# Party Sympathy as Impetus for Politicisation of Litigation News in Nigeria: A Content Analysis of *Daily Trust* and *Punch* Newspapers

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## Abstract

*Media organisations play crucial role in the sustenance and strengthening of any democratic governance. Therefore, the importance of the media in the implementation of electoral process cannot be overemphasised. Litigations that follow intra and interparty elections, where aggrieved aspirants go to court to seek redress, are also critical stages that can make or mar any democratic state. The paper, therefore, examines the coverage of the litigations that followed the 2019 presidential election by the Daily Trust and Punch Newspapers with view to determining whether party sympathy influenced the framing of their news items. Independent judiciary is part of the critical attributes that ensure the flourishing of the rule of law, which is a strong pillar of democratic governance. Consequently, if the reportage of judicial decisions is influenced by sentiments; it can lead to devastating consequences. The paper adopted the Social Responsibility Theory as its framework. This is with a view to ascertaining whether the media is adhering to its constitutional status of being free but mindful of the unity and peaceful coexistence of Nigeria. Content Analysis Research Method was employed for the analysis of data. The editions of Daily Trust and Punch newspapers for six months were content analysed. The front- page stories and editorials of the newspapers were the Unit of Analysis, while the ruling All Progressives Congress (APC)/Muhammadu Buhari and the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP)/Atiku Abubakar were the Content Categories. The data generated by the paper revealed that both the two newspapers framed their news items on the litigations that followed the 2019 presidential election to favour either of the political parties studied and their candidates through the featuring of unbalanced news items. Therefore, party or candidate sympathy influenced the coverage of the post 2019 presidential election litigations by both Daily Trust and Punch newspapers. The paper recommends adherence to ethics and professionalism while the press reports election litigations for the sustenance of Nigeria's nascent democracy. Politicisation of litigation reportage can inspire citizens to perceive the judiciary as a biased umpire and this can create unimaginable doldrum for the corporate existence of Nigeria.*

**Key words:** Litigation, media, framing, democracy, election

## Introduction

The importance of the media and its inseparable nature with politics make modern scholars of political communication to coin what they referred to as mediatisation of politics. The increasing influence of the media in all aspects of politics entails

that it is too important to be neglected by political fencers, hence, according to many scholars, especially Pate, Nwabueze and Idiong (2013), politicians in Nigeria cajole this important sector to disseminate reports in their favour. Media in Nigeria exercises a lot of influence in the formation of opinion, as it usually influences the verdict of public courts.

Media in Nigeria serves as an important source of information. It is also an important channel of communication between the leaders and the led or between aspirants and the electorate. According to Busy and Holbert (2011), institutions of governance and the citizens are often "governed" by media logic. Therefore, media as social institutions are involved in politics not only in Nigeria but around the globe. It is important to however state that the first and basic function of any media organisation is to disseminate news and information in response to a basic human need – the right to know. Therefore, media plays a vital role in shaping political behaviour and it is because of this importance that Mohammed (2012) refers to media as the Fourth Estate of the Realm or People's Parliament.

It is based on the foregoing that media is seen and regarded as tool for moulding public opinion as well as shaping of states' policies. Hence, the vital role that media plays in the politics of societies, nations or states makes it imperative for Nigerian politicians to have a vibrant and effective media house that would disseminate information aimed at shaping, defending or being sympathetic to their political interests or those of their different regions (Jason, 1997).

Nevertheless, the level of media participation in the politics of the country makes many scholars like Oso, (2012), Mohammed (2012) and Pate, et al (2013), to tag it as partisan. Although all over the world, media organisations are formed to protect certain ideology, but they have the social responsibility to keep the unity of their societies and be partisan of the truth only. The ideology of the media can be tribal, regional, corporate or even profit-oriented, (Oso, 2012).

Partisanship of the media in Nigeria dates back to pre-colonial era and it continued even after independence. Media organisations that were established before Nigeria's independence were meant to inculcate reading culture and create awareness on religious activities, but they later metamorphosed to political platforms. Again, after independence, the three major political parties that emerged were regionally based and each of these parties had its media outfit(s) supporting its manifestos, (Omu, 1978).

Despite the fact that Nigeria's media ethics and code of conduct state that media organisations are supposed to operate independently devoid of interference from any quarters in order to ensure that they effectively discharge their roles, political interests, certainly, coupled with other interests, have made Nigeria's media to become partisan while disseminating information, largely to favour their host regions, proprietors' tribes, religion or even political party, (Sa'idu, 2017).

Therefore, especially according to Haruna, Shariff and Yusuf, (2003), media in Nigeria selects an aspect of news (frames) that favours its interest and consistently gives it prominence. Through the framing of their news items to promote a certain interest, or achieve a certain goal, media often negates the ethics of their profession. Framing of news items to achieve a hidden goal by the media sometimes affects the unity of Nigeria, as it causes acrimonies among citizens. Framing news to suit the interest of the media has since become a norm in the operations of the Nigerian media; and no sector, including the judiciary, is spared. Being judiciary a critical stakeholder in any democratic dispensation, it is important for the media to, however, tarry with caution while reporting its processes.

In Nigeria, inter or intra party elections are usually ushered in and accompanied by disputes and disagreement. This makes aggrieved parties to resort to court for justice and Nigerian media reports these judicial processes. This paper, therefore, examines the coverage of the litigation processes that followed the 2019 presidential election by the *Daily Trust* and *Punch Newspapers* with view to determine whether party sympathy had influenced the framing of the two newspapers' news items.

