Mass Media, Public Sphere and Public Policy: A Textual Analysis of Public Transportation Regulation in Lagos Metropolis

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Abstract

It is essential to revaluate the present scholarly debates on the possible role of mass media in public policy process based on predictable sphere of influence on governance in order to objectively ascertain a valid connection, establish specific mass media contributions, as well as identify if the media constitute viable or alternative voice in political decision making. Thus, public sphere and media framing theories remain valid theoretical ideas to exemplify this cognitive process with the adoption of textual analysis as the suitable research method to derive information from texts collected from different genres of editorial reports on the selected policy case. The analysis evidently ascertains substantial media interaction with public policy process and also validates media ability to enhance public knowledge of significant political decisions. However, there is no convincing evidence that mass media can affect or change government decisions, which undermines their position and viability as alternative voice. Hence, it is essential for the mass media to adopt a more engaging approach to public policy reporting and also to broaden and reinvigorate the public sphere for effective public policy agenda, formulation, implementation and evaluation.

Keywords: Public Sphere, Public Policy, Policy Community, Political Economy, Contingency Effect

Introduction

The *public sphere* is largely regarded as a social space in which diverse views and ideas are communicated or a public forum where societal problems of significant magnitude are discussed in order to collectively develop consensual solutions (Wessler & Freudenthaler, 2018). Thus, the mass media according to Udende (2011) are denoted to be sine-qua-non to political clime with 'raison d'être' to public service, which significantly helps the citizens to make informed decisions on governance issues (Afamuefuna, 2007). Alluding to the facts above, one can suggest that the conceptualisation of public sphere remains a central theme in the political economy of the mass media but, lately, the online network media are also considered to be instrumental to the sustenance of mass communication within the public arena.

Similarly, it is essential to identify public policy as an instrument of governance designed to address societal problems or issues that are of public concern, such as

political, socio-economic, cultural, environmental, religious and security to mention but a few (Dunn, 2014). Hence, this process often required the concerted efforts of a 'policy community:' a term equally denoted by Popoola (2016) as 'crucial actors or participants,' This is an idiom used by policy researchers, political scientists and public administration scholars to signify the extra-formal interactions outside the official processes of government (Miller & Demir, (2007).

But notedly, the conceptualisation or claim about the mass media as a public sphere or a key actor within the policy community needs to be revaluated in a complex society or political terrain such as Africa with the vulnerability of underdeveloped media apparatus or technological debasement, as well as decisive strangulation by the authority. This implies that it remains unsubstantiated if the mass media channels in this clime are capable of facilitating robust, objective and fair public communication on public policy or governance. More evidently, Oginni and Moitui (2015) suggest that the uncertainty in Africa is possibly connected to the peculiar conservative nature or approach to public policy process and governance. Similalry, Garba (2016) suggests that West African region and indeed Africa has not been very successful when it comes to the entrenchment of democratic values and indeed its gains for the people because of despotic governance history as well as the peculiar challenges such as poverty, corruption, abuse of office and illiteracy among others.

Also, the degree of mass media influence on the people in Africa has been described as constantly peripheral considering the long-term of military rule (Obilade, 2010), which perhaps makes media capability of swaying, affecting or effectively moderating public policy discourse further debatable. More evidently, Imoh (2013) expatiates that authoritarianism does nothing but scuttles personal freedom, detests alternative opinions and strangulates the independent mass media from carrying out its civic duties and social responsibilities.

