The Role of Newspaper Editorials in the Death of Third Term Agenda: A Study of the Guardian and Vanguard

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Abstract
This study examines the role of newspaper editorials in the death of the third term agenda of the former President of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, Chief Olusegun Obasanjo. Using content analysis as research methodology and the systematic random sampling as a sampling technique, the researcher purposively choose two major newspapers, The Guardian and Vanguard of 2006. The main objective of the study was to determine if editorials were written in favour of the third term bid of the former president. Out of the one hundred and forty-two issues of the Guardian and Vanguard newspapers, twenty four and twenty six issues of The Guardian and Vanguard newspapers respectively, making up fifty issues in both newspapers attacked the third term bid. No editorial comment in both newspapers supported the power elongation of the former president. It was discovered that the battle to stop the elongation of the rule of President Obasanjo was partly fought on the pages of newspapers. Thundering editorials were written, no blood was shed, but the former President lost to the power and prevailing opinion of the press and the masses. The paper therefore argues that editorial comments should be used to fight social vices such as corruption, oppression and marginalization including extolling of virtues of great contributors with the aim of emulating such virtues.

Key words: Role, Editorial, third term agenda, Nigeria.

Background

Chief Olusegun Aremu Obasanjo was among the few that ruled the Federal Republic of Nigeria and almost turned it into his farm. He first came to political limelight after the then Head of State, Brigadier Murtala Ramat Muhammad was assassinated on February 13, 1976 by Colonel B.S. Dimka . Udeajah (2004) reports that at the time of the assassination, Brigadier Olusegun Obasanjo was the Chief of Staff, Supreme Headquarters before he rose to the rank of a General. Following the assassination and failed coup, he became the Head of State. He ruled the country for four years and successfully handed over to Alhaji Shehu Shagari of the then National Party of Nigeria (NPN). The then Chief Justice of Nigeria, Justice Atanda Fatai Williams, conducted the swearing-in ceremony on October 1, 1979.

After successive dramatic military coups notably among which were those of General Ibrahim Babangida and General .Sanni Abacha, the heaven smiled again on Chief Olusegun Obasanjo and like the Biblical Joseph was lifted from prison to the presidency, this time for two tenures, 1999 to 2007.

It is on record that having forgotten the history of what happened to despots, and wanted to continue in power, the former President fought trash, finger and nail to elongate his tenure and possibly become life president. But his bid was forcefully resisted, rejected and renounced by all well meaning Nigerians. The Press which is regarded as the conscience of the masses, the advocate of the downtrodden, the afflicter of the comfortable and the Fourth Estate of the Realm, in keeping with its constitutional role of the watch dog of the society, fought the third term agenda of the former president in all its ramifications. Words and sentences that have effects stronger than bullets were carefully packaged on the pages of newspaper against the elongation bid. Editorial comments were also written against it in order to resist the then president.

Editorial being one of the genres of feature writing is important in the world of Journalism because it expresses the opinion of the paper. The choice of study of editorial comments therefore spurs from the functions which they play in the entire newspaper sphere in particular and journalism in general. Against this background, this study will explore the role of newspaper editorials in the death of the third term agenda of former President Olusegun Obasanjo.

Literature Review

Editorial comment is a specialized aspect of newspaper features. According to Ossai (2002), editorial writing is considered very important because a mass medium can be made popular by its editorials. This is because it provides background and interpretation through explanation and interpretation, and relates topical national issues to how they affect the common man.

Ukonu (2007) defines editorial comment of a newspaper as a reasoned expression of a definite point of view on a burning issues. This implies that editorial comment is the voice and opinion of a newspaper on an issue of which it decides to comment. Editorial comment therefore is a critical evaluation, interpretation, analysis and projection of issues by a newspaper.

Ossai (2002) is of the view that editorial writing in Nigeria can be viewed from the watchdog and crusading functions of the mass media through which the mass media fight against societal ills such as bribery and corruption, drug trafficking, child abuse, prostitution e.t.c.

Apart from performing the role of educating, entertaining, persuading and providing companionship and information, the editorial can be used for social mobilization and to fight against unpopular government.

It is believed that the struggle for Nigerian independence was fought through the editorials of nationalist papers. Quoting Duyile (1987), Lateef Jakande, a veteran journalist and the second Republic governor of Lagos State stated thus:

> The War of independence was fought on the pages of the Nigerian pres. Not one shot was fired. But many thundering editorial were written. No blood was shed.