## Literature Review

This section of the paper surveys and discusses some of the available literature written on the role of the media in democratic consolidation, the framing of news items by the media and the affiliation of the media to political parties. Efforts were made at a concise review of what has been studied, argued, and established about the topic of this paper that are available in the existing literature. Therefore, as observed by Parris and Peachey (2013), the paper interrogated and reviewed the literature that are relevant to the matter under study, and where necessary, the weaknesses and gap left by the literature reviewed were highlighted.

**Role of the media in democratic consolidation**

The role that the media played in the attainment of political independence for Nigeria was enormous. This fact was attested to by one of the eminent Nigerians that were involved in the struggle that rescued the country from the jaws of colonialism, Nnamdi Azikiwe. According to Omera (2010), Nnamdi Azikiwe described power of the pen and tongue as two factors that mobilised Africans against cololinialism, which led to the independence of Nigeria and many other African countries.

Since then, Nigerian media has been consistent in promoting democratic ideals and in many instances served as the voice of the populace in holding leaders accountable. This has helped in inculcating the belief of self-governance in many Nigerians. Therefore, media's role in structuring Nigeria's political landscape was not just outstanding, but attracts accolades and recognition by different stakeholders in the Nigerian project. This fact can be buttressed by the deliberate decision of the framers of the Nigerian constitution to assign responsibility for the media. The constitution gives the mass media a role to perform in the development of Nigeria and its peaceful coexistence.

Section 22 of the 1999 Constitution states thus; "the Press; Radio, Television and other agencies of the Mass Media shall at all times be free to uphold the fundamental objectives contained in this Chapter and uphold responsibility and accountability of the government to the people."

Haruna, et al (2003:16-20), have identified the fundamental objectives, which the media are expected to uphold at all times, as foreseen by the Nigerian constitution: "The fundamental objectives are political objectives, economic objectives, educational objectives, foreign policy objectives, environmental objectives, Nigerian cultural values, among others."

Furthermore, the importance of the media in governance and unity of every society can be found in different speeches and assertions of famous world leaders. For instance, Thomas Jefferson, one of the former presidents of the United States of America, once famously remarked that, if he had to choose between government without newspaper or newspaper without government, he said he would not hesitate to preserve newspaper (Researcher, 2011, Editorial, Tell Magazine, July 15, 2005).

Media creates awareness and raises certain important issues into national limelight and discourse. Pate, et al (2013) emphasised this fact through the assertion that media has the capacity to shape the thought processes of a nation. This is epitomised, they said, in the 20th and 21st centuries with the introduction of policies by the media to the Nigerian people. For example, when former Nigerian President, Olusegun Obasanjo, allegedly intended to extend his tenure beyond eight years, Nigerian media set the agenda for the bid's total collapse. Also, the Nigerian media championed the course of power rotation policy despite its non-recognition by the country's constitution.

Therefore, modern scholars have elevated the functions of the mass media beyond the traditional roles of informing, educating and entertaining the public to the more sophisticated functions of agenda setting, shaping of public opinion and influencing public policy. According to Pate, et al (2013), media sets agenda through its coverage of national events. Hence, the topics of public discussion are often what the media reported or commented upon. Salient and important issues of national interest may not receive national attention if media fails to give it prominence (Achor & Moguluwa, 2012).

Similarly, the media can direct and influence public opinion through its reportage. The role played by the media, for example, in getting the Northern politicians and society to accept and support power shift can further buttress this fact, (Haruna, et al, 2003). It is on this ground that Pate, et al (2013:185) said thus:

> Public opinion is not simply the sum of individual opinions but of a continuous, comparing and contrasting of opinions, based on a wide range of knowledge and experience; it means that before a popular opinion is obtained over a given issue, people's minds will have to be influenced by the minds of others either through their words or action.

It is stating the fact that policy makers need the support of the populace to achieve the goals and objectives contain therein in the policies they formulate. Therefore, it is needless to say that since the media has the capacity to shape public opinion, it thus influences public policy. Government decisions and laws are many at times influenced by the editorials and opinion pages of newspapers and magazines. This is what some newspapers have built their reputations on in some parts of the world, (Pate, et al 2013).

There is no gainsaying that one of the key roles that the media plays in democratic consolidation in Nigeria is playing the watchdog role. The media in Nigeria is fond of raising alarm against any bad policy of the government, especially the violation of the rule of law. It is on this assertion that Olanipekun (2003) posited that media is playing a vital role in the sustenance of the rule of law which is a "sine qua non" to a successful democratic dispensation. The importance of the media, according to him, is also seen in its support for the fight against corruption and exposing high profile corruption cases.

Despite the important role that media plays in democratic consolidation in Nigeria, it is often found wanting on many strands. On many instances, Nigerian media is often found to engage in deliberate acts capable of subverting not only democracy, but the peace and harmonious coexistence of the country. Nigerian media comes out opinionated whenever sensitivities like ethnicity, regionalism and religiosity are the bound of contention. On many occasions, Nigerian media openly support a given political party or politician. They sometime promote violence and sensationalise issues that threaten the security of the country (Sa'idu, 2017).