Without any gainsay, it is apparent that a good political and socio-economic administration of an organised human society vehemently relies on a coordinated, independent or objective public sphere capable of harmonising contending opinions. In other words, this is essential to enable the government to take political decisions that can be considered evenly acceptable to a majority of the citizens, if not all in the society. Nevertheless, the extent at which this is possible and the actions of the mass media in enabling this socio-economic and political communication model is still debatable in Africa. This is practically insinuated by Mwangi (2018) who states that studies analysing media influences on policy making had mixed results on whether the media does actually influence policy

process and administration. Thus, some suggest that the mass media make some contributions in the engineering of public policies while alluding to Schramm's postulation, as cited by Kadiri et al., (2015) that the mass media are among the forces that have shaped and would continue to define democratic establishments and developments in developing nations. Equally, Olper and Swinnen (2013) suggest that the mass media play a crucial role in information distribution and in the political market as well as public policy process because there is theoretical evidence predicting that information provided by the media reflects certain incentives; the provision of news to diverse groups in the society can be aimed at affecting them to influence policies, which implies an indirect media effect.

However, there are also audacious and vocal retribution suggesting that mass media effect on public policy process is unsubstantial and counterproductive. According to Isike and Omotoso (2017, p. 224), "African mass media has unwittingly contributed to the pervasive political and economic underdevelopment of the continent." Similarly, Mwangi (2018) in a study observes weaknesses and thus states "the media was very good at telling the politicians what was happening and what to talk about, but they were less able to tell the politicians what to do, which compromised the watchdog role."

More interestingly, the majority of socio-political infuriation, agitations social unrests or infrastructural deficiencies across the continent are offshoots of policy failures or bad political judgments that alienate efficient civic or public engagements from the process of governance and public policy's process. According to Ansah (1988, p.7), "There is a positive correlation between the right to express one's idea in an open debate and the contribution to the development effort of the nation." But more devastating is how the mass media report some of these policy imbroglios to the public and the kind of negative energy it generates due to the polarisation in the contemporary political and media landscape. According to Wilson et al. (2020), there are three key societal-level factors contributing to these polarisation phenomena: the role of political elites, partisan media and social media dynamics, which are collectively causing high-level disinformation as well as often negating the conceptualisation of mass media as a democratic apparatus deployed to coordinate and moderate the socio-political interaction between the government and the citizens and providing a level-playing ground for meaningful civic debate or discourse.

According to Vanderwicken (1995, p. 144):
The news media and the government are entwined in a vicious circle of mutual manipulation, mythmaking, and self-interest. Journalists need crises to dramatize news and government officials need to appear to be responding to crises. Too often, the crises are not really crises but joint fabrications. The two institutions have become so ensnared in a symbiotic web of lies that the news media are unable to tell the public what is true and the government is unable to govern effectively.

At this juncture, it is necessary to adopt a wide-range classic case to revaluate mass media role in public policy's process based on their predictable sphere of influence in governance as posited or opposed by different scholars and observers. Hence, this study would adopt the media coverage of a recent complex government regulation in Lagos Metropolis (*an economic, cultural and political hub in Africa*) as a case to examine mass media' intricacies as the Fourth Estate of the Realm (McQuail, 2006).

Objectives of the Study

There is a need to re-evaluate mass media production beyond the usual fragmentation of public perception into the broader capacity of gathering information, setting agendas and holding the powerful accountable. Thus, in relation to the noticeable gaps in knowledge, the following objectives were explored to develop clearer and reliable evidence(s) on the role of mass media in public policy and governance beyond the current notion of bringing issue into salience:

I. To ascertain if the mass media have any kind of connection or influence on public policy process cycle.
II. To establish if the mass media as agent of socialisation are contributing to public knowledge of public policy.
III. To determine if the mass media by any means are recognised as viable and alternative voice in public policy debates.

Research Questions

Research questions are often considered based on process or expectations but it can also be conceptualised to predict, understand, emancipate or deconstruct a phenomenon (Given, 2008). Thus, in line with these concerns, the study explored the following research questions:

I. What connection or influence do the mass media have on public policy process cycle?

II. Are the mass media noticeably advancing public knowledge on public policy as an instrument of governance?

III. Are the mass media considerably recognised as viable and alternative voice in public policy debates?

Evaluation of public Transportation Reforms and Regulations in Lagos, Nigeria

The Nigerian transport systems, right from the onset had been berated as poorly conceptualised, which made it practically impossible to meet up with enormous demand of the populace. According to Aduwo et al. (2019, p. 46), "The transportation challenges in most urban centres have been on the increase since independence. This is due to rapid increase in population in urban areas, which is not matched with improvement in transport facilities such as road network, transport complimentary facilities, transport services and traffic management techniques." Moreover, the system is plagued with flaws such as lack of coherent policies, traffic congestion on roads, overstressed railways, faltering airfields, and mass-transport blind spots, as well as all sorts of crimes, which demand urgent reforms (Faajir & Zidan, 2016). Thus, Mizuoka and Shimono (2013) recommend rescaling in regulation, which allows a provincial entity like Lagos to take responsibility for providing transport service through a state-based regulation. This justifies the need for immediate reform or proactive regulation such as obtainable in Lagos. Thus Igwe et al. (2013, p. 168) posit as follows:

Globally Nigeria ranks low in the quality of its infrastructure which impacts the ease of doing business. Low investments in transportation have resulted in the current infrastructural deficit. Key challenges include inadequate investment and poor management of transport infrastructure – which have created a huge infrastructural deficit.

Hence, in a metropolitan state like Lagos with an estimated current metro area population of 14,862,000 people (PouplationStat, 2021), it is expected that the public transport system or scheme must not only be safe but fast, effective and efficient; this implies that the masses must be presented with a scheme that moves with the speed of light, encouraging more business transactions and commercial activities, which ultimately implies more revenue or taxes accruing to the government. This led to the passage of Lagos State Transport Sector Reform Law - 2018 to urgently address the challenge and create an efficient transport system to meet the needs of a growing urban population, facilitate sustained economic growth and create sanity on the roads by raising the dignity of the commuters. In

other words, the reforms are necessary to ensure a continuing operation of every form of public transportation services ranging from buses to tricycles and motorcycles as well as to regulate the activities of the operators and investors (Lagos NMT Policy, 2018). According to Dakeje-Ibraheem (2019), the improvements offered by this legal reform are commendable with the potential to revamp and reorganise the transport sector in addition to securing lives and properties in the state.

Thus, it must be noted that the transport system in the state is predominantly road-reliant through Bus Rapid Transit (BRT), which is being managed by the Lagos Metropolitan Area Transport Authority (LAMATA) and Lagos Bus Services Limited (LBSL). Still, this scheme is greatly overstretched and therefore there is a need for residents to rely heavily on the informal paratransit modes such as danfos (minibuses) as well as taxi services such as *kekes* (three-wheelers) and *okadas* (motorcycle taxis). Also in recent years, there are other organised and technologically driven services such as Uber, Bolt and Gokada.

However, the policy initiatives may seem adequate and comprehensive in terms of context and contents but still a major challenge is the full implementation of the reforms. Based on this notable impediment, further policy-based research and empirical studies are required to provide a robust data base for formulation of a sustainable transport policy in the metropolis (Sumaila, 2013). In addition, it must be noted that government also need a viable public platform to sensitize the masses and other critical stakeholders, a sphere of reach and influence only the mass media can provide being a powerful and persuasive force in society (Lull, 2000).

Mass Media Intricacy as Public Sphere

Over the last few decades, it can be said that the role of the mass media in the political process has changed fundamentally from a rather passive conveyor of messages to an active instrument of public representation (Page, 1996), which is capable of shaping the agenda of the political discourse and able to contribute perceived public preferences in political controversies (Bennett & Entman, 2001). This precipitated the emergence of a concept called 'media democracy,' which dictates a new logic of mass media operation in political processes with the task of checking the established political institutions on power misuse (Meyer, 2002).