Editorials can be used to teach, praise, defend, and attack. The editorial is a veritable tool of social agenda for mobilization of people for a cause. It is an avenue for public opinion moulding and guidance. Experts also believe that editorials perform the advocacy role (Defleur and Dennis: 1994). It is also a means of highlighting objective point of view Westley: (1972), Sandman et al (1972) are of the view that essentially the newspaper editorial can educate, entertain, agitate, inform, mobilize and advocate. Ukonu (2007) is also of the opinion that the newspaper is a vehicle for social control and catalyst for social change and progress. It should be noted that readership of editorial or search for editorial comments on burning issues is higher during crisis, tension or period of important development. Studies have shown that editorials were read 10-15% more than other newspaper contents apart from news (Ukonu: 2007). This implies that the number of people that read editorial comments isfairly large. Most educated people especially academia hardly resist editorial comments.

Statement of Problem

Judging from the importance of editorial comments in newspapers and the role which the mass media play in the social, political, economic and technological development of any nation, this study intends to explore the role of newspaper editorial comments in the death of the Third Term Agenda of the former President of Nigeria, Chief Olusegun Obasanjo. The study also ascertains the magnitude of editorial coverage and the position of Nigeria's newspapers in the Third Term Agenda.

Scope of Study

This study was aimed at determining the role of newspaper editorials in the death of the Third Term Agenda of the former president of Nigeria, Chief Olusegun Obasanjo. Two national newspapers were selected namely, *Vanguard* and *The Guardian.* The choice of these national newspapers arose from their wide coverage, wide circulation and general acceptance. Also, the views of these newspapers are highly respected. It has been observed that these newspapers are household names everywhere in Nigeria.

The scope of the study was restricted to 2006. That was the year the immediate past president's clamour for power elongation was at its peak. Out of the 365 issues of each of the newspapers in the year 2006, 71 issues each, making a total of 142 issues were content analyzed using the systematic Random Sampling Method of every 5^{th} issue each.

Research Questions

From the background of the study some questions readily come to mind: These forms the research questions, which are:

- Do Nigerian newspaper editorials treat anything about the third time bid of Olusegun Obasanjo?
- Did the Nigerian Newspaper editorials oppose or support the Obasanjo third term bid?
- What role did the editorials of Nigerian Newspapers play in the death of Olusegun Obasanjo's third term bid?

Objectives of Study

The major objective of the study is to determine the role of editorial in the defeat of the former president's elongation ambition. Specifically, the study has the following objectives.

1. To find out if the editorials of *The Guardian* and *Vanguard* newspapers supported or opposed the Obasanjo tenure elongation bid.
2. To ascertain the magnitude of editorial coverage of the Third Term Agenda.
3. To find out the position of Nigerian newspapers on the Third Term Agenda.

Theoretical Framework

This study is best situated within the context of the Authoritarian Press Theory. According to Ogbiti (2006), this theory is applicable where the press is largely-owned and controlled mostly by dictators. This theory posits that the ruling class is given the opportunity to use and control the press to promote the interest of the government in power.

Defleur et al (1987) in Obaze et al (2004:17) are of the view that authoritarian governments operate their media for the purpose of controlling the flow of information, shaping public opinion and providing approved collective interpretation. Okunna (1999) is of the view that the instruments of authoritarian control are among others, heavy taxation, direct state control of production, enforceable codes of conduct, government right of appointment of editorial staff and seizures of publication.

The situating of this study on this theory stems from the fact that although, it is a civil government, the Obasanjo administration showed tendencies and elements of authoritarian control of the media. It is on record that African Independent Television (AIT) was attacked during the 2007 political campaign by thugs suspected to be members of the ruling People's Democratic Party (POP) to which the immediate past president belongs.

Another theory that supports this study is the agenda setting theory. The issue of agenda stems from the various assumptions that the mass media's direct public attention to issues makes them important and a matter for public debate.

McCombs and Shaw (1972) note that audiences not only learn about public issues and other matters through the media, they also learn about how much importance to attach to those issues.One aspect of features writing through which the media raises issues of serious concern is the editorial. The editorial is the voice which the media has right to represent.

Methodology

This study which examines the role of editorial comments in the death of the third term bid of former President Obasanjo used the content analysis method because the researcher is interested how the editorials of Nigerian newspapers handled the subject of the campaign for tenure extension of the immediate past president.