The negative attitude of the media made Pate, et al (2013) used what they called Zanism to describe the political absurdity of the Nigerian media. Zanism refers to the practice whereby the media becomes mere clowns or stooges of the political elites, "who themselves are often epitomes of political absurdity and tend to be so as a result of, or perhaps in spite of, their socio-political milieu, and this is commonly found in many developing countries." The media in this Zany arrangement, according to Pate, et al (2013:16), is used in maintaining the status quo; consequently, "journalists become boot-licking lapdogs of the political class practicing begging-bowl journalism." By and large, Nigerian media is also guilty of promoting diversity and disharmony, which affects the unity and progress of Nigeria.

## Framing of election litigation news

Framing is a situation where a journalist characterises a news story through the selection of a certain reality and gives it prominence in order to influence the behaviour of the audience or readership towards achieving a hidden goal or objective of either the journalist or his media outfit. Framing is usually meant to portray a certain fact in a manner that suit the interest of the writer or his sponsors or employers. In Anyadike (2015), framing, according to Kim (2003), "occurs

when journalists select an aspect of perceived reality and make it more important in their news story than other aspects by promoting a particular problem or interpretation."

Many scholars, according to Anyadike (2013), posited that framing essentially involves selection and salience while communicating certain information to readers or audience. Framing is done to promote a particular agenda, goal or problem. It is done to influence the interpretation of readers or audience of a certain fact or reality. Framing is done to promote a given fact or reality based on the interest, goal and objective of the journalist or his media organisation. In framing, certain facts can be disregarded or ignored, especially if stating them would deter the achievement of the expected desire.

Therefore, framing is meant to make readership or audience understand a certain fact in the line of thought of a journalist or his media outfit. For instance, through framing of report, citizens can be made to prefer military rule than democratic rule. Similarly, through framing, a terrorist or an offender can be made to attract the sympathy of the citizens. With framing, a media outfit can promote peace or conflict, depending of its interest and objective, especially in multi-cultural and religious state like Nigeria. It is on these grounds that Pate (2012) identified the following through which the media uses framing to achieve certain primordial goals and objectives in Nigeria:

The first is through promotion, by selective reporting, prejudicial stereotypes about groups and individuals. Second, through reporting intergroup conflicts out of their fundamental sociological, economic, political and other contexts. Next is through the use of inflammatory, misleading and sensational headlines to attract sales, and through publishing rumours as facts.

Therefore, the use of framing in this paper is meant to understand how *Daily Trust* and *Punch* newspapers report the litigation that followed the 2019 presidential election either for or against the All Progressives Congress (APC)/Muhammadu Buhari or Peoples Democratic Party (PDP)/Atiku Abubakar. The wisdom is to establish how framing was used to sympathise with, or support, either of the political parties or their candidates with aim of influencing the judicial outcome at the detriment of the independence of the judiciary and Nigeria's nascent democracy.

**Party affiliation and the media in Nigeria**

The history of media establishment in Nigeria is an important trajectory to the understanding of the Nigeria's media's involvement in party politics. It is necessary to at this juncture state that media organisations that were established before Nigeria's independence were meant to inculcate reading culture and create awareness on religious activities, but they later metamorphosed to political platforms. Furthermore, after independence, the three major political parties that emerged had their media outfits supporting their manifestos (Omu, 1978, Sa'idu, 2017).

The foregoing antecedent of Nigeria's media, according to Sa'idu (2017), is strongly linked to its behaviour now where some media outfits openly, through their actions and reportage, endorse a candidate or party in an election, with some maintaining a surreptitious bias in their selective reporting. Most of the media outfits, particularly during political campaigns, engage in partisan activities.

Different scholars, according to Daramola (2013), have done comprehensive studies on the relationship of Nigerian media with party politics. For instance, according to him, a study of the politics of the First Republic revealed that the character of political reporting and commentary, especially in the print media, were influenced by the political affiliation of the owner/proprietor of a particular media outfit. Therefore, some media outfits, according to him, end up becoming the mouthpiece of a given political party.

For instance, Daramola (2013) observed, the Pilot Newspaper, owned by late Chief Nnamdi Azikiwe, did not hide its partisanship in its support for Azikiwe and his party, the National Council for Nigerian Citizens (NCNC). Similarly, newspapers and other media outfits based in the Northern and Western Nigeria pitched their tent with the Northern Peoples Congress (NPC) and Action Group (AG), respectively.

In the same vein, Daramola (2013) observed, the partisan attitude of Nigerian media remained the same during the Second Republic. He cited how government-owned media like the *New Nigerian, Daily Times,* Nigerian Television Authority (NTA) and the Federal Radio Corporation of Nigeria (FRCN) were used as the ready-made propaganda tools of the then ruling party, the National Party of Nigeria (NPN).

Similarly, during the botched Third Republic, The National Concord, African Concord and Community Concord, owned by the late Moshood Abiola, supported by other Lagos-based media outfits, glaringly pitched their tent with the Social Democratic Party (SDP) and its presidential candidate, late Moshood Abiola. The open support of Abiola by these media outfits continued during the imbroglio of the June 12, 1993 (June 12), which followed the annulment of the June 12, 1993 presidential election where the aforementioned media's prepared candidates was winning.

At this juncture, it is important to note that media ownership largely dictates its affiliation with a given political party. Oso (2012) clearly posited this assertion. He cited the example of the 1959 elections to strengthen his position. He noted at that time, almost all the owners of the then leading newspapers and journalists were also leaders of the then main political parties. Hence, the reportage of the newspapers clearly aligned to the political parties of their proprietors. These newspapers, according to him, were not only used for campaigns and publicity, but they became instruments for mobilisation and recruitment of supporters.

