

## Analysis of the Sun and the Vanguard Newspapers' Coverage of the 2023 Presidential Election Campaigns in Nigeria

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### ABSTRACT

*The researchers undertook an examination of the coverage of the 2023 presidential election campaign by The Sun and The Vanguard newspapers. The study used a content analysis research design which involved the analysis of news reports using five specific tones and seven frame categories. A total of 72 news reports from The Sun and 45 news reports from The Vanguard were analysed through systematic sampling techniques. The findings revealed that both newspapers predominantly used the strategy frame in their reporting of the election campaigns. Interestingly, The Sun primarily employed the indifference frame, while The Vanguard utilised the attack frame to report on the campaign. Based on these findings, the researchers recommended that both newspapers incorporate more of the policy issue frame. By focusing on the plans and agendas of the candidates, this approach would enable Nigerians to make well-informed decisions regarding their choice of presidential candidate in the election.*

**KEY WORDS:** *Presidential election, Campaigns, The Sun, The Vanguard, mass media.*

### INTRODUCTION

Newspapers play a crucial role in the context of presidential election campaigns, serving as indispensable tools for ensuring transparency in Nigeria's electoral process. Nwaoboli (2023) highlights the media's significance in terms of surveillance, correlation, education, and information dissemination to the general public. Prior to the 2023 Nigerian presidential election, a range of campaign activities aimed at mobilising citizens to participate in the electoral process and vote for their preferred political candidates were carried out. While candidates actively engage with voters to garner support, the media provides up-to-date information on the campaign proceedings.

Asemah, Nwammuo, and Nkwam-Uwaoma (2022), as well as Nwaoboli and Asemah (2021), emphasize that the populace relies on the media to receive information that shapes their opinions and aids decision-making during times of political change or crises, aligning with the media dependency theory. Consequently, Nigerians depend on the media to report on election campaign activities, thereby informing their electoral choices.

Similarly, Ajibulu (2022) observes that the mass media report events and occurrences using various tones and frames to shape public opinion in desired ways. This underscores the importance of media coverage in events such as the Nigerian presidential election, as it has implications for both the media and the general public. As Rosentiel, Jurkowitz and Sartor (2012) argue, the mass media

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allocate significant coverage to electoral campaigns, capturing the strategic differences among political candidates during election periods.

*The Sun* is a prominent Nigerian newspaper that has been in operation since January 2003. Known for its bold headlines and vibrant reporting style, *The Sun* covers a wide range of news topics, including politics, business, sports, entertainment, and human interest stories. Privately owned, the newspaper has garnered a significant readership across Nigeria. It is recognized for its in-depth analysis and investigative journalism, providing valuable insights into key issues impacting the country.

On the other hand, *The Vanguard* is a renowned Nigerian newspaper that was established in 1984. Published daily, it focuses on delivering national and international news. *The Vanguard* aims to provide balanced and objective reporting on a variety of subjects. Its coverage spans politics, business, sports, entertainment, and includes opinion pieces from diverse writers. With a broad readership, *The Vanguard* holds a position of influence within the Nigerian media landscape. Both *The Sun* and *The Vanguard* possess their own distinctive editorial styles and philosophies, which can shape the tone and framing of their news coverage.

Sahara Reporters (2022) highlights that the presidential election campaigns commenced on September 18, 2022, with the media assuming the responsibility of covering it as part of their societal obligation. Therefore, it is essential to examine how Nigerian newspapers have been reporting on the election campaign, considering the projected impact of these reports on the public. Based on these considerations, an investigation into *The Sun* and *The Vanguard's* coverage of the 2023 presidential election becomes pertinent.

## STATEMENT OF PROBLEM

The problem at hand is the lack of academic research on the coverage of the 2023 Nigerian presidential election campaigns by *The Sun* and *The Vanguard* newspapers. While some previous studies have explored political framing strategies and media framing in electoral campaigns, such as Hanggli & Kresi's (2010) research on a Swiss democratic campaign, and there are articles on election coverage in Nigeria by researchers like Egbulefu & Nwaoboli (2023), none of these studies specifically examined the coverage provided by *The Sun* and *The Vanguard* for the 2023 Nigerian presidential election campaigns.