Similalry, Garba (2016) posits that since early 17th century, the enlightenment theorists had argued that publicity and openness provide the best protection against tyranny and the excesses of arbitrary rule. This implies that the mass

media represent an objective instrument of publicity and openness and thus remain strategic to democratic consideration of any society. Also, it must be noted that democracy as a system of government will be a mockery without an effective political communication platform or model. This further stresses that mass media are critical to democratic dispensation by presenting *public sphere* as a structural transformation for the society. Habermas, as cited in Livingstone and Lunt (1994, p. 14), affirms thus:

By 'the public sphere' we mean first of all a realm of our social life in which something approaching public opinion can be formed. Access is guaranteed to all citizens. A portion of the public sphere comes into being in every conversation in which private individuals assemble to form a public body.

Thus, one can pre-empt the operation of a public sphere by the mass media as socio-political proactiveness and productiveness. Furthermore, in a close reference to the traditional liberal theory, the democratic role of the media is to act as a check on the excesses of the state. Hence, in relation to this condition Curran (2002) posits that the mass media should monitor the full range of state activity and bravely expose the misuses or abuses of official authority, which adequately resonates with the traditional watchdog role. This further justifies the whole essence of public sphere as a political communication model or an agenda set up to ensure freedom of expression and make the political class accountable to the people. In other words, the mass media in this space must guarantee liberties and give room for government actions to be debated upon and criticised if necessary to ensure good governance (Dunu, 2013). Therefore, it is important for the mass media to embrace this responsibility objectively and accountably.

The operationalisation of the public sphere goes beyond taking government into accountability alone but also involves social engineering and nation-building through the facilitation of political participation and democratisation, which typifies mass media' role in governance or political decision making such as public policy (Isike & Omotoso, 2017).

Theoretical Framework

Though it has been insinuated that mass media may not necessarily change public attitudes, the cognitive effects that mass communication can steer attention, create awareness and duly inform the audience are still valid (McCombs et al., 1997). Thus, *public sphere* and *media framing* theories remain valid theoretical ideas to exemplify this cognitive process.

Public Sphere Theory

Accordingly, the dominant idea of public sphere theory as originally propounded by Habermas was idealism and normativism with copious emphasis on civic-minded or civil discourse that proposed an impractical egalitarian or absolute participation and thus the approach provided useful insights into the structural transformation in the early modern period. On the contrary, it failed to offer adequate theoretical framework to comprehend the structural transformation in the late modern societies (Susen, 2011). Therefore, in order to adequately address the complexities and polycentric nature of the contemporary human society and politics, different scholars such as Adut (2012) proposed semiotic theory as a modification to reflect the dialectical bond between the public sphere and politics with specific emphasis on the instruments of visibility and publicity as resources or limitations for political actors, thereby analysing the connection among social structure, social norms and political action. Similarly, Garcia et al. (2018) also address the gaps and limitations associated with the conceptualisation of public sphere as an empirical-descriptive and normative category of research in social management by suggesting that public sphere is a locus of consensus and conflict that cater for plurality of publics, interests, opinions, conflicting dimensions and oppressive potential.

Furthermore, it is improper to continually look at public sphere as a space of the privileged based on Habermas' logic, instead the consideration and emphasis should shift to the media with the capability of facilitating equal opportunities based on provision of transformative capacity and the swell of a democratic space for every individual (Magalhaes et al., 2012). According to Wole-Abu (2018), the media have a major role to play in the development and sustainability of public culture; they arouse and enlighten the debates, stimulate public opinion by promoting a vigorous and inclusive forum for dialogues while also cultivating a sense of community and oneness to ensure cultural unity. Also, the media typically act as an important platform for social identity or association that enables the masses to align their interests in public sphere (McNair, 2011; Nwaolikpe, 2013). This explains the expansive definition of public sphere as "a space for the development of shared culture and ideas, located between the realm of 'public authority' (government) and the private realm of 'civil society' which encapsulated commercial relations and the domestic sphere" (Hodkinson, 2011, p. 174).

Hence, it can be asserted that the central goal of public sphere remains the development of a unified public culture and identity derived from masses' participation on every significant political decision. Silveirinha (2005) posits that

political ideology of inclusion must be pronounced in every form of political dialogue or conversation to create a legitimate ground for democratic consensus around common conviction that all participants have their interests represented or captured in every significant political decision. Thus, this remains a speculative role of the media in public policy process cycle.