In this dispensation, Oso (2012:29) posited that, "since 1999 when the current dispensation began, the main newspapers are those established by politicians." The only difference between what is obtained now and the previous republics, according to him, is that there is no newspaper that is owned by any political party, at least from what is in the open. However, because their owners are card-carrying members of some political parties, these newspapers "maintain evident link to the political parties."

**Theoretical framework**

In order to have logical guidance, this paper adopts the Social Responsibility Theory of the media. Social responsibility role of the media presupposes that the media is free to operate in any social system but they are to operate in a responsible manner. The theory also holds that, the media has the right to criticise government and institutions but also has certain basic responsibilities to maintain the stability of the society (Des, 2012).

According to McQuail (1983:116), Social Responsibility Theory owes its origin to an American initiative – the Commission on Freedom of the Press of 1978. Therefore, while the theory gives the media absolute freedom, it at the same time restricted the freedom by recommending that the media must act in accordance with the ethics of journalism.

McQuail (1983:117-118) has elaborated the main theses of the theory as follows: That media should accept and fulfill certain obligations to society. These obligations, he said, are mainly to be met by setting high professional standards of informativeness, truth, accuracy, objectivity and balance. In accepting and applying these obligations, media should be self-regulating within the framework of law and established institutions. The media should avoid whatever might lead to crime, violence or civil disorder or give offence to minority groups. Similarly, the media as a whole should be pluralistic and reflect the diversity of their society, provides access to various points of view and to rights of reply. Again, society and the public, following the first named principle, have a right to expect high standards of performance and intervention can be justified to secure a public good; and journalists and media professionals should be accountable to society as well as to their employers and the market.

In the same vein, Folarin (1998) and Des (2012) state that, the press performs some specific functions within the ambit of the Social Responsibility Theory and they include:

Serving the political system by making information, discussion and consideration of public affairs generally accessible. The media is expected to inform the public to enable it to take self-determination action. Furthermore, the media is expected to protect the rights of the individuals by acting as watchdog over the government; and, as a duty, the media is to preserve financial autonomy in order not to become dependent on special interests and influences.

The Social Responsibility Theory has provided adequate ways, which the press could satisfactorily serve the society. However, in a democratic state like Nigeria, social responsibility falls victim to the dictates of government or profit seeking motives of the commercial media and thereby short of serving the people (Des, 2012).

The major problem confronting the efforts of ensuring social responsibility in press performance in Nigeria is the fact that, there is absence of practical application of the principles of the theory (Des, 2012). The passing of the Freedom of Information Bill into law has, according to Sa'idu (2017), provided the media with the legal and statutory structure, which were hitherto not available. This would ensure that the media fulfils the responsibilities they are expected to play in accordance with the postulations of the theory.

Despite the seeming weaknesses however, the review of the postulations of the Social Responsibility Theory has helped this paper to understand the ethics that the press is supposed to work on. Applying the postulations of the theory to Nigeria's situation entails that the mass media is expected to embrace freedom but work responsibly for the Nigerian politics, democracy and stability of the society, (Sa'idu, 2017).

## Methodology

Babbie (2010) posited that research methodology entails a detailed systematic attempt to discover or confirm facts through investigation in regards to a specific problem and this is based on concrete and defined procedures. Therefore, this paper adopts Content Analysis as its research method. Content Analysis was used to content analyse the editions of *Daily Trust* and *Punch* newspapers from December 2018 to May 2019 in order to establish the behaviour of each of the newspapers in its coverage of the two major political parties of the All Progressives Congress (APC) and the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) as well as their presidential candidates, Muhammadu Buhari and Atiku Abubakar during the litigation that followed the 2019 presidential election. The reportage of the litigation that heralded the 2019 presidential election, as well as the litigations that followed the election, by the two newspapers is the main thrust of the paper.

*Daily Trust* and *Punch* newspapers were selected based on their circulation and place of publication. They were selected to establish the role of place of publication in influencing media's affiliation with a given political party or candidate. While the *Punch* newspaper is Lagos-based, *Daily Trust* newspaper is Abuja-based. Despite the fact that both the two major presidential candidates in the 2019 presidential election were from the Northern part of the country, but the stronghold of the PDP, as the result of the elections showed, was Southern part of Nigeria, while the APC appeared stronger in the Northern part of Nigeria.

In selecting the two newspapers and their editions for the purpose of content analysis, judgmental sampling was adopted. Babbie (2010:192) justified the use of any of the non-probability sampling techniques where the use of probability sampling "wouldn't be appropriate even if it were possible". Therefore, content analysis was used in analysing the front-page stories and editorials featured in the editions of *Daily Trust* and *Punch* newspapers for six months - from December 2018 to May 2019.

The period of the study was selected on the strength of the fact that months before the 2019 presidential elections, the two major parties, their presidential candidates and proxies engaged in political skimming in order to demerit one another through litigations. This trend continued up to the time when the winner of the election was sworn-in, and beyond. Therefore, the period was validated by professors and other senior lecturers of Political Science in the Department of Political Science and International Studies of the Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria, Nigeria. The period was adjudged by these scholars to be adequate to test the political party affiliation of the two newspapers in their coverage of litigations that ushered in the 2019 elections and what followed after the election.

Furthermore, Voltmer (2006) has observed that front page stories and editorials of newspaper determine its identity, hence the analysis of the front-page stories and editorials of *Daily Trust* and *Punch* newspapers within the period under study. Therefore, within the period under study, both *Daily Trust* and *Punch* newspapers, being daily titles, produced one hundred and eighty (180) editions each, if an average of thirty (30) days per month is taken into consideration.