Given that the 2023 Nigerian presidential election has already taken place, it is crucial to understand the media's role in providing in-depth information about the campaigns. The public relies on the media to stay informed, and analysing the media coverage is important as it directly relates to the Nigerian population's response to the election. Therefore, there is a need to investigate and analyse the coverage of the 2023 Nigerian presidential election campaigns by *The Sun* and *The Vanguard* newspapers to gain insights into how these media outlets shaped public perception and understanding of the electoral process.

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## RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

The objectives of this study were to:

1. Analyse the tone utilized by *The Sun* and *The Vanguard* newspapers in their coverage of the 2023 presidential campaigns, specifically focusing on the tone of reports.
2. Find out the frames used by the newspapers in the coverage of the 2023 presidential campaigns.

## CONCEPTUAL AND LITERATURE REVIEW

### Overview of Election

According to Santas, Asemah and Jumbo (2020), the process of choosing a candidate or group of candidates for a given position or office via a formal voting system is referred to as "election." An election is defined by Egbulefu and Nwaoboli (2023) as an organised procedure that either identifies people or collective entities for public posts or accepts or denies political ideas via the act of casting ballots. In other words, elections designate who will hold public positions. An election is, in its most fundamental sense, the process by which people or organisations are selected for public posts or political proposals are approved or disapproved. Participating in an election gives voters the opportunity to express their approval or disapproval of a political proposal.

The electoral process is of great institutional relevance under democratic governments and electoral systems since elections are held often. According to Adibe (2015), the legitimacy of a government under democratic systems is decided by the permission of the population. This is a fundamental tenet of democratic theory. In order to translate the consent of the governed into legal political power, elections are consequently an extremely important part of the process. The holding of elections that are both free and fair is essential to ensuring the success of this process. Elections are an essential component of contemporary democratic political systems.

Having said that, it is necessary to realise that democratic norms are not adhered to in every election. According to Nwaoboli & Ajibulu (2023), certain elections may provide voters with viable alternatives; nevertheless, the options on the ballot are often restricted to those proposed by the incumbent political party, which makes such elections inherently undemocratic. According to Ikpegbu and Ihejirika's (2020) definition of democratic elections, important distinguishing features of election are competitiveness, regularity, inclusion, and the capacity to achieve a resolution. Elections guarantee that people enjoy a broad variety of freedoms, including the right to criticise the government, the freedom to freely voice their concerns, the freedom to present alternative opinions, and the freedom to exercise their freedom to pick the decision-makers who are best suited to meet their needs. Elections in a democratic system are conducted at regular intervals and are organised to establish a level playing field for all of the candidates who are running for office.

### An overview of the 2023 Nigerian presidential election

According to the *Daily Post* (2022), in late June 2022, Nigerians were presented with eight candidates to compete for the presidency. These candidates included Prince Malik Ado-Ibrahim representing the YPP party, Rabiu Musa Kwankwaso representing the NNPP party, Omoyele Sowore representing the AAC party, Peter Obi representing the LP party, Prince Adewole Adebayo representing the SDP party, Kola Abiola representing the PRP party, Asiwaju Bola Tinubu representing the APC party, and Atiku Abubakar representing the PDP party.

Subsequently, the candidates launched their election campaigns at various levels to persuade Nigerians to vote for them. Notably, the campaign flag-off ceremonies of the APC, PDP, and LP parties were televised nationwide due to their status as major political parties. The media including newspapers promptly reported on the candidates' activities as well as those of their supporters. As highlighted by King (2023), the 2023 presidential election campaigns were marred by incivility, characterised by insults and banter among the candidates and their supporters. The campaigns generated more unrest than peace, featuring mudslinging, hate speech, character assassination, vitriol, scurrilous attacks, and invasions of personal lives.