Framing Theory

Framing theory has experienced a rapid development for decades and differs significantly from other accessibility-based models; it is based on the proposition or assumption that how an issue is characterised in news reports can have an influence on how it is understood by audiences (Kostopoulos, 2020). Thus, this remains a multidisciplinary paradigm that holistically examines media effects on individuals and audiences (Ardèvol-Abreu, 2015). Interpretatively, people's account of reality is somehow connected to the influence and interpretation of other people's actions and interactions as amplified by the mass media. Hallahan (1999, p.207) posits thus:

Framing essentially involves selection and salience. To frame is to select some aspects of perceived reality and make them more salient in the communicating text, in such a way as to promote a particular problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation and/or treatment recommendation for the item described. Frames, then, define problems—determine what a causal agent is doing and costs and benefits, usually measured in terms of cultural values; diagnose causes—identify the forces creating the problem; make moral judgments—evaluate causal agents and their effects; and suggest remedies—offer and justify treatments for the problem and predict their likely effects.

More deliberately, Rodelo and Miniz (2019) further define the concept of framing as the flow of structures from political actors to journalists and subsequently to news articles. Notwithstanding a significant factor to be reflected upon is the fact that framing also contains media input, which comprises materials that political actors send to newsrooms to facilitate their work while influencing the news. Also, the mass media can equally impact on political attitudes by creating a chain of storylines around an event to influence audience' preference through a consistent directional but biased information flow (De-Vreese & Boomgaarden, 2006). It can be interpreted that these imposing evaluations of information charged at the public through media framing more often than not are premeditated for a predictable intent and result, which appear more like a subtle media propaganda or bias.

Methodology

To determine the influence of mass media reportage on public policy in Lagos metropolis, the qualitative method of textual analysis is considered most suitable. This research method is a process of deriving information from texts, such as novels, monographs, articles, web pages, etc. and it usually involves finding patterns, such as identifying word frequency or discovering associative links between words (McKee, 2001). In addition, the procedure for the purposive case selection is a "typical case" and according to Patton, as cited by Shakir (2002), this technique is adjudged to be ''representative, typical or normal" because it exemplifies a distinctive set of values in accordance with some general understanding of a phenomenon (Gerring, 2010). Thus, this succinctly justifies the choice of public transportation policy in Lagos metropolis, Nigeria because of its common denominator with typical socio-economic impacts on the generality of the residents. Hence, the data textually analysed were assembled using Google News; this tool allows researchers to extract electronically archived editorial items from the mass media. More relevantly, "*Lagos Ban on the use of motorcycles and tricycles for public transportation''* with related search "*Lagos ban on okada and tricycle*'' were used as keywords or phrases to retrieve applicable news stories from the prominent national media (*The Nation*, *Vanguard*, *The Punch, The Guardian* and *This Day*) in Nigeria. These stories were transferred into Microsoft Word document for proper formatting before the researcher applied Voyant or Text-Mining Tools to extract patterns within the available structured data, which is the underlining procedure for textual analysis as an applicable research methodology (Welsh, 2014). Also, the dominant words and their interrelations were further explored within the context of agenda setting propositions using *Voyant-Tools* for the analysis to reveal the most trending words for the selected media reports and their editorials formats as contained in the table as follows:

Table 1: Selected Mass Media' Contents and Story's Format

Title of Stories	Formats
The Lagos Ban on Okada	Editorial
You are expanding the kingdom of armed robbers — Bode George hits Sanwo-Olu over Okada ban	News Story
Ayokunle, Sanwo-Olu justify ban of tricycles, motorcycles	News Story
Ban on Okada, Keke Marwa Done in People's Interests — Lagos Chief Whip, Hon Abiru	News Story
Okada Ban: Accidents reducing in Lagos – Deputy Governor	News Story
HR experts seek flexible office hours for workers as Lagos traffic worsens	News Story
Lagos to Train Former Okada Riders on Vocational Skills	News Story
Tricycle Ban: Salute to Sanwo-Olu's Courage	Opinion Article
Lagos State's motorcycle and tricycle ban	Opinion Article
The ban on Okada in Lagos State	Opinion Article
As Lagos Plans to ban Okada	Opinion Article