According to Ohaja (2003), Wimmer and Dominick (2011), content analysis refers to the examination of the manifest contents of communication to discover the patterns existing therein. Such manifest contents could be news stories, advertisements, opinion articles, features, cartoon, editorial e.t.c.

This view is supported by Sobowale (1983) when he writes that content analysis focuses on the manifest contents of communication. In other words, only messages that have been coded by way of formal presentation should be analyzed.

A total of 71 copies each of the *The Guardian* and *Vanguard* newspapers were content analysed using the systematic random sampling of the 5thissue each. Okoro (2007) sees the systematic technique for the analysis of the contents of a message and the handling of the message as important. It is an instrument for observing and analyzing Overt Communication behavior (Budd etal: 1967).

The researcher used the code sheet and the questionnaire. The questionnaire was tailored and constructed to be able to answer the research questions. The questionnaire guides the analysis of the content of the editorial. Out of the 142 copies of the *Vanguard* and *The Guardian* that were content analyzed, the following issues were systematically and randomly selected.

Table 1. Showing the numbers and dates of issues in *The Guardian and Vanguard Newspaper* that was content analyzed.

Months	**No of Copies**	**Date of Publication**
January	6	5,10,15,20,25,30
February	5	5,10,15,20,25,
March	6	5,10,15,20,25,30
April	6	5,10,15,20,25,30
May	6	5,10,15,20,25,30
June	6	5,10,15,20,25,30
July	6	5,10,15,20,25,30
August	6	5,10,15,20,25,30
September	6	5,10,15,20,25,30
October	6	5,10,15,20,25,30
November	6	5,10,15,20,25,30
December	6	5,10,15,20,25,30

Source: Field Work 2014.

The numbers of issues that were content analyzed for both newspapers as shown above reveals that 71 issues of each of the newspaper, making a total of One hundred and forty-two (42) were studied.

Findings/Discussion

The findings and of the research is discussed below:

Did the Nigerian newspapers' editorials treat anything about the third term bid of Olusegun Obasanjo?

Table 2: Showing the number of *The Guardian* and *Vanguard* editorials that supported and opposed the Third Term Agenda of Obasanjo in 2006

Months	No. of editorials that support the bid	No. of editorials that do not support the bid		
		The Guardian	Vanguard	Total
January	Nil	3	3	6
February		2	4	6
March		4	5	9
April		1	3	4
May		2	3	5
June		3	2	5
July		1	Nil	1
August		Nil	Nil	Nil
September		2	Nil	2
October		3	4	7
November		Nil	Nil	Nil
December		3	2	5
Total		**24**	**26**	**50**

Source: Field Work, 2014

From table two above, no editorial was written in favour of the third term agenda. Out of the total number of 71 issues drawn from both newspapers, 50 of them contain editorials that oppose the third term agenda of former President Olusegun Obasanjo. This represents 35.2%.

Table 3: Showing the percentage of editorials that opposed the third term bid.

Newspaper	No. of content analysed issues	No. of issues that attack the bid	Percentage
The Guardian	71	24	34%

Source: Field Work 2014

From table three above, out of the 71 issues of *The Guardian* that was content analyzed, 24 of them representing 34% attacked the third term agenda. None of the rest supported the third term agenda as they treat other issues of national importance.

Table 4: Showing the percentage of editorial of the Vanguard Newspapers that opposed the third term bid.

Newspaper	No. of content analysed issues	No. of issues that attack the bid	Percentage
Vanguard	71	26	37%

Source: Field Work 2014

The table shows that while 26 issues of *The Vanguard* contained editorials that frowned at the Third Term Agenda of former President Olusegun Obasanjo, none of 35 issues that make up the 71 that was left supported the agenda.

Table 5: Showing the percentage of editorial *of The Guardian* Newspapers:

Names of Newspapers	No. of content analyzed issues	No. of that praise the third term bid	No. of issues that attacked the third term bid	Percentages of No. that attacked the third term bid	Total Percentages
The Guardian	71	Nil	24	34%	
Vanguard	71	Nil	26	37%	35%
Total	**142**	**Nil**	**50**		

Source: Field Work 2014

From the table five above, a study of the manifest content of the Nigerian newspaper's editorials using *Vanguard* and *The Guardian* as a reference point reveals that the press highlight the evils and the reasons why the masses should not support the former president tenure elongation programme. Out of the 142 copies that were content analyzed, fifty of them representing approximately 35% of the issues, treated the power elongation bid of the former president and criticized the former president's attempt to continue in power after eight years.