Furthermore, The Nation (2023) reported that presidential candidates, particularly those representing the top political parties, sought validation from foreign diplomats as part of their campaign strategy, which some viewed as a form of colonisation of the presidential campaign. Various other actions of the candidates were also reported, with many of them promoting specific agendas to gain votes. For example, Sowore promised to legalize weed if elected as president (Sahara Reporter, 2023), Tinubu pledged to address fuel scarcity and transform Nigeria (*The Guardian*, 2023), Obi aimed to end poverty and insecurity (*The Vanguard*, 2023), and Atiku promised to restructure Nigeria (*The Vanguard*, 2023), among others. These reports indicate that the 2023 Nigerian presidential election was marked by numerous activities, which the media regularly reported to the Nigerian populace.

### **Media tone and its impact on audience**

Media tone, also referred to as valence, is a significant aspect of media coverage, as discussed by PMLiVE (2022). It encompasses the emotional undercurrents present in media texts and serves as a tool to gauge the mood and framing of news reports. Media tone plays a vital role in shaping public perception and understanding by conveying positive, neutral, or negative sentiments within news stories (Flaf, 2016).

Flaf (2016) further highlights that media tone has the power to sway public opinions by influencing the way news is presented. In essence, the use of a supportive frame by the media can cast presidential candidates in a positive light, while a discouraging tone may undermine support for a particular candidate. Moreover, an overemphasis on the attack frame within media coverage can have a profound impact, potentially exacerbating conflicts and triggering animosity among citizens and supporters of different political candidates. Sheaffer (2007) argues that media strategically employ tones to influence the affective priming of their messages, utilising compelling argument effects. These tones enable the audience to derive meaning from media messages and make informed judgments on political issues.

Bleich et al. (2022) contribute to the discourse by emphasising the role of media tone in shaping public perception. They provide an illustrative example of how the tone used in reporting on Muslims and the Middle East has significantly influenced the public's outlook on these subjects over time. Media tone is therefore of critical importance in the context of this study, as it elucidates the potential influence it can exert on Nigerians' participation in the 2023 presidential election and their decision-making process regarding candidate selection. Understanding the role of media tone is crucial for comprehending how the media can shape public attitudes, beliefs and behaviours in relation to the electoral process. By delving deeper into the impact of media tone, this study aims to shed light on its significance in influencing public sentiment and engagement during the election campaign.



## EMPIRICAL REVIEW

Sule, Adamu and Samba (2020) conducted a study on "The 2019 General Election in Nigeria: Examining the Issues, Challenges, Successes, and Lessons for Future General Elections." The researchers employed a qualitative approach, utilising both primary and secondary sources of data analysis, including participant observation and data from the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC). Through thematic analysis, they identified and discussed various themes and sub-themes. The findings revealed that the 2019 general election in Nigeria encountered numerous challenges. Consequently, the researchers recommended measures to improve future general elections in the country.

In a related study, Ojebuyi and Salawu (2018) investigated the level of objectivity demonstrated by Nigerian newspapers in their coverage of Nigeria's 2015 presidential election in their work on "Partisanship and selective reporting in Nigeria." Employing textual analysis, the researchers examined news stories related to the election activities of the People's Democratic Party and the All Progressives Congress as reported by four newspapers. The analysis revealed that certain news stories received prominent coverage while others were marginalized, indicating biases influenced by newspaper ownership and political alignments. The researchers emphasised the importance of fairness and objectivity in reporting election issues and recommended that Nigerian news media adopt these principles in their coverage.

Ekeanyanwu (2007) conducted research with the aim of evaluating how the Nigerian press covered political crises and disputes during the second term of President Obasanjo's administration from 2003 to 2007. The study focused on a diverse society and utilized content analysis as the primary method for data collection. The findings revealed that the Nigerian press performed below expectations in its coverage of political conflicts and crises. Advocacy-based reporting was prevalent, and editorial directives from publishers may have influenced the coverage. The researchers concluded that rather than acting as neutral arbiters, the Nigerian press actively participated in political crises and conflicts. It was recommended that measures be taken to curb advocacy journalism in Nigeria's media sector and promote increased public participation through popular ownership.