Source: Researcher's Analysis, 2021

Analysis and Discussion of Mass Media' Influence on Transportation Policy in Lagos

The reform or ban on the commercial motorcycles and tricycles in Lagos State in 2020/2021 constituted the case employed to understand mass media interactions with public policy process cycle; the analysis examines mass media inclusive or seemingly extensive coverage to understand the degree or nature of influence on policy process as regards the ability to engage policymakers and the facilitation of public participation. In this regard, the formats of reporting used by the mass media are considered for the explication of the case within the context of this study; the collection of media stories comprising editorial, the news and the opinions listed in the previous table were purposively selected for the analysis.

The selected editorial contains a total of 859 words, out of which 388 words were used uniquely by the medium that wrote it. According to the Voyant-tools adopted for the analysis, when certain words are uniquely used within the context of a story, it means that the writer creatively uses them to reflect the degree of assertiveness on the subject instead of making the content insipid to the audience while articulating the media organisation's position on the ban. The medium focused on the state government, transportation system and the effect of the policy on socio-economic activities, as well as security of lives and properties in the state.

Also, the selected news stories contain a total of 3,260 words, of which 1,012 emerged as unique words. The news stories reflect the perceptions of government representatives such as the governor, deputy governor, a member of the state parliament and a chieftain of the opposition party (People's Democratic Party) in the state. The analysis of the news stories also sparingly contains the views of the motorcycles and tricycles' riders as well as captures a bit of commuters' viewpoints. Largely, the focus of the stories was on the state government's decision and the possible impacts of the ban on the masses, especially the riders who derived income from the business proceeds to cater for their dependents. Similarly, the count from the selected opinion articles shows 5,913 words, out of which 1,954 words were adjudged to be unique based on the outcome reflected by the tool deployed for the analysis. Like the news stories, the writers of the opinions focused on the government, the ban and its consequences on the riders and commuters in the state. The results are presented in Figure 1 to 3 as follows:



Source: Researcher's Analysis, 2021
Figure 1: Dominant Words in the Selected Editorial

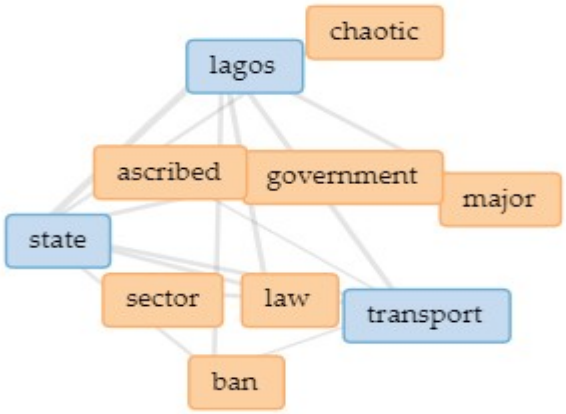


Source: Researcher's Analysis, 2021
Figure 2: Dominant Words in the Selected News Story

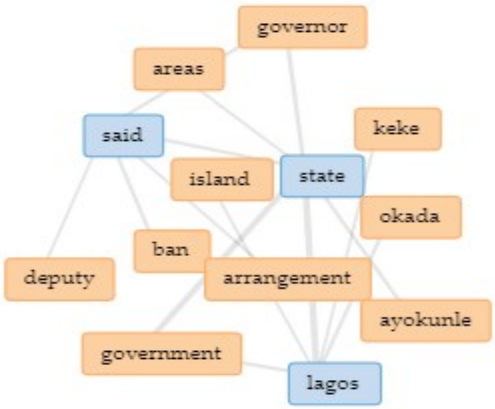


Source: Researcher's Analysis, 2021
Figure 3: Dominant Words in the Selected Opinions