From the foregoing, judgmental sampling was also used in reviewing the editions of the *Daily Trust* and *Punch* newspapers produced within the period under study, as only the editions that carried the 2019 presidential election litigation news items were reviewed. After the review, twenty-one (21) editions of *Punch* newspaper were found to have featured news items (front page stories and editorials) on litigation concerning the 2019 presidential elections, while twelve (12) editions of *Daily Trust* newspaper featured news items (front page stories and editorials) on litigations that either ushered in or followed the 2019 presidential elections.

The content categories for this paper are All Progressives Congress (APC)/Muhammadu Buhari and Peoples Democratic Party (PDP)/Atiku Abubakar. The content categories were determined by bias or presentation of unbalanced/balanced front-page stories or editorials. When, for example, a litigation story or editorial published by any of the two newspapers under study featured only the side of the PDP and its candidate, Atiku Abubakar, while other parties in the dispute were neglected, such story or editorial was coded as content in favour of PDP/Atiku Abubakar, and vice versa. Contents that appeared balanced and unbiased, featuring all parties in the dispute, were coded as neutral. Similarly, the units of analysis are front page stories and editorials of the *Daily*

*Trust* and *Punch* newspapers. Here, the paper qualitatively and quantitatively established news items featured for each of the parties and their candidates. The content categories and the units of analysis were coded as "1" news items on APC/Muhammadu Buhari, "2" news items on PDP/Atiku Abubakar, "3" front page stories for APC/Muhammadu Buhari, "4" front page stories for PDP/Atiku Abubakar, "5" editorials for APC/Muhammadu Buhari, "6" editorials for PDP/Atiku Abubakar, "7" neutral front page stories and "8" neutral editorials, respectively.

**Data Analysis**

The data obtained for this paper was subjected to both qualitative and quantitative content analysis. Therefore, three steps were adopted to achieve the foregoing. The data was prepared, organised and reported. Similarly, macroconstruct of news framing was used to establish the direction of each news items. These macroconstructs are placement of the news item and the amount of space allotted to that news items. In most cases, relevant excerpts from the newspapers were used to buttress the direction of a given news items to show whether it was for APC/Muhammadu Buhari or PDP/Atiku Abubakar, (Ojebuyi and Salawu, 2018).

**Result**

The following table and figures present the coverage of the litigations that were associated with the 2019 presidential elections by the *Daily Trust* and *Punch* newspapers from December 2018 to May 2019. The reportage that featured on the newspapers' editorials and front pages within the period under study was considered:

**Table 1: *Daily Trust* and *Punch newspapers'* coverage of 2019 presidential elections' ligations from December 2018 to May 2019**

| Variables | Daily Trust Frequency | % | Frequency | Punch % |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Front page (Lead)** | 1 | 8.33 | 10 | 47.62 |
| **Front page (Second Lead)** | 11 | 91.67 | 10 | 47.62 |
| **Editorials** | 00 | 00 | 1 | 4.76 |
| **Total** | **12** | **100** | **21** | **100** |

**Source: Field Work (Sa'idu, 2022)**

Table 1 shows the coverage of the 2019 presidential elections litigations by both *Daily Trust* and *Punch* newspapers. From the table, it is clear that *Punch* newspaper gave more prominence to the litigations than *Daily Trust* newspaper, as it featured twenty (20) front page stories on the litigations within the period under review. Lead stories and second lead stories were ten (10) each, representing 47.64% each, while the newspaper did only one (1) editorial, representing 4.76%, on the litigations within the period under review. However, *Daily Trust* newspaper gave less prominence to the issue under study. Out of the twelve (12) news items the newspaper featured in the period under review, only one (1), representing 8.33%, was a lead story on the 2019 presidential election litigations, while eleven (11), representing 91.67%, were second lead stories and without any editorial on the problem under study; within the period under review.

Therefore, the data shows that *Punch* newspaper was more attached to the litigations that followed the 2019 presidential election in Nigeria. Every newspaper has a constituency that it serves and front-page stories reflect the direction and priority of a given media outfit. Hence, it would be instructive to say that, *Punch* newspaper's interest on the litigations that followed the 2019 election was borne out by the desire to serve its constituency.

The following excerpts, though not exhaustive, from both *Daily Trust* and *Punch* newspapers show how each framed its reportage of the 2019 presidential election litigations:

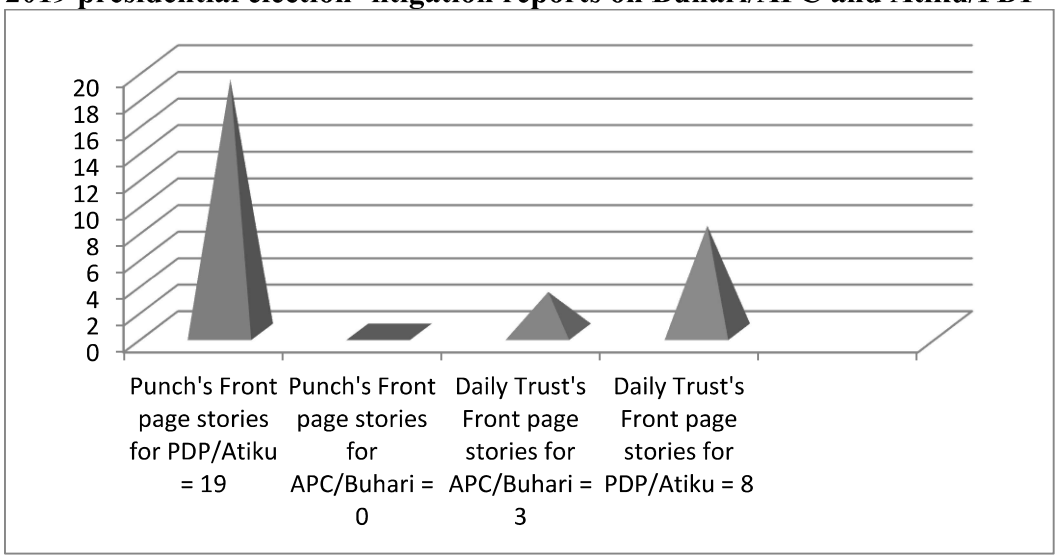
**Atiku seeks tribunal's order to inspect poll materials as PDP attacks INEC:** The PDP and its presidential candidate, Alhaji Atiku Abubakar, on Tuesday, filed an application seeking an order compelling INEC to allow them to inspect materials used for the conduct of the presidential poll….. **Punch (Front page: Lead, p1-2) March 6, 2019.**

**Atiku asks court to compel INEC to produce election materials:…..** in the motion ex-parte dated March 4, 2019, Atiku and the PDP, are seeking leave to inspect the voters register, the Smart Card Reader Machines, Ballot Papers and other vital documents that were used in the conduct of the presidential election….**Daily Trust (Front page: Second lead, p1-5). March 6, 2019.**

**Tribunal grants Atiku access to inspect poll materials, rejects forensic exam request: Buhari has subverted S'Court, ex-VP may not get justice – Agbakoba:** …….A former President of the Nigerian Bar Association (NBA), Dr. Olisa Agbakoba (SAN), has said he is in support of Atiku's decision to challenge the result of the February 23 presidential poll in court. He, however, expressed doubts that Atiku would get justice because "President Muhammadu Buhari has subverted the Supreme Court by the removal of the Chief Justice of Nigeria, Honourable Justice Walter Onnoghen…..**Punch (Front page: Lead, p1-2) March 7, 2019.**

**Atiku gets court's nod to inspect election materials….rules out request for forensic analysis:** The Presidential Election Petitions Tribunal in Abuja has ordered the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) to allow the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) and its presidential candidate, Atiku Abubakar, to inspect materials used for the February 23, presidential election….**Daily Trust (Front page: Lead, p1-5) March 7, 2019.**

**Figure 1: *Daily Trust* and *Punch* newspapers' treatment (prominence) of 2019 presidential election' litigation reports on Buhari/APC and Atiku/PDP**




**Source: Field Work (Sa'idu, 2022)**

Figure 1 shows that the coverage of the litigation that followed the 2019 presidential election by both *Daily Trust* and *Punch* newspapers favoured PDP/Atiku Abubakar. Out of the twenty front page stories featured by *Punch* newspaper within the period under review, nineteen (19) favoured PDP/Atiku Abubakar, while none was framed to favour APC/Muhammadu Buhari. However, despite the fact that *Daily Trust* newspaper has framed eight (8) front page stories out of the twelve (12) it featured within the period under review in favour of PDP/Atiku Abubakar, it also, unlike *Punch* newspaper, framed three (3) front page stories out of the twelve (12) in favour of APC/Muhammadu Buhari.

Therefore, the data in figure 1 established the fact that the coverage of litigation that followed the 2019 presidential election was framed to favour the opposition PDP/Atiku Abubakar by both *Daily Trust* and *Punch* newspapers. However, *Daily Trust* newspaper, from the data in same figure 1, appeared to sit on the fence, as it also framed some front-page stories in favour of APC/Muhammadu Buhari unlike the *Punch* newspaper that completely, from the data, pitched its tent with the PDP/Atiku Abubakar.

The following excerpts are examples of how the two newspapers framed their front-page stories to strengthen the above analysis:

**PDP, Atiku: INEC's server shows we beat Buhari with 1.6 million votes….file five grounds petition, revisit alleged certificate scam against President:…**.The petition which sought to rely on 50 sets of documents, was filed before the Presidential Election Petitions Tribunal in Abuja…..but the petitioner stated in their 139-page petition that "from the date in the 1st respondent's (INEC's) server…the true actual and correct results from state to state computation showed that Atiku polled a total of 18,356,732 votes to defeat Buhari whom they said scored 16,741,430 votes….**Punch (Front page: Lead, p1-3) March 20, 2019.**

**I'm a Nigerian by birth, says Atiku:…says server result are not false:** The Peoples Democratic Party candidate in the February 23 presidential election, Alhaji Atiku Abubakar, has denied the All Progressives Congress' allegation that he is not eligible to contest because he was not born in Nigeria…..**Punch (Front page: Second lead, p1-16) April 22, 2019.**

**INEC replacing servers to conceal rigging, PDP alleges:…**.Ologbondiya said the commission's action was aimed at deleting the actual presidential election results transmitted from the polling centres across the country…. **Punch (Front page: Second lead p1-12) April 30, 2019.**