In another study by Nwaokafor and Okunoye (2013), titled "Media power in elections: Evidence of the role of agenda setting theory in political communication in Nigeria's evolving democracy," the role of the media in election processes was explored. The study aimed to provide empirical evidence on the significance of agenda-setting in political discourse within the Nigerian context. The researchers found substantial evidence of the media's significant influence, particularly during election periods, in assisting political parties and communities exposed to its content. The Nigerian Television Authority (NTA) was identified as a channel that effectively influenced public opinion by leveraging its wide reach and timely dissemination of information. The NTA not only provided information on key events and issues but also offered guidance on evaluating candidates based on their leadership qualities. Therefore, it was recommended that the media consistently provide fair election coverage to promote informed decision-making.

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## THEORETICAL REVIEW

### Framing Theory

Framing theory, originally proposed by Erving Goffman in 1974, explains how mass media utilises frames to convey meaning in news events (Omoera & Nwaoboli, 2023). According to Arowolo (2017), frames are conceptual frameworks employed by the media to define and interpret events within media texts. These frames serve as cognitive structures that shape individuals' understanding and communication of their experiences (Funderburk, 2019).

The central tenet of framing theory is that the media's selection and presentation of information influence how the general public perceives and interprets news. Asemah, Nwammuo, and Nkwam-Uwaoma (2022) emphasise the impact of media frames on people's decision-making processes, stating that frames act as temporal boundaries in shaping interactive messages. Within the context of framing theory, the media intentionally employs various strategies such as visual imagery, headlines, biases, and tones to shape public perception of particular issues. Asemah, Nwammuo, and Nkwam-Uwaoma (2017) highlight that through this deliberate framing, the media prioritises certain topics over others, influencing what is considered important or inconsequential to the audience.

The framing theory is highly relevant to the study on the analysis of *The Sun* and *The Vanguard* newspapers' coverage of the 2023 presidential election campaigns in Nigeria. This theory provides a framework for understanding how media outlets intentionally employ frames to shape public perception and interpretation of news events. In the context of the study, the framing theory helps to elucidate how *The Sun* and *The Vanguard* newspapers may use frames in their coverage of the 2023 presidential election campaigns. The newspapers may employ various techniques such as visual imagery, headlines, biases, and tones to present the election-related information in specific ways. These framing choices can influence how readers perceive and interpret the news stories, potentially shaping their understanding of the candidates, issues, and overall campaign dynamics.

By employing the framing theory as a conceptual framework, the study provides insights into the media's role in shaping public opinion and understanding of the 2023 presidential election campaigns in Nigeria. It also sheds light on the potential biases, preferences, or agenda-setting effects of the newspapers' coverage, contributing to a comprehensive analysis of their role in the electoral process.

### METHODOLOGY

The researchers employed a quantitative content analysis as the research design for this study. The target population consisted of all publications from *The Sun* and *The Vanguard* newspapers within the period of January 1 to January 25, 2023, totaling 50 editions for both newspapers. In total, there were 216 news reports found in *The Sun* and 136 news stories in *The Vanguard*.

To manage the large number of reports, the researchers opted for a systematic sampling technique. Every 3rd report was selected and coded for analysis. This sampling approach resulted in a sample size of 72 news reports from *The Sun* and 45 news stories from *The Vanguard*, which constituted the sample size for the study.

By utilising quantitative content analysis and employing systematic sampling, the researchers were able to analyze a representative subset of news reports from both *The Sun* and *The Vanguard* newspapers. This sampling strategy allowed for a manageable sample size while still capturing a diverse range of reports from the given time frame.

Five Specific-issue tone and seven frames were used for the analysis and they are explained in below.