From Figure 1 to 3, it emerged that three of the dominant words in the selected formats of reporting policy matters are linked, which shows the relativity of the words to others within the context of the formats. For the editorial, it was established that the medium that wrote it wants the masses to reason with the government's position (see fig. 1). For instance, *Lagos* connects with *transport* and *state,* which signified the need to improve the sector by the state government. Lagos also resonates with law and ban. This could be interpreted as calling attention of the public to the need to have the sector reformed by the government.



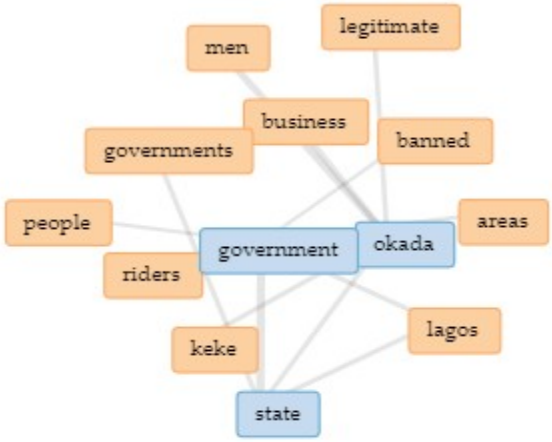
Source: Researcher's Analysis, 2021
Figure 4: Link among the dominant words in the selected editorial



Source: Researcher's Analysis, 2021
Figure 5: Link among the dominant words in the selected news story

From Figure 5, it could be seen that *Lagos*, *state* and *said* connect with the *governor*, *areas*, *arrangement*, *keke*, *okada* and *deputy*. This points us towards understanding that media presented the view of critical stakeholders in government. The linkage further reaffirmed the earlier results that the mass media projected the opinions of dominant actors during policy formulation and implementation. For instance, one of the news established that some areas in the state need to be secured more and protected from the crooks using the means of transportation under contention for criminal activities. It also emerged from one

of the stories that the state government is working on alternative initiatives to cushion the impacts of the ban on the riders and commuters. This position was reported by the media when the concerned members of the public agitated for alternatives. Thus, one can conclude that the media moderately through its platform project public opinions to the state government.



Source: Researcher's Analysis, 2021
Figure 6: Link among the dominant words in the selected opinions

As presented by Figure 1 and 2, *government*, *okada* and *state* steadily connect with *keke*, *business*, *men*, *Lagos*, *legitimate*, *banned* and *areas*. This implies that the writers of the opinions want government officials to re-consider the riders that are legitimately using public transportation service as a source of livelihood for themselves and their dependents without criminal intents or actions. However, it was found that the ban would increase unemployment or cause an upsurge in criminality but this position was eschewed by the editorial and news formats in their presentations. Hence, the cumulative analysis of these stories without their headlines resulted in the data presented in the subsequent table with the aim of identifying the most trending words and to align them with agenda-setting theory. This is imperative to reveal different agenda set by the media and other actors expected to significantly address them.

Table 2: Trending Words in Selected Mass Media' Contents and Formats

Categories	***First Trending Word***	***Second Trending Word***	***Third Trending Word***
Editorial	*Lagos*	*State*	*Transport*
Collocative Words	State, law and transport	Government, law and transport	Lagos, sector and state
News	*State*	*Said*	*Lagos*
Collocative Words	Government, governor, said, Ayokunle, areas	Ban, governor, state, arrangement, deputy	State, government, Okada, Island, Keke
Opinion	*Okada*	*State*	*Government*
Collocative Words	Men, business, Keke, legitimate, riders	Government, state, governments, Lagos, Okada	Lagos, areas, state, banned, people

Source: Researcher's Analysis, 2021

Hence, the data presented in Table 2 made it obvious that the media want the public to align with the state government to ensure maximum security and improve the transportation sector. This could be discerned from the first trending word to the third trending word with the relational collocative words. For instance, when *Lagos* trended, it collocated with *law*. This indicates that the medium that wrote the editorial stressed the importance of the law banning motorcycles and tricycles in the state. Considering the second trending word, it could be seen that *law* also collocated with *state*. This reaffirms the place of the law in governance. It could also be deduced that the *state,* which is the second trending word collocated with *transport*, which emerged as the third trending word.

These results are not quite different from what was discovered in the news stories format. *State*, *said* and *Lagos* are respectively the first, second and the third most trending words. This signifies constant reference to the state government by the newsmakers as actors who should address the issues that prompted the ban or the possible consequences of the ban on the riders and commuters. As pointed out earlier, the opinion format is replete with trending words that established *Okada ban* as an issue and the state government as an actor or stakeholder. While *Okada* is the first trending word, it has the view that riders and their business need to be protected. The second and third trending words collocate with words that identify state government and the public as stakeholders. Thus, the results show the need to protect lives and property, support the riders to make ends meet as well as to

cushion the impacts of the ban on commuters, which appeared as agendas set by the media and the public.

Findings, Conclusion and Recommendations

The analysis conspicuously revealed that mass media interaction with the public policy process cycle somehow enhances public knowledge of political decisions; this shows that mass media abilities to provide information, arouse public awareness and call attention to the new development about government regulation in the state remains intact or unperturbed. However, there is no convincing evidence that mass media was able to affect or change government decisions or position on the supposed ban but rather strongly projecting government's intentions and justification for such decision to the public, which put mass media viability as alternative voice in public policy debates in doubt. This accurately confirms the notion that the government often drives media agenda while the mass media do have *contingent effect* depending on the nature of the policy or the condition. Thus, mass media influence or impact on political agenda or governance had generally been dubbed as either "weak," "moderate," or "strong" by different literature but in this case and based on the evidence derived from the data it appeared to be considerably *weak*.

In terms of daring engagement of the policymakers, the media style and approach to reporting was not only weak but timid as there is no debate from the media angle in terms of news analysis and assertive editorial but only notional projections of the government's stance to the people while sparingly presenting a handful of individual view of the riders and commuters to whoever cares to know. The tone of writing as observed is not essentially directed from the mass media to the government. Therefore, effective engagement from the mass media during policy process cycle can be concluded to be at the lowest ebb at the moment in Nigeria.

Hence, it is essential for mass media to adopt a more engaging approach to policy reporting and also to broaden and reinvigorate the public sphere by ensuring public participation in policy debates or robust engagements of the public and other critical stakeholders outside the government to effectively engage the policymakers. This is the whole essence of *public sphere* but the mass media in Nigeria are not presently attentive and engaging with this sacred responsibility of an active and accountable moderator of public discourse or debate essential for effective public policy agenda, formulation, implementation and evaluation.

However, there are suggestive reasons why the mass media are currently wielding a weak degree of influence on policy decisions; a notable argument is the unpredictability of mass media coverage since the news hardly put emphasis on an issue for a longer period of time, which suggests that if policy matters are reported in this manner to generate only a spotlight of attention, the information would hardly have any impact on human attitude or the case will be obsolete in a short while. Furthermore, mass media agenda is overcentralised or obsessively concerned with salience and mostly revolves around personalities (characters behind or in the news) instead of being centred on the important area of regulation or public issues. In other words, the substance of media agenda setting is driven by newsworthiness and persons instead of pivotal issues central to public policy. Moreover, the impairment to media influence on policy agenda is also linked to over-reliance on elite opinions as sellable media contents, in addition to policymakers' news management or media commodification. Government media ownership or paying for coverage has drastically weakened mass media's influence on policy process cycle as whoever pays the pipers, equally calls out the tunes.

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