or contested in public arena which give the southerners an edge over the northerners because there are more newspapers owned in the south than there are in the north. Similarly, Kamoru and Sirajudeen (2016) stressed that Nigerian media operate within certain ideological frameworks. It is these frameworks which are explored, relived and made explicit for the readers in repeated mulling of tales. According to them, the newspapers are not necessarily interested in reporting the truth as it is, the events as they occurred, but to reconstruct and reaffirm their ethnic and cultural positions and identities.

Finally, the result of this research shows that all of the selected newspapers, with exception of Leadership newspaper, encountered some challenges while reporting the RUGA programme. The challenges, range from accusations of supporting bandits or being classified as bandits; cyber bullying, condemnation of reports, detention, name calling and being avoided by news sources as well as reactions from the presidency such as denials or refutation of reports. This is in line with the findings of Ekpo and Tobi (2019) who carried out a situational analysis of the RUGA programme to identify the various factors that culminated in its rejection by stakeholders from central and southern Nigeria. It revealed that RUGA settlement

arrangement by government created a favourable climate for the fear of the unknown, revolving around conspiracies of "Islamisation", "Fulanisation" and federal-backed land-grabbing agenda". Similarly, Mohammed, Dalib and Adisa (2018) explored the patterns of news framing on the social tension and how it necessitated the need for effective conflict management strategy in Nigeria's failed political atmosphere. The research revealed, among others, some patterns of positive and negative stereotypes and favouritism characterized by the news coverage during the period (as a result of the media reports).

Conclusion

Based on the result of the above findings in this research, it is safe to conclude that despite the hurricane of controversy surrounding the announcement and suspension of the RUGA programme, the selected newspapers, especially the ones located in the North, gave low volume of reports and also very low prominence in the presentation. In addition, majority of the newspaper reports emphasized more on the political angle to the RUGA programme other than the economic and other benefits that may be attached to the programme. Similarly, majority of the reports on RUGA programme did not provide the necessary background information or context in the reportage of the RUGA programme and the content of the newspapers reflected the much perceived regional and ownership influence. Therefore, it is safe to conclude that the media representation of the RUGA programme contributed largely to its rejection by the citizens and subsequent suspension by the Buhari government.

Recommendations

Based on the finding of this study, it is therefore appropriate to advance the following:

1. It is recommended that the newspapers should step up coverage by increasing the attention given to issues of national development and eschew regional sentiment in presenting government development programmes, no matter the region it seeks to benefit. The media should endeavor to emphasize the benefits of government programmes and policies to encourage mass mobilization towards acceptance as against fanning the embers of national discord, suspicion and unnecessary national embarrassment within the watching eyes of the comity of nations. When the newspapers struggle to reflect national staffing and circulation, it should also make efforts to balance its contents to reflect a philosophy of national objectivity in reporting.
2. There is need for the government to reintroduce RUGA programme in a more democratic manner to reflect the peculiar culture and ownership by each region other than the ethnic domination which the previous initiative

projected. Every region should take ownership of cattle rearing by its youths, to be trained and empowered by the federal government.

3. It is also recommended that constant evaluation of the programme be carried out to prevent a repeat of the negative representation of the RUGA programme by the selected newspapers and to fashion out better ways to improve future programmes and policies for national development. In addition, government needs to always interface with and carry along stakeholders in every programme and policy of government. This will contribute immensely towards collective ownership, participation, advocacy and desirable action of acceptance by the public. These stakeholders include, but not limited to members of the national assembly, representative of governors' forum, NUJ, Nigerian Guild of Editors, NGOs, inter-faith representatives and other bodies or opinion leaders and molders that may be relevant to the programmes or policies in all states and regions. For RUGA and other government programmes to succeed in Nigeria, they must be democratized to favour the individual state or region according to their peculiarity or needs. The government may also consider pre-testing every programme and policy before implementation. This will give the government the opportunity to make the necessary adjustments where necessary, to enhance acceptance by the public.
4. There is also a need for the newspapers to give preference to important national issue of this magnitude by way of giving it the prominence it deserves, sometimes on the front and back pages of the newspapers especially as major news headlines and editorial subject matter.
5. There is need for the newspapers to constantly give adequate space to competing national issues of public interest like the controversial RUGA by devoting reasonable spaces such as full page, centre spread etc for their presentation. This will allow for greater information and enlightenment of the issues and the importance attached to them
6. This research also recommends the need for more and constant training workshop for journalists and editors for balanced and objective reporting and editing of issues of national outlook. Journalists and editors must be seen to live above board by seeing and treating national issues in the newspapers beyond ethnic, religious and regional interests.
7. Finally, this research recommends that Nigerian newspapers must, as a matter of urgency, develop a philosophical outlook that reflects national representation. This goes beyond location, ownership, national staffing, circulation and nationwide coverage of issues. It is more on the national treatment of reports that shows the newspapers' contents reflect national solidarity as against regional and ownership interests. This will go a long way

to drastically reduce the challenges newspapers, editors and reporters face as a result of the perception of their reportage.

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