The answer to the research question **"Did the Nigerian newspapers' editorials treat anything about the third term bid of Olusegun Obasanjo?"**is therefore in the affirmative. The Nigerian newspapers editorials treated the third term bid of the former president of the Federal Republic of Nigeria. It is also clear that editorial comments that were written were not in support of the plans of the former president to continue to rule neither in support of the "Obasanjorism" which the friends and supporters of Obasanjo sang at that time.

The research question Two, **"Did** the **Nigerian newspapers" editorials attack or praise the Obasanjo third term bid?"**can be explained from Table 2 above. From the table, out of the total 26 and 24 copies of the *Vanguard* and *The Guardian* editorials comments which treated the third term issue, none supported the bid. Instead all the 50 issues of the newspapers' editorial comments frown and attacked the power elongation plans of the former president, This implies that Nigerian newspapers editorials, if one is to infer using *The Guardian* and *Vanguard,* opposed the third term bid.

To answer research question 3 **which role do the editorials of Nigerian newspaper played in the death of Olusegun Obasanjo third term** is not far-fetched.
Out of the total 142 issues *of The Guardian* and the *Vanguard* which were selected using the systematic random sampling of every 5th issues of each of the papers, a total of 50 issues treated the third term, representing approximately 35%. None of the editorial comments supported the power elongation bid of Obasanjo. They all criticized and attacked the plans of the former leader to continue in power.

From the analysis above, the researcher wants to assert that editorials of Nigerian newspaper played the following role in the death of Olusegun Obasanjo third term.

- Criticized the power elongation bid
- Attacked the power elongation bid
- Alerted the masses on the danger of power elongation.
- Expressed the opinion of majority of Nigerian masses.
- Mobilized people against the bid.
- Sensitized the populace against Obasanjo's power continuation campaign.
- Persuaded the masses to resist the power elongation process.
- Added to the many voices of people who were against the third term elongation.

The fifty copies that treated the power elongation bid did not support the move of the former president. In other words, no editorial comments in the two national newspapers supported the power continuation bid of Chief Olusegun Obasanjo. This implies that the editorials were used as a weapon of opposition on the third term bid.

From the research, it can be inferred that the press contributed to the death of Obasanjo's third term agenda. This is given credence by the number of thundering editorials that were fired during the battle. This research is of the view that if *Vanguard* and *The Guardian* could publish as much as 50 editorials against the third term bid, it is possible that other national newspapers may have also published against the bid. It is however subject to further study by other researchers.

It can also be inferred that the treatment of the Obasanjo third term bid by editorials of newspapers made the populace to see the issue of the third term agenda as it affects their lives as important, thereby making it possible for the continued struggle against the elongation which ultimately brought victory to the masses.

One major finding is that the editorial could play a major role in social mobilization against ideas that do not support the tenets of nation building. The editorial can also be a veritable tool for advocacy, sensitization, persuasion, and opinion formation. This work therefore supports existing researches that newspaper editorials are tool for social change and social transformation and reformation.

If the press could be used to fight successfully for the actualization of the Nigerian independence and against the third term bid of President Olusegun Obasanjo, it could be used to actualize the Niger-Delta struggle of true federalism, resource control and rapid development of the area. It could also serve as a tool for social integration and unity especially in an era of insurgency in Nigeria

As the study has shown, the press, using the editorial comments is a strong force to reckon with. It is therefore high time that the press in Nigeria used newspaper editorial to effectively transform and reform the social, politicaland economic atmosphere of the Nigeria environment. The mass media should make the Nigerian government accountable and responsible to the masses through newspaper editorials.

Editorial comments should be used to fight social vices such as corruption, marginalization, and oppression of the less privilege in the society. It should also be used to extol the virtues of great contributors.

Conclusion

The Nigerian Newspaper, using the editorials, plays a major role in the mobilization, persuasion and interpretation of events that have direct bearing with the masses.

The press, like during the battle for Nigerian independence, fought against the actualization of the third term bid of Chief Olusegun Obasanjo who thought he would be able to extend his stay as president.

The battle against the Third Term Agenda of former president of Nigeria, Chief Olusegun Obasanjo, like the battle for Nigerian Independence, was fought on the pages of Newspapers. Thunderous editorials and features were written. However, the former president bowed to the prevailing opinion of the Nigerian masses and the press, reiterating the old axiom in the world of journalism that "The pen is mightier than the sword".

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