**Table One**

| Background information | V.0 Title of news item       | Explanation   |
|------------------------|------------------------------|---|
| Tone categories        | V.1 Attack                   | This captured news items that were toned to attack a political candidate or party during the campaigns.   |
|                        | V. 2 Supportive              | This captured news that were toned to show support for a political party or candidate.  |
|                        | V.3 Persuasive               | This captured news that were toned to persuade people to endorse, support, and vote for a political candidate.  |
|                        | V.4 Discouragement           | This captured news that were toned to discourage people from supporting a political candidate or party.   |
|                        | V.5 Indifference             | This captured news that were toned in a way that showed indifference towards supporting, persuading, discouraging, or attacking any political candidate or party.           |
| Frame categories       | V.6 Strategy                 | This frame category captured news that focused on the campaign activities and poll.   |
|                        | V.7 Personal issue           | This captured news that focused on candidates personal issues like health, educational background, religion, ethnic group, and age.   |
|                        | V.8 Policy issue             | This captured news reports that highlighted the policies, plans, or agenda the presidential candidates have for the citizens.   |
|                        | V.9 public records           | This captured news that focus on the public records of the presidential candidates.   |
|                        | V.10 Free election processes | This captured the news that focused on the promotion of free and fair election, free election processes, as well as encourage people to vote and avoid selling their votes. |
|                        | V.11 Misinformation          | This captured news items that were used to correct misconceptions about political parties and their presidential candidates during the campaigns.                           |
|                        | V. 12. Morality              | This captured news stories on religion, or God in relations to the campaign.  |

**DATA PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS**

**Table two: Categorisation of *The Sun* and *The Vanguard* coverage of the 2023 presidential campaigns according to the tone of reports.**

| <b>Tone categories</b> | <b><i>The Sun</i> (Percentage)</b> |            | <b><i>The Vanguard</i> (Percentage)</b> |            |
|------------------------|------------------------------------|------------|---|------------|
| Attack                 | 16                                 | (22)       | 18                                      | (40)       |
| Supportive             | 20                                 | (28)       | 10                                      | (22.2)     |
| Persuasive             | 11                                 | (15)       | 11                                      | (24.4)     |
| Discouragement         | 2                                  | (3)        | 0                                       | (0)        |
| Indifference           | 23                                 | (32)       | 6                                       | (13.4)     |
| <b>Total</b>           | <b>72</b>                          | <b>100</b> | <b>45</b>                               | <b>100</b> |

This table shows that *The Sun* dominantly used the indifference tone to report the 2023 Nigerian presidential election campaign, while *The Vanguard* majorly used the attack tone. The supportive tone also accounted for 20 % on *The Sun* and 22.2% on *The Vanguard*. It also shows that the least used tone on *The Sun* and *Vanguard* newspapers were discouragement tone.

**Table three: Categorisation of *The Vanguard* coverage of the 2023 presidential campaigns according to the frames of the reports**

| <b>Frame categories</b>     | <b><i>The Sun</i> (Percentage)</b> |            | <b><i>The Vanguard</i> (Percentage)</b> |            |
|-----------------------------|------------------------------------|------------|---|------------|
| Strategy frame              | 22                                 | (30.5)     | 15                                      | (33)       |
| Personal issue frame        | 5                                  | (6.9)      | 7                                       | (16)       |
| Policy issue frame          | 14                                 | (19.4)     | 6                                       | (13)       |
| Public records frame        | 12                                 | (16.7)     | 8                                       | (18)       |
| Free election process frame | 13                                 | (18.1)     | 4                                       | (9)        |
| Misinformation frame        | 4                                  | (5.6)      | 5                                       | (11)       |
| Morality                    | 2                                  | (2.8)      | 0                                       | (0)        |
| <b>Total</b>                | <b>72</b>                          | <b>100</b> | <b>45</b>                               | <b>100</b> |

This table shows that the most dominantly used frame in the coverage of the campaign on *The Sun* and *The Vanguard* is strategy frame with 30.5% and 33% rate on the newspapers respectively while the least used frame on the newspapers is the morality frame.

**DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS**

This study investigated the dominant framing and slant used by *The Sun* and *The Vanguard* newspapers in their coverage of the 2023 presidential election campaigns. Through the process of coding the news reports, several noteworthy findings emerged. Firstly, it was discovered that *The Sun* provided more extensive coverage of the campaign compared to *The Vanguard*. Between January 1 and January 25, 2023, *The Sun* published a total of 216 news reports, while *The Vanguard* had 136 news stories.

Further analysis revealed that *The Sun* predominantly adopted an indifferent tone in its campaign reports. This suggests that the newspaper did not heavily emphasise persuading readers to vote for a



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specific candidate, showing support for a candidate, attacking candidates or their supporters, or discouraging voter participation. In contrast, *The Vanguard* primarily employed an attack tone, indicating a dominance of reports focused on conflicts and clashes between presidential candidates and their supporters.

Additionally, the findings of this study supported Ajibulu's (2022) assertion that the media give attention to significant societal issues and employ media frames and tones to present information to the public. This is evident from the high number of news reports that were tailored to convey specific moods or emotions. Notably, *The Vanguard* did not utilise its reports to discourage people from voting for a candidate or engaging in vote-selling, as evidenced by the tone used in its campaign news. This suggests that newspapers perceived the election campaign as an important issue to report on and provided up-to-date news on campaign developments, expressed through specific tones.

The researchers also discovered that, in addition to the supportive frame, *The Sun* employed varying degrees of the persuasive frame and attack tones. On the other hand, *The Vanguard* used the supportive and persuasive frames to differing extents, with the tone of reports reflecting the emotions and motives behind the campaign news. The prevalence of attack tones in the reporting indicates that Nigerian politics involves verbal confrontations, as evidenced by the antagonism between candidates such as Atiku Abubakar of the People's Democratic Party, Asiwaju Ahmed Tinubu of the All Progressive Party, and Peter Obi of the Labour Party. Insulting words like "stingy," "unhealthy," and "thief" were used by candidates to attack one another, thereby influencing the tone of the reports. The significant use of the indifferent tone by *The Sun* suggests widespread indifference toward the election tussles, with advocacy groups and the Independent Electoral Commission (INEC) being notable sources of news.

Turning to the frame categories, the researchers revealed that the strategy frame was the most dominant in both *The Sun* (33%) and *The Vanguard* (3.5%), accounting for the highest proportion of the analysed news. Reports falling under this frame category discussed polls, election activities, and various campaign strategies employed during the election. The second most prevalent frame used by *The Sun* was the policy issue frame, accounting for 19.4% of the analyzed news. This indicates that *The Sun* focused on the political candidates' plans and agendas for the Nigerian populace. In contrast, *The Vanguard* predominantly utilised the personal issue frame as the second most dominant frame, indicating a focus on issues related to the candidates' personal lives, such as religion, health status, educational background, and ethnic groups.

The Free Election Process frame accounted for 18.1% in *The Sun* and the Personal Issue frame served as the third most dominant frame in *The Vanguard*. These findings suggest that *The Sun* also prioritised the fair conduct of the election. The Public Records frame accounted for 16.7% in *The Sun* and 18% in *The Vanguard*, indicating that both newspapers paid some attention to the candidates' public records and their supporters. Reports falling under this category discussed how candidates performed in their previous public offices. The Misinformation frame accounted for 5.6% in *The Sun* and 11% in *The Vanguard*, serving to correct false news, accusations, or opinions about the candidates and clarify issues related to their personal lives. The Morality frame was present in *The Sun* news, albeit accounting for only 2.8%, as a religious angle was incorporated into

the election. News falling under this category depicted religious leaders prophesying about the winner of the presidential election.

Overall, the findings of this study support Hanggli and Kresi's (2010) notion that the media employ political framing strategies in their news reporting. Furthermore, the study affirms Omoera & Nwaoboli (2023) and Asemah et al.'s (2022) assertion regarding the validity of the framing theory by confirming the presence of frames in the analyzed news reports.

## CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the content analysis of news stories from *The Sun* and *The Vanguard* on the coverage of the 2023 presidential election campaigns in Nigeria, it was observed that both media outlets primarily focused on election strategies and polls using the strategy frame. However, *The Sun* predominantly used the indifference tone, while *The Vanguard* employed the attack tone. These findings suggest that media organisations' reporting is influenced by their individual philosophies and in-house styles. The researchers recommended that:

1. Both *The Sun* and *The Vanguard* should incorporate more of the policy frame in their election coverage. This will enable Nigerians to gain a better understanding of the candidates' plans for the country and help them make informed voting decisions.
2. The *Vanguard* should reduce the use of the attack news frame, as it has the potential to incite hate speech among Nigerians. Instead, they should consider employing the indifference tone more frequently in their reporting on the election campaign.

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