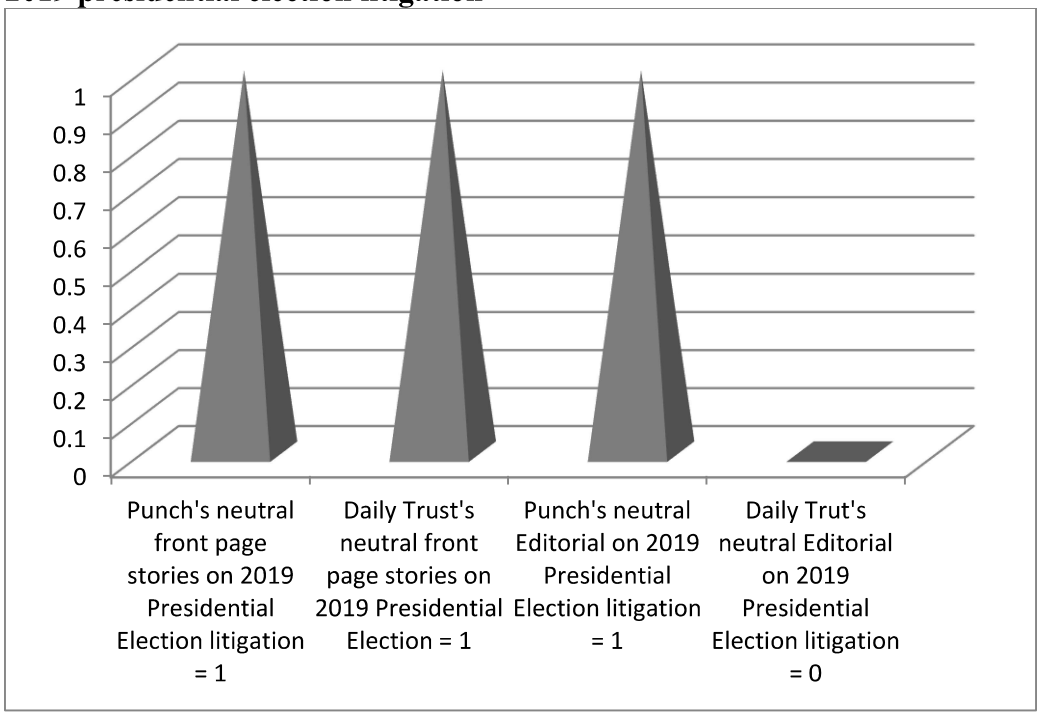
**Presidential poll: Atiku asks tribunal to declare him winner:** Candidate of the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP), Atiku Abubakar, has asked the Presidential Election Petitions Tribunal (PEPT) to declare him winner of the February 23 presidential election…..**Daily Trust (Front page: Second lead p1-10) March 19, 2019.**

**My parents are from Sokoto, Jigawa – Atiku:** The Presidential candidate of the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP), Atiku Abubakar, and the party have stated that he is a Nigerian by birth as his parents both have roots in the North West and is therefore qualified to seek for the office of the president. Atiku and PDP stated this in reply to claims by the All Progressives Congress (APC) and its candidate, President Muhammadu Buhari,…claimed that he is a Cameroonian…**Daily Trust (Front page: Second lead p1-13). April 22, 2019.**

**Our victory seen on INEC server not concocted – Atiku tells tribunal:** The presidential candidate of the PDP, Atiku Abubakar, and the party have told the Presidential Election Petitions Tribunal in Abuja that their victory as shown in the

results from the INEC server were not concocted…..**Daily Trust (Front page: Second lead p1-13) April 25, 2019.**

**Figure 2: *Daily Trust* and *Punch newspapers'* neutrality on the coverage of 2019 presidential election litigation**




**Source: Field Work (Sa'idu, 2022)**

Figure 2 reveals that both *Daily Trust* and *Punch* newspapers framed one (1) front page story each that did not reflect bias on any political party or candidate in their coverage of the litigations that followed the 2019 presidential election. Editorial of any newspaper reflects its opinion and position on any given issue. Therefore, the only editorial that the *Punch* newspaper featured during the period under review did not suggest support for either APC/Muhammadu Buhari or PDP/Atiku Abubakar.

The following excerpts from the two newspapers strengthened the data in the above figure:

**Post-primary litigation, threat to credible elections: …**….The avalanche of post-primary election court cases – about 639 for now – which the Independent

National Electoral Commission is contending with in the run-up to the 2019 general election is a pointer to this. With the election scheduled to begin soon, this rash of cases is set to reverberate beyond the polls……**Punch (Editorial, p18) February 6, 2019.**

**Presidential election tribunal promises justice for all:--**Bulkachuwa warns media, others against analysing proceedings:…..**Punch (Front page: Second lead p1-16) May 9, 2019.**

**Buhari, Atiku set for epic legal battle**……already the two parties have begun to assemble a strong team of attorneys to meet in court in what appears to be an epic battle….**Daily Trust (Front page: Second lead p1-42). March 9, 2019.**

**Discussion of findings**

From the literature reviewed by this paper, especially Omera (2010), it has been established that media plays an important role in democratic consolidation not only in Nigeria, but the world over. The role of the media in ensuring free society is enormous; hence the reason Nigeria's 1999 constitution recognised this role in section 22, which is in accordance with the postulations of the Social Responsibility Theory adopted by this paper.

Similarly, from the literature, especially Sa'idu (2017), Daramola (2013), Oso (2012) and Omu (1978), it was established that media in Nigeria engages in politics and as such it aligns itself with a particular political party or candidate. Therefore, the history of media formation, political lineage of owners and place of publication were found to be the major factors that induced party sympathy in the coverage of political events by some media organisations in Nigeria. This usually makes such media organisations and journalists to give prominence to certain factors and deliberately ignored other factors in the framing of their news items to favour a chosen political party or candidate.

Again, the literature established that mediatisation of politics makes the media to influence public policies, sets agenda and shapes public opinion. Therefore, the media in Nigeria uses these influences to turn the tide of political events in favour of a chosen candidate through the framing of their news items. Oso (2012) posited that this is more prominent with the media outfits founded by politicians.

Although the Social Responsibility Theory used as a guide by this paper demands the media to be responsible in its reportage while it serves as the society's

watchdog, however, from the foregoing postulations in the literature, it is evident that the media in Nigeria often breaches the assumptions of the Social Responsibility Theory. Starting from the First Republic up to the present dispensation, media in Nigeria is guilty in openly giving preference to a certain political party or candidate, according to the literature reviewed by the paper.

Furthermore, data in Table 1 indicates that the *Punch* newspaper gave more prominence to the coverage of the litigations that followed the 2019 presidential election than the *Daily Trust* newspaper. The data in the table reveals that, out of the 32 front page stories featured by the two newspapers within the period under review, *Punch* newspaper featured twenty (20), representing 62.5%, while *Daily Trust* newspaper had twelve (12), representing 37.5%.

Data in Table 1 therefore established that the *Punch* newspaper was more attached to the litigations that followed the 2019 presidential elections than the *Daily Trust* newspaper. This is a fact that suggests that the paper has a given goal to achieve, which was promoting the course of Atiku/PDP, as excerpts that formed the data in Table 1 revealed.

Data in Figure 1 also shows the framing of *Daily Trust* and *Punch* newspapers' news items in support of either APC/Muhammadu Buhari or PDP/Atiku Abubakar. Out of the thirty (30) front page stories that the two newspapers featured, which indicated support to either of the parties and candidates, Figure 1 indicates that both the two newspapers framed front page stories in favour of PDP/Atiku Abubakar in their coverage of the litigations that followed the 2019 presidential election. However, *Punch* newspaper, according to data in Figure 1, displayed open affiliation to the PDP/Atiku Abubakar. Out of the nineteen (19) front page stories that were framed in support of either of the parties and candidates by *Punch* newspaper, the nineteen (19), representing 100%, were for PDP/Atiku Abubakar.

However, according to the data in Figure 1, *Daily Trust* appeared to be more balanced in its framing of front-page stories in support of either of the parties and their candidates. Out of the eleven (11) front-page stories framed by the newspaper in that direction, eight (8), representing 72.73%, were in favour of PDP/Atiku Abubakar, while three (3), representing 27.27%, were in favour of APC/Muhammadu Buhari.

Figure 2 contains data revealing that both *Daily Trust* and *Punch* newspapers framed news items on 2019 presidential election litigations, within the period under study, that were neutral to both APC/Muhammadu Buhari and PDP/Atiku Abubakar. Both the two newspapers featured one (1) neutral front page story each, while *Punch* newspaper featured one (1) neutral editorial on the post 2019 election litigations, while *Daily Trust* had none. Data in this figure therefore reveals that the two newspapers did not use their editorial in showing support to any of the two parties and candidates.

## Conclusion

It is evident that media in Nigeria, like its counterparts in other parts of the globe, has been involved in party politics. This is contrary to the assumptions of the Social Responsibility Theory of media that demands responsible, balanced, accurate and fair reportage of all events, political or otherwise. However, media all over the world are formed to protect a given ideology. This ideology can be capital, based on belief, party manifesto or region. In Nigeria, history of media formation has revealed that many media outfits were formed by politicians, hence whenever the interest of the proprietor or his allies are at stake, these media organisations frame their news items to promote the course of their proprietors or their allies.

In the same vein, where ownership plays no role, other variables like patronage, place of publication, belief, tribe et cetera shape the behaviour of any media outfit and this determines the framing of their news items. Furthermore, media outfits have readership or audience to satisfy and this ensures their continuous survival. By this, media in Nigeria, and elsewhere, strive hard to satisfy their readership/audience through the framing of their news items.

Therefore, this paper has been able to establish that party sympathy or affiliation is playing a great role in the way and manner media in Nigeria frame their news items. The selection of *Daily Trust* and *Punch* newspapers has been able to establish how media in Nigeria shun their ethics, as assumed by the Social Responsibility Theory, to engage in partisan activities, especially through the framing of their news items. The paper was also able to establish how drive to satisfy readership or audience is influencing the reportage of the media in Nigeria.

Nevertheless, it is imperative for the Nigerian media to always take the path of objectivity and integrity in their reportage of national politics. This attribute is essential in safeguarding the country's unity and democracy.

Attempt by the media to influence judicial outcome in favour of a given party or candidate in tantamount to subversion of the principle of the rule of law and a deliberate effort to impose an unpopular will on Nigerians. Since judiciary is a blind arbiter, Nigerian media should ensure that it remains so through fair, objective and apolitical reportage of the judicial proceedings.

Media can make citizens to lose confidence in the judiciary through their reportage. A situation like this can lead to self-help, which can metamorphose to anarchy and chaos. Therefore, while holding judiciary accountable, Nigerian media should as much as they could desist framing their news items to hurt the integrity and image of this important arm of government, the judiciary, for the growth and progress of Nigeria's nascent democracy